

Leadership 101

Text: Exodus 18:1-27

Series: Book of Exodus [#12]

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Introduction

Finally Israel is camped near Mt. Sinai, the place where they were to worship God. God led them out of Egypt, made a way for them through the Red Sea, demonstrated His faithfulness to them even when they were not faithful, and now here they are! But before the next *mountain top* experience, Moses shares something that is both personal and practical. Jethro, his father-in-law, observed Moses on the job, noting, and then pointing out a problem in leadership.

Leadership. There are more articles, books and seminars on leadership than we can count. As with many things, it is best to start with the KISS principle —*Keep It Simple Saint*. Peter Drucker, the late management consultant and author summed up the definition of a leader as “someone who has followers.”¹ Now he wrote volumes more on leaders and leadership in his almost 96 years, but this is a good starting place. Leadership in its most basic sense is *leading people*—being a person, doing something which others follow. All of us have some leadership responsibilities because there are people who look at, listen to and follow us.

So whether you see yourself as a leader or not, there are some basic truths for you in this chapter. It is a short introductory course on leadership, *Leadership 101*. It begins with ...

A Textbook Example Of The Need For Good, Godly Leadership.

The scene opens with an enjoyable family reunion, strange as that may seem. Verse 5 tells us that Jethro and Moses’ family came to where Israel “was camped, at the mountain of God,” or Mt. Sinai. We aren’t told when Moses’ wife and the boys left to see her family. I think it was at some point after they crossed the Red Sea and were heading south toward Mt. Sinai.

When Moses and Jethro met they asked each other about the other’s welfare, which typically took a lot of time. Then they went back to Moses’ tent to relax and visit some more. Even though Jethro had heard reports of what God had done for Moses and Israel, Moses filled in all the details. They celebrated, offered sacrifices to God and enjoyed a meal with the family and also all the elders of Israel. It was a great, enjoyable time. The day after all of this Jethro went with Moses to the office.

It was there and then that a leadership problem was exposed. Here’s the situation. Moses was God’s appointed leader and mediator for Israel. While the people had some structure such as the elders, Moses was the one who gave God’s word to them, who led them, and was the final authority. Most of his days were spent sitting, listening to a long line of people who had questions for him and God, as well as disputes with others they wanted to have settled.

When Jehthro asked him why he was doing this, Moses' straightforward answer was, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God" (15). He was God's leader and mediator. They came to him. So he accepted and helped them. What else was he to do?

Jethro had a fresh, good and God-enlightened take on this. He told Moses that sitting alone from morning to evening judging the people was not good because it was an impossible task. Remember, there were about two million people. Picture having only one person to answer questions and settle disputes for all the people in greater Edmonton and Calgary combined! No one person could do this. In trying to do it by himself Moses was sure to wear out, and also frustrate the people (18).

Jethro proposed, subject to Moses' acceptance and God's approval that Moses continue his God-mandated role to represent the people before God and teach them God's truth, but that he set up a system for hearing requests and disputes that involved, if you will, an appellate system. There would be one person designated over a group of ten, most likely ten extended family units. The more serious or unresolved matters would go to the next levels so that in the end Moses would hear only the most serious and difficult cases. Moses accepted and implemented this plan. This incident is not only a textbook example of the *need* for good, godly leadership, it also is...

A Textbook Example Of Good, Godly Leadership.

As we look at Moses, Jethro and the men chosen we see some important personal and leadership qualities. We begin with some personal qualities we should have and be developing. The six personal qualities we see here are not exhaustive, but each of them is critical.

The first quality is *fearing God*. Fearing God tends to be a familiar but fuzzy thing. Many ask, "Does this mean we are to constantly be afraid of God?" The answer is yes and no. It is *yes* for those who reject God's grace and mercy in Christ in the sense that they ought to fear God's rightful judgment, punishment on them for their sin. It is *no* for them in the sense that God lovingly receives all who come to Him through Jesus Christ.

