

# Will They Follow

by Peter Maiden

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*A Christian leader must have a God-given vision, be committed to hard work and research, and be committed to people in order to lead effectively.*

**Duration:** 41:57

**Scripture:** Nehemiah 1:1-2, Nehemiah 1:6 - 2:3, Matthew 3:13-17, Hebrews 5:14

**Topics:** "Leadership"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having a clear objective in the work of God. He encourages the audience to think about their long-term and short-term goals in their Christian union, school union, or church responsibilities. The speaker references the example of Nehemiah, who assessed the damage to the walls of Jerusalem and took responsibility for rebuilding them. He also mentions a letter he received challenging leaders to seek God's guidance for the objectives and goals of their organization. The sermon concludes with the importance of leading by example, using the Apostle Paul as a model for inspiring and influencing others through his way of life.

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## Transcript

I'd like you to turn with me to Nehemiah this morning, and we're going to read the whole of the first chapter, and the first two or three verses of chapter 2. Nehemiah chapter 1, we're going to read the whole of the first chapter, the first three verses of chapter 2, and my reading is from the New American Standard Version of the Bible. The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hekeliah, now it happened in the month Chislew, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa, the capital, that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came, and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. And they said to me, the remnant there, in the province, who survived the captivity, are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.

Now it came about when I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. And I said, I beseech thee, O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant, and loving kindness for those who love him, and keep his commandments, let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open to hear the prayer of thy servant, which I am praying before thee now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel, thy servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel, which we have sinned against thee. I and my father's house have

sinned.

We have acted very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances, which thou didst command thy servant Moses. Remember the word which thou didst command thy servant Moses, saying, If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples. But if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote parts of the heavens, I will gather them from there, and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause my name to dwell.

They are thy servants and thy people, whom thou didst redeem by thy great power and by thy strong hand. O Lord, I beseech thee, may thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and the prayer of thy servants who delight to revere thy name, and make thy servant successful today, and grant him compassion before this man. Now I was the cupbearer to the king.

And it came about in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him. And I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.

So the king said to me, Why is your face sad, though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart. Then I was very much afraid. And I said to the king, Let the king live forever.

Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my father's tombs, lies desolate, and its gates have been consumed by fire? As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, Matthew tells us he saw two brothers, Simon, called Peter, and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake because they were fishermen. Come, follow me, Jesus said, and I will make you fishers of men.

At once, at once, immediately, they left their nets and they followed Jesus. We see from this passage which we've just read that Nehemiah's concern for the rebuilding of Jerusalem was so great that King Artaxerxes could see that concern written all over his face. So with royal permission, he makes for the city.

If you read on in Nehemiah, you'll find that he carries out an initial survey of the situation, and then he says to the local people of Jerusalem, come on, let's rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. And they immediately reply, yes, let's start rebuilding. And they immediately began the great work.

Think, thirdly, of Lot, compromised by the sin of the city of Sodom. He is warned by two heavenly visitors of the coming judgment of God on the city. Those visitors give him opportunity to rescue his family.

And he goes to his sons-in-law with an urgent message. Hurry, get out of this place. The Lord is about to destroy this city.

But we're told that his sons-in-law thought he was joking. As far as we can ascertain, they took no notice of what their family head had to say. And as far as we know, they perished in God's judgment on that city.

What does cause people to follow some leaders, leaders like Jesus and Nehemiah, and yet not others like Lot? That's the issue we're going to consider together for the next 30 or 40 minutes. And it's a very vital issue indeed. I spend a great deal of my time in conferences and committees with a great variety of missionary and evangelistic societies.

But though the variety of these societies is great, the cry coming from them is consistent. It is a cry for leaders. Can you, from the ranks of OM, provide us with leaders? Not just energetic individuals who get a

lot done themselves.

And not just theorists who come up with great strategies and wonderful plans. It seems there are enough of those. Plans to evangelize the world, for example.

By the year 2000, now number not in the hundreds, but in the thousands. And that's great. Programs are wonderful and necessary.

But people don't follow programs. They follow people. They follow leaders who inspire them.

We need men and women who have a vision. That's important. But equally, we need men and women who can communicate that vision to others.

And can go even further and inspire people to enter into partnership with them to fulfill their God-given visions. How many Christian unions up and down the country or churches or youth groups are surviving through the committed minority? Often a very small number of people. 8, 10, 15, maybe 20.

