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# How do I start a Christian project?

**Time spent on research is time well spent**

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Years ago I worked for a missionary organisation in research and

various projects. One of the first questions that came to my mind was whether there is in the Bible a template for how to start projects. I found this in the book of Nehemiah, who came to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city. We can take a few lessons from him and use these as the basis for setting up a quality project.

There are always ideas for projects and you will often have to make choices and weigh up the pro and cons. Nehemiah started a large project and there would be many sleepless night over it. How was it that he realised this project?

### **1) Nehemiah collects information**

Nehemiah 1: 2: "Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem."

Most plans can be formed after gathering information. Gather and analyse all data related to your idea, its feasibility, relevancy, effectiveness, and possible challenges. Points to consider could be the trends in a particular city, what keeps people busy, how many children live in a neighbourhood, why more people are knocking at a food bank. We must do our HOMEWORK well. What Nehemiah did here we call desk research.

### **2) He seeks the Lord and selects his goals**

Nehemiah 1: 4: "When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven."

After gathering information comes selection. You will have to make choices about what you can do and what is effective. One thing that became clear to Nehemiah was the condition of the wall of Jerusalem, and he was in conversation with God about it. Before Nehemiah, Ezra had already returned and

rebuilt the altar, so God was again in their midst. The next priority was to restore the wall and with it, security. Nehemiah also identified himself with the problem and did not speak in terms of 'you' but 'we' and 'us'. Prayer will show which project is selected. John White puts it this way: "Planning that results from or is the product of prayer, is far superior to the schedule only 'supported' by the prayer."

### **3) He carries out his field research**

Nehemiah 2: 11-16: "I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on. By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work."

Having selected the target and done the desk research, our ideas should be confirmed by field research. Very often field research is seen as a first step, 'you must have been there'. The result is that there are often emotional decisions. But if you do step 1) well you can place observations into the correct context. Therefore, you should perform field research after you have already done your homework. You also see that Nehemiah's research was very thorough. He takes the time to research systematically.

### **4) He makes his strategy and seeks support and resources**

Nehemiah 2: 17-18b 'Then I said to them: You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates are burned with fire. Come, let us build up the wall of Jerusalem...'

Finding people who can help should only be done if the project has already been well put together on a solid foundation. The manpower and costs should be well calculated and you should be able to kindle people's enthusiasm so that they are ready and willing to be part of it for the long run. Workers need a clearly defined strategy. Concentrate on the project you want to run, do not get distracted by more exciting projects. Gather funds only after the plans are clear.

### **5) He achieved his goal**

Nehemiah 2: 'And they said, Let us rise up and build! And they took courage for the good work.'

Nehemiah 6: 15 '... The wall was completed, after fifty-two days.'

With a clear strategy the work is much easier. Continuous research is very important. Who can provide the best stones for the best price? This is more 'ad hoc' research. Desk and field research are particularly important to develop and create a solid project plan and good strategy.

### **6) Conclusion**

Research is not only the collection and archiving of data. We will need to convert data into useful information. This information is important for developing a strategy and a plan. The order of the above steps is very important. I have seen in many projects how this template works.

We see through Nehemiah the misery in which churches can find themselves. We sit in the corner where the blows will fall. Do we want to put these above steps into action and develop a strategy? The alternative to planning is coincidence and things just happen. That was not the choice of Nehemiah.

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