The answer is *no* for all who have accepted God's grace and mercy in Jesus Christ, whose sins are forgiven, who enjoy life with Him. For believers fearing God means to have the proper respect and reverence for Him. But that still can be fuzzy. I could say, "Of course I respect and have reverence for God" without understanding what proper respect and reverence for Him involves.

The Bible describes a number of elements in "fearing God." First, it is closely tied to and defined by obedience to God and His truth in the Bible. Deuteronomy 8:6 says, "you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him." Secondly, it is tied to and defined by serving God. We see that in Deuteronomy 10:12-13,

"Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to

serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the LORD'S commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?"

Thirdly, the fear of God is developed. We can learn and grow in this respect and reverence. We see this in Deuteronomy 31:12-13,

"Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. Their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live on the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess."

And, fourthly, there are blessings that God gives us as we relate to Him with proper respect and reverence.

- Psalm 25:14 tells us "The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him, and He will make them know His covenant." God reveals His truth to those who fear Him.
- Then in Proverbs 19:23, "The fear of the LORD leads to life, so that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil."
- Psalm 34:7, "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them."
- Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge."
- And Psalm 111:10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."
- These new judges certainly needed to be men who truly feared God in order to be good godly leaders and faithfully carry out their leadership responsibilities. And so do we.

The second quality, noted in verse 21, is being *able* for the task. The meaning behind this word is strength, stability and efficiency. While often used of military personnel, it also was used to describe ability and efficiency regardless of the area or task. For example, in Genesis 47:6 the Pharaoh told Joseph,

"The land of Egypt is at your disposal; settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land, let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know any *capable* [there's the word] men among them, then put them in charge of my livestock."

The word is often connected to character as well as ability. Leaders need to have the ability and character for their specific leadership task. Sometimes we may lack certain skills we can learn. But until we do, we are not *able*, *capable* for the task. At other times we may not have the basic underlying abilities or capabilities. Good, godly leaders need to have the ability and character for their specific leadership task.

Personal quality number three is being *truthful*. Verse 21 says the judges were to be “men of truth.” Leaders are to be truthful. The word has the underlying idea of sureness, certainty and reliability. It was often used of God, as later here in Exodus when God told Moses, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and *truth*” (34:6).

Leaders must be truthful. A few months ago I came upon some material that looked interesting. The chapter titles of this author’s self-published work immediately caught my attention, and then seemed to be familiar. In fact, I found after some checking, each of the twenty chapter titles was the same, word for word, as in a book by another author. Some content in each chapter was also from that other book. The title page of this material had the man’s name and a statement of copyright. There was no credit or attribution to the author from whom a substantial part of this material was *borrowed*, or better, stolen. So here is a Christian putting out material under his own name that to a substantial degree is not his. That is not being honest. It is certainly not is an evidence of being *a man of truth*. Leaders must be truthful.

Still in verse 21, we move on to the fourth quality of “*hating dishonest gain*.” It is easy to see the connection to the judges because they could be subject to attempted bribes to give a sure but partial, unjust verdict. About 600 years after these events we read that King Jehoshaphat

“appointed judges in the land in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city. He said to the judges, ‘Consider what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the LORD who is with you when you render judgment. Now then let the fear of the LORD be upon you; be very careful what you do, for the LORD our God will have no part in unrighteousness or partiality or the taking of a bribe.’”

2 Chronicles 19:5-7

This quality is not only for judges, but for all leaders. The Psalmist prayed, “Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to Your testimonies and not to dishonest gain” (119:35-36). Good, godly leaders do not get involved in any dishonest way of making money. More than that, they hate that.

Sometimes people try to segregate areas of their life so that their business ethics are not where like what they profess for their faith and the church. A very successful business man once told me, “Lyle, church is church and business is business.” That’s how he thought and lived. He had two separate, conflicting sets of values.

Personal quality number five for good and godly leadership from this chapter is being respectful and humble. When Jethro came to Israel’s camp, much of the little that is described followed their customs. But, as today, there were competing customs. For example, in that culture elders were respected. So one would honor and often defer to someone who was older, particularly in the same family. But there also was a strong element of showing respect and deferring to someone in a more important or higher

position. Jethro was older. Moses was in a higher position. We see both of them being respectful and humble.