And if you pull that committed minority out of the Christian union or out of the church, there would be probably considerable collapse. How can we motivate others to follow us in our God-given visions? Well, first of all, we must appreciate what many might call natural factors. There are personalities, charismatic personalities, we might call them, who seem naturally to draw others after them.

We speak of some people, don't we, as natural leaders. I look at my own children growing up, and I've got to be a bit evasive here as they're in the congregation. But it's obvious that one of these kids in a situation immediately starts thinking, now, what should be done here? Immediately, he or she is beginning to look for a strategy to find their way out of the difficult situation, possibly, that the family or the children have got themselves into.

If there are problems, he or she is immediately looking for answers to those problems. And I notice that when that individual takes a lead, the others tend to immediately follow. Clearly, certain personalities have both great opportunity and great responsibility here.

They have the ability to influence and inspire. It's an ability which is very, very difficult to define or to quantify. It's not that all extroverts have the ability and all introverts don't.

Far from it. Moses is described as the meekest man on the face of the earth. And yet he was certainly one of the most effective leaders the world has ever witnessed.

Those with this ability, then, have great responsibility. History shows that this ability can be used to bring havoc and destruction. Hitler had this ability in incredible measure, inspiring people to believe things and to do things which today they find so hard to understand that they ever believed or ever practiced.

In the history of religion, there are so many examples of those who have used this ability and they've dressed it in religious clothing. And that's a powerful combination. This ability to influence and to inspire, dressed in religious garb, has been used to lead millions, if not billions, astray.

Obviously, in God's hand, under the control of God's Spirit, this ability can be mightily used for the glory of God and for the Church's development and extension. In Romans chapter 12 and verse 8, we're told by the Apostle Paul that leadership, or the ability to rule in the Church, is a God-given gift of the Spirit. Just as much as the gift of prophecy or the gift of faith, there is the gift of leadership.

And those who are given the gift of leadership, says Paul, are to govern diligently. The Amplified Bible says they're to govern with zeal and with singleness of mind. So if God has given you the ability to lead, Paul says you must commit yourself to it with zeal, realizing the opportunity which is yours.

But you must also commit yourself to it with care, realizing the responsibility which is yours. So I think that must be our foundation point. When we ask this question, why are some people followed and others are not? The foundation answer must be that leadership in the Christian Church is a God-given gift.

People are anointed by the Holy Spirit to lead others in the Church. But it's also true to say that in those who possess this gift there are certain commonalities. And I want to look with you this morning at four common points which I perceive, as I study the Bible and as I look at people today, who have this ability to influence and to inspire others.

Four very simple common points. The first is that they are people of vision. They are not merely maintainers.

They are visionaries. Now I was reading an article recently on Margaret Thatcher, and I'm sure you'll forgive me for that. It was by no means totally complimentary, surprisingly.

But the author had to concede, and I think we would all agree, that she is a woman with vision. We may not like her vision, but we can't deny the existence of her vision. And the author went on to say this, there are really only a handful of prime ministers who in their period of office have radically changed this nation.

The majority, he argued, are merely maintainers, whether they are socialist or Tory. They come in, they alter a little here and a little there, but basically they are maintaining. After Margaret Thatcher, the nation will never be the same again.

Now the church needs consolidators. The church needs maintainers. Paul needed his Dr. Luke or his Barnabas.

But how we need in every age our share of visionaries. Every church, every Christian union, in every generation of the church, needs such people. Those who are willing not just to get their direction by asking, what will be most acceptable with the majority? But those who are willing to get before God and in discussion with brothers and sisters, hear what the Lord is saying.

And then to go out, seeking to lead others in the fulfillment of God-given goals. Quite simply, a leader must have a dream. A Christian leader must sense, must recognize God-given objectives.

When Nehemiah came to the city of Jerusalem, he had no doubts of what God wanted. He may have had many, many questions about how it was ever going to be achieved, but he knew from God what God wanted. When Moses came to the palace of Pharaoh and when he appeared before his own people, again, there was no doubts as to what was to be done.

We know Moses had many, many questions about whether he was the man to do it. But his objectives were clear. When the Lord called Simon and his brother Andrew, he was able to inspire and to influence with a clear, succinctly expressed objective.

Leave your nets, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. I want you all to pause for a moment. We're just going to take a minute to do this.

And I want you to think for a moment of what you are involved with in the work of God. I hope you're all involved, crucially, at some point in the work of God. Maybe it's in your Christian union or your school union or your church.

