

A Leader's Wisdom

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God provides wise leaders for His people to help complete the mission God has given.

MAIN PASSAGES: Exodus 18:7-18,24-27

? Whom do you consider to be one of the world's great leaders? Why?

As we read through the Scriptures, we encounter some great leaders. One of the most well-known is Moses, perhaps the biggest star of the Jewish world. He gave God's people direction and led them out of Egypt, and He served as God's mouthpiece, telling the people what God had told him. But the task was not easy. The people struggled to trust God, and they grumbled against God, against Moses, and against one another. As problems arose among the people, Moses tried to carry the load of managing them by himself. But thankfully, God doesn't want His people to bear their burdens alone.

Group Time

Point 1: Wise leaders rejoice with others (Ex. 18:7-12).

⁷ So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, bowed down, and then kissed him. They asked each other how they had been and went into the tent. ⁸ Moses recounted to his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardships that confronted them on the way, and how the LORD rescued them.

⁹ Jethro rejoiced over all the good things the LORD had done for Israel when he rescued them from the power of the Egyptians.

Notice how Jethro responded to what Moses told him: he rejoiced. God's works are a blessing not only to those who experience them firsthand but also to all who hear of them, even if they are separated by distance, time, or both. Jethro was able to see what the people of Israel had missed. They were the ones who had actually lived through the story Moses told; they were the ones who had witnessed what God had done. But for all they had *seen*, they still didn't marvel at God's power in the way that Jethro did from just *hearing* of God's mighty works. The Israelites were too busy complaining.



What does complaining say about our hearts?

¹⁰ "Blessed be the LORD," Jethro exclaimed, "who rescued you from the power of Egypt and from the power of Pharaoh. He has rescued the people from under the power of Egypt! ¹¹ Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because he did wonders when the Egyptians acted arrogantly against Israel."

¹² Then Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses's father-in-law in God's presence.

Jethro didn