Let's start with Jethro. He announced his presence at the outskirts of the camp and waited there rather than going back to his tent, expecting Moses to come to him. He listened respectfully as Moses recounted all that God had done for him and Israel in bringing them out of Egypt, even though he had already heard about it. When he made his suggestion for improving the process of judging, he didn't say "It's obvious! I'm surprised you haven't thought of this! You *have to* do it this way!" Rather, he qualified it in terms of being acceptable both to Moses and to God.

Now let's look at Moses. When he received word that Jethro and his family were at the outskirts of the camp, he didn't tell servants to escort them to his tent, but he made his way to them. When he met Jethro he bowed down to him which, again, was a sign of respect usually for someone who is in a higher position or older. He did not wait for Jethro to bow down before him, the leader of a nation of two million people. Then when Jethro made his suggestion to improve the process of judging the people, Moses *listened*. He listened not just politely, but he took in what Jethro said and recognized Jethro was trying to help him and the people. He was not proud. He was willing to accept a good idea and God's direction from someone else, including from his father-in-law.

Good and godly leaders are respectful and humble. They don't demand center stage. They don't insist on doing everything their own way. They have humble and respectful hearts that we can see in how they relate to others, their tasks, and how they see themselves.

Now the sixth and last personal quality of good and godly leadership in this chapter: taking interest in and praising God for what He is doing in others. We see this in Jethro. His customary and lengthy asking about Moses' welfare is noted in verse 7. It was not our standard "How are you?" not expecting anything back more than "Fine. How are you?" It also was much more than just fulfilling the custom of that time. How do we know this? Let's pick it up at verse 9.

"Jethro rejoiced over all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, in delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians. So Jethro said, 'Blessed be the LORD who delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people.' Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses' father-in-law before God."

Jethro was genuinely interested. When he heard the good news he rejoiced at God's goodness.

Good, godly leadership is marked by really being interested in and rejoicing in what God is doing in and through other people, families and churches.

Jethro's interest led to him being blessed. Verse 11 records the great confirmation to his own faith that came from hearing of all these great and gracious works of God. So he praised and worshiped God with sacrifices and a celebration meal with the family and all of Israel's elders. Good, godly leaders are not "me and mine" focused. They are interested in what God is doing beyond themselves. They are quick to praise God for His work in whomever and wherever it may be. These six *personal* qualities are critical to good, godly leadership, to every leader.

In addition to these *personal* qualities, let's take a look at some leadership qualities from this account. The first is that to be a leader in spiritual things means the person must be called by God. Back in chapter 3 God called Moses to lead Israel. In this chapter the judges that filled out the plan of delegated responsibility were appointed by Moses. While all the time lines are not crystal clear, Deuteronomy chapter 1 tells us that the people had a role in this process, apparently presenting men to Moses from their own tribes. He then made the final appointment, recognizing God's call on them for this task.

While our situation is quite different, the principle remains the same. Leaders in the church, in God's work, must be called by God. Part of the process often, but not always, includes a desire to be involved in the particular work. 1 Timothy 3:1 recognizes this, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do."

But wanting to do it, thinking God is calling you to do it does not necessarily mean God is calling you. You may recall the old story about a young man at Bible School preparing to be a pastor. He found studies very demanding. He wasn't doing well at all. One of his teachers took him aside and asked him, "Why do you think you are called to be a pastor?" The young man answered, "One day as I was working in the field I looked into the sky and saw the letters P C in the clouds—it was a sign from God to *Preach Christ*." The teacher said, "Have you ever considered that perhaps it meant *Plant Corn*?"

The apostle Paul tells us several times that God called him to be an apostle (cf. Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1). But it was as the church saw the evidence of that calling that he was recognized as an apostle. In the New Testament some leaders were appointed and others selected by the church. The exact process is not as critical as are the facts that each leader must be truly called by God for the particular ministry and time, and that the church recognize that calling.