I want you to think of it. And for one minute, I want you to think in the presence of God, what am I aiming for? What is my objective in that Christian union responsibility or in that church responsibility? And I want you to think in two realms. I want you to think long term.

What's the long term objective? Where are we going? What are we aiming for? And I want you to think short term. Where do I want it to be next month? Where do I want it to be at the end of 1990? Will you just take a moment just to bow before God and to think of an area of responsibility with which you're involved and ask yourself those two questions, long term and short term. What's my dream? What's my God-given objective? Now I would imagine that if this is a normal group of people, and I have no reason to believe you are abnormal, you will not have been able to very clearly define the specific objects of your ministry.

Long term will probably have been easier than short term for you. I wonder if you're willing to give time, maybe as a result of this Leadership Weekend. Are you willing to give time to work on such objectives? I received a letter just about a month ago from a leader about eight years younger than me in OM.

And this brother wrote to me and he said, Are you willing to get before God with your fellow leaders in your area leaders group? Are you willing to give, say, two or three days, put time aside, and really seek the Lord and ask God, what is the ethos of OM to be in the 90s? What are the objectives? What are the goals of OM in the 90s? Are you willing, he challenged me, to give two, three days to work through such objectives? We would be foolish, wouldn't we, if we weren't willing. You've probably heard of the famous American football incident. My knowledge of American football is extremely limited, but I'm told of an amazing story about a man called Roy Regals.

In the Rose Bowl game for the University of California, he picked up a fumbled ball and ran triumphantly the length of the field to touch down, tragically, at the wrong goal line. He didn't fail, did he? In what he set out to do, he had a clear vision, but he was heading in utterly the wrong direction. We'd be fools in OM if we weren't willing to give time to get before God and say, Lord, where do you want us to go? What do you want of us? And I suggest to you this morning that if you're involved in Christian leadership, you would be equally foolish if you were not willing to give similar time.

So if people are to follow you, you need vision, you need direction, you need a dream. And in Christian leadership, it's so crucial that that vision is God-given. In passing, let me say that you can't possibly be a Christian leader unless you are a Bible student.

It's impossible. If you're to maintain a God-given vision in today's world, you're going to need to be a Bible student. So much is being thrown at us today, so many suggestions, so many ideas, so many plans.

How can we discern what is God-given? How can we know what is from God? Well, Hebrews 5 and verse 14 gives a big part of the key. Solid food, the food of God's Word, says the writer, is for the mature. And through constant use of this book, the writer says they will be able to distinguish good from evil.

You'll be able to distinguish what's right and what's wrong as you hear from God through His Word. Bible study, crucial to Christian leadership, crucial to maintaining that first necessity, a God-given vision. Secondly, those whom others will profitably follow, fruitfully follow, must be people, and this is so simple,

who take their leadership responsibility seriously.

But I would want to immediately follow that statement by stressing that this fantastic possibility of knowing what God wants does not deliver us from the necessity of hard work. We all know the dangers of easy guidance. You've probably heard the story of the Bible college student who went into the principal's study and he said, well, I'm convinced now, sir.

God wants me to be a missionary. My only problem is, I don't know which country. And the principal said, well, just keep praying, be patient, and God will certainly reveal His will.

And out he went, very happy with the answer. He was walking down the corridor and a student friend came up and gave him a sweet. A minute later he was dashing back into the principal's study, I've got it, I've got the answer! The principal said, well, how on earth did that happen? This student gave me a sweet, I was unwrapping it, Brazil nut.

There it is, Brazil! It's as clear as a pike's stamp. And the principal said, well, what would have happened, young man, if he'd given you a Mars bar? John White, in his book, *Drawing Leadership Lessons from the Example of Nehemiah*, points out this need for hard work and responsibility. Let me just remind you of chapter 1 and verse 2. Nehemiah met with Hanani and some others and he questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile and also about Jerusalem.

If you read on through the book, you'll find that as soon as he got to Jerusalem, he made a tour of the walls, assessing the damage to the walls, assessing the overall situation. What was he doing? He was working hard. He was gathering facts so that his God-given vision could be translated into a clear action plan.

As John White comments on that, waiting on God does not mean that detailed information and research are unnecessary. I would add to that that to walk by faith does not mean, does not mean you don't research all the issues, identify all the problems. To walk by faith, on the contrary, means that with whatever knowledge of the problems you can discover in advance, you move forward, trusting God for the solutions as you go.

Talking about Christian living and discipleship, Jesus showed the importance of research and planning. You remember his two telling illustrations. He said the sensible builder doesn't set out to build his tower without counting the cost.

