

By Mutua Mahiaini

Have you noticed how people who are just coasting along, going nowhere fast, can be mobilized, energized and motivated to keep going by a certain kind of leader? Leadership is incredibly important. For better or for worse. Wherever you or I have been placed by God in a position of influence, we are truly in it for better or for worse, and today we would do well to examine our impact. Lorne Sanny's famous words remain as true today as when he uttered them a couple of decades ago: Leaders bring Vision, Faith and Courage to co-ordinated effort.

After nearly one century of a broken wall and burned gates, the Jews in Jerusalem who had survived the exile were probably not planning to do anything to change the status quo. Maybe they complained from time to time. Perhaps they daydreamed about how nice it would be for all this to change. Someone may have dispatched an angry letter to the editor every so often, and we can even imagine the occasional "Delegates' Consultation" without any serious commitment to action. People gradually get addicted to their discouragement! It all seems so 'normal' to be stuck in mediocrity. And then God moves in through a different kind of leader to introduce a new kind of normal.

When you read the book of Nehemiah, you don't get the impression of a man who was given to fear. Actually most of us feel that we can pick and choose some useful lessons from him, but it is hard to identify with him. The words of Nehemiah 2:2-3 are therefore rather surprising: " ... I was very much afraid, but I said to the king ... ". To my shame, I must admit that on several occasions I have retreated into the safety of mediocrity because I was afraid. Nehemiah does not consider being afraid as an excuse. Instead of admitting that we are "very much afraid", we choose to manage what is. Sometimes we manage the status quo with a bravado that we pretend is courage. I wonder how many of us are actually afraid of failure, afraid of opposition, afraid of not getting it right, afraid even of lost opportunities from the past and therefore not taking action. But Nehemiah does not just admit that he is afraid. There is a great "BUT..." and God is looking to see who among us will both admit their fear and follow it up with "... but.."! This separates the men from the boys. This is when God's kind of leader surfaces.

Later on, it is Nehemiah's turn to encourage the people when they are fearful. In 4:14 we read, 'After I looked things over, I stood up and

said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes." ' When we are afraid, there is a dual perspective that brings back courage: Remembering the Lord (who is Great and Awesome), and remembering our loved ones. There is a holy and vital fight for the family that can fail to take place, because we forget the Lord. Or rather, we fail to see Him in His greatness and awesomeness. And also because we forget that our sons, daughters, wives and homes are targeted by the enemy. The fight for Africa (our home) will require Nehemiahs. And right now, most Nehemiahs are "very much afraid". But because of this great Remembering, they will not be missing in action. How is your remembering on these two fronts? It will determine what you end up giving yourself to.