A second quality of leadership is that good, godly leaders focus on the gifts and abilities and role God has given them. Moses knew that part of his role was to judge disputes and instruct the people in God's truth. Jethro recognized that Moses was appointed by God to represent the people before Him and teach them His truth. Jethro did not suggest changing that. In fact, he reaffirmed that and wanted Moses to be able to be more focused on his God-given role.

There are a host of things that can distract us from this principle, everything from the *tyranny of the urgent* to a Moses-like “It all has to be done! Who will do it if I don’t” kind of thinking, on to the call to major on broadening ourselves by focusing on our weak points. Moses learned to focus on the gifts, abilities and roles God gave him. So should we. That doesn’t mean we should not do some things we don’t see as being directly in line with our gifts, abilities and roles. But it does mean that we should focus on the gifts and responsibilities God has given to us.

Another leadership quality is that leaders are to teach and develop other leaders. Notice Jethro’s advice to Moses, verse 20, “teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do.” This was Moses’ task to all the people, including leaders and developing leaders: teach them God’s truth. Teach them, show them how to walk in that truth. Teach them the work, tasks, service they are to do for God.

Verse 25 tells us that Moses chose able men and “made them heads over the people.” The process of preparing and making them fit is not spelled out, but Moses certainly gave them preparation and there would be learning, consulting, mentoring throughout the structure.

Now when it comes to us in the church, 1 Timothy 3:2 tells us that elders are to be “able to teach.” This is not limited to a classroom or formal kind of instruction, but includes all ways of passing on God’s truth to others. Then Paul told Timothy to teach the truth he had learned “to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2). Leadership that hits the mark deliberately and actively teaches and trains other leaders.

Finally, there is the leadership quality of sharing your leadership in an organized team. First here is the shared nature of leadership. God did not intend that Moses do all the work of answering questions and judging the people by himself. God used Jethro to bring home the necessity of shared leadership.

Whether you are an intense hands-on or relaxed and laid back person, God does not expect or want you to carry out your leadership on your own. In the New Testament, for example, we see multiple elders in the local churches. The pastor-teacher is one kind of elder, but not the only elder. And even there, the responsibility of teaching is shared.

Then there is the organized team part. Moses organized and divided the various responsibilities of leadership. There were leaders over groups of ten extended families, then above them were those over fifties, and above them those over hundreds, and above them those over thousands.

There is no specific prescribed form of church organization in the New Testament. We do see the division and organization of the church, for example, in Acts 6 when the apostles were set apart primarily for the ministry of prayer and the word, while others led in different areas (6:1-7). There was organization to provide for smooth function and settling difficult questions and issues such as the council at Jerusalem in Acts 15, where the apostles and elders settled the matter of accepting Gentiles in the faith without first becoming

Jewish.

One of the key qualities of good, godly leadership is that it is shared and organized. When you see a church or Christian organization that is run by one person, or a few, take note: that is not God's pattern. When you see a church or a Christian organization marked by shared and organized leadership, thank and praise God.

Conclusion.

Our one-session look at *Leadership 101* has covered a lot of ground. This section underscores an important point: God has given us instruction in His word that touches on all areas of what it means to please and bring glory to Him. Certainly, in the words of Arthur Holmes, *all truth is God's truth*.² Anything that is really true comes from God. But the measure of all ideas, theories and models, including leadership, is God's truth in His Word. Scripture is to be our first and final resource. Nothing that contradicts the clear teaching of that firm, unchanging foundation is to be accepted.

As you spend some time God now, thank Him that He wants to use you to lead and impact others. Review where you are at in terms of the personal and leadership qualities we have looked at today. Ask God to help you make any necessary adjustments and changes, and to keep on growing in character and leadership.

¹*The Leader of the Future: Drucker Foundation Future Series*, edited by Frances Hesselbein, Marshall Goldsmith and Richard Beckhard (Jossey-Bass, 1996)

²Holmes, Arthur F. *All Truth Is God's Truth*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979.

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