The sensible and successful general will not go to war without making full use of his intelligence services. So whilst I would want to insist that people follow people rather than programs, and while I would want to stress that we don't just want an excellent program dreamed up by an efficient theorist. We want to know the mind of God.

I would equally want to stress that careful research and planning, hard work that will lead to a program or a plan of action are vital for responsible leadership. After all, we are leaders of people, aren't we? One great danger in leadership is to abuse people through underuse or overextension or by complete confusion. How often I arrive at an OMT when I get talking to people about their experience and they'll say, well, it's fine.

They're evangelicals, you see, so they start like that. Well, it's fine. But to be perfectly honest, I don't quite know what I should be doing.

To be perfectly honest, I don't really know why I'm here. Why I'm here at all. Now, that's great, isn't it? They've probably made sacrifices to be there.

Others are probably giving sacrificially to help them stay there. But they are underuse. And though not intentionally, they are being abused.

Two crucial aspects if you are to be the kind of people, person, who will lead others. You need that God-given vision. But that doesn't deliver you from the hard work and research which is necessary to put a plan of action together for your situation.

That leads me thirdly to a third qualification. And that is that those who lead in the work of God must be committed to people. It's not true of all the secular world, but sadly it's often the case.

In the secular world, people are used to fulfill programs. People are used to fulfill programs. In God's work, the person is vital.

So much so that often one of the great advantages of the program is that through it, the individuals participating are refined. They are brought to maturity. A Christian leader, I say again, is a leader of people.

Those people are vital to the leader. Their development, their spiritual encouragement and spiritual reality. I'm afraid that OM, which has a tendency to considerable activism, often fails at this point.

You could write over our opportunity, program complete, goals achieved, people hurting. Their true needs not met. Just turn over if you're still open in Nehemiah to a lovely section in chapter 5. I was so challenged by this.

Earlier this week, in fact. Nehemiah chapter 5. Look at verses 15 to 19. Nehemiah speaking to God.

But the earlier governors, those preceding me, says Nehemiah, placed a heavy burden on the people. They took 40 shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people.

Now there's the boss mentality. The boss mentality. With personal gain a high priority.

Now look at Nehemiah's servant mentality. But, out of reverence for God, I did not act like that. Instead I devoted myself to the work on this war.

Verse 17. Furthermore, 150 Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. Each day one ox, six choice sheep, and some poultry were prepared for me.

Every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people. Remember me with favor, oh my God, for all I have done for these people.

See the place that people had in Nehemiah's thinking. Yes, he had a program. Oh, he had a vision.

But he wouldn't tread on people to fulfill that vision. The greatest example of leadership, of course, is the Lord Jesus. In Hebrews 2 and verse 10, Jesus is called the pioneer of our salvation.

In chapter 6 and verse 20, he's referred to as the forerunner. Now those two words you could translate in modern language with the word pace-setter. Jesus is the pace-setter for his people.

He's the one who has gone before us, blazing a trail ahead of us into heaven. Now think of a pace-setter. He doesn't live for himself, does he? He lives for others.

There's James May setting the pace for Syed Awita. He's got no thought of personal triumph. His one concern is to bring the best out of Awita, to encourage him forward, to encourage him to triumph.

His task is to help him, Awita, to reach his fullest potential. Are you willing to give your life for a similar purpose as a Christian leader? We've been thinking of those in your Christian union or your youth group who may be massively underused. Their potential is untapped.

Indeed, it's unknown. Others, because of overextension, may similarly be performing well below their potential. You know, they're waiting for someone to get alongside them, to work with them.

Someone who will possibly bury their own prestige and their own position for the sake of that person. You may well find that as that person you are coaching develops, they will leave you far behind in a number of areas. After the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, we read in Acts chapter 9 that he tried to join the disciples in Jerusalem, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple, but Barnabas, verse 27 of Acts 9, took him and Barnabas brought him to the apostles.

Soon Paul has to flee from Jerusalem and returns home to Tarsus. Probably Paul will never be heard from again. His massive God-given talents will lie undeveloped.

But what do we read in Acts 11, 25? Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. Antioch. It was from that city that the great international missionary drive of the church began.

There's a sense in which we are here this morning as a result of that church in Antioch. And you can trace it all back to one true leader. Possibly not a highly charismatic character, possibly not a powerful preacher, he was Barnabas.

The son of encouragement. The one who got alongside raw material like Saul of Tarsus and pace set, coached him forward until his full potential was released for the glory of God. One of the essential tasks of the true Christian leader then is to discover the potential in people to give yourself to that person until that potential is released.

Let me just quote John White once more. There has always been a true elite of God's leaders. They are the meek who inherit the earth.

They weep and pray in secret and defy earth and hell in public. They tremble when faced with danger but die in their tracks sooner than turn back. They are like a shepherd defending his sheep, a mother protecting her young.

They sacrifice without grumbling, give without calculating, suffer without groaning. Listen to this. To those in their charge they say, we live if you do well.

That's pace setting. We live if you do well, such leaders, says White, their price is above rubies. They are the salt of the earth.

You willing for that kind of leadership? Leading through a desire not to push yourself forward but in order to bring others forward for God's glory. Very briefly, a fourth crucial quality in the leader who deserves to be followed and that's example. Example.

People may follow for a time the instructions or the vision described by a gifted orator. But people are actually looking for someone to model. Someone who doesn't just say it but is it.

Paul must have been a tremendous inspiration and model to Timothy. He's able to say to him just before his execution, he actually writes this down. You know all about my teaching.

All about my way of life. And so on and so on. Earlier he sent Timothy to the Corinthian church and in an accompanying letter he wrote this.

I'm sending to you, Timothy, my son and my love who's faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. Wow.

A leader who can write such a letter. He's going to tell you about my way of life and what I live agrees with what I say in every church. Paul had nothing to hide.

He could quote his life as an example. They knew that what he said it was his sincere goal to be. And that must be the aim of every leader.

Some leaders keep their distance from the people, don't they? Now I realize, of course, that leaders have to be protected. They can't give themselves to everyone. But the desire of the leader must be identification not separation.

Leadership must be by example not just by instruction. Again, this is clearly seen in Nehemiah. Did you notice identification in the prayer of chapter 1? Look at the middle of verse 6. I confess the sins we Israelites including myself and my father's house have committed against you.

We have acted very wickedly towards you. And so on. There's Jesus coming to Jordan to be baptized by John.

Where's he standing? He's standing in line with sinners. Jesus, the son of God standing in line with sinners. He had no sin.

But if he is to lead many sons to glory he will identify himself with those people. He will not, as their leader, seek to be above them separate from them but he will do all in his power to identify with them. Examples.

Models. For people to follow. Important in every Christian union, church or youth group up and down the land.

May I just make one final point. We need to identify sufficiently closely with people so that they can see our weak points experience our failures as well as see and hear of all our successes. Few things I find encourage people more to take on leadership than to realize that leaders whom they admire are weak, faltering humans.

Just like them. You know, I think the Corinthians must have got a bit of a shock when they received Paul's second letter. Paul had opponents in Corinth false apostles who'd come down from Jerusalem where the great church was and they were setting up a kind of anti-Paul faction in the church and these apostles

came with signed letters of recommendation from Jerusalem.

And they seemed qualified, competent strong, eloquent leaders and Paul was so different. Isn't it a criticism of Paul? It's really nice. 2 Corinthians 10 verse 10 Some say his letters are weighty and forceful but in his person he's unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.

Nice people, weren't they? Paul, you write a pretty strong letter but when you hear, you don't look much and you can't speak to save yourselves. Nice people indeed. But you read his letter.

I'm sure the Corinthians expected Paul to write back and quote all his strong points in his defense. After all, he couldn't be seen to be weak. Could he? Surely he'd lose all his authority, all his influence.

On the contrary, he writes back boasting, glorying in his weakness. Because through his human weakness he is convinced the power of Christ will be displayed. Am I willing to get alongside the people I lead to truly identify with them to be an example or do I feel that I must maintain my strong self-assured image? I must remain somewhat separate I can't afford to be truly seen or known.

It's interesting that Jesus shared a common room with his disciples. They lived from a common curse. Can you imagine the instruction the inspiration they must have received simply from being with him? Remember Luke chapter 11? One day Jesus was praying.

When he finished, one of his disciples said to him Lord, teach us to pray. Just as John taught his disciples. They were with Jesus.

They saw him rising a great while before day and going off into the mountains. They saw his life of prayer and they said Lord, we want it. Teach us to pray.

The power of example. Will they follow? I believe people are looking for examples. Those upon whom they can model their lives.

They will be people of vision who are willing to work seriously at their responsibility. And part of that work will be a patient commitment to people. To see their fullest potential realised.

And I believe brothers and sisters that God is looking for such people in his church, in this nation today. May God bless his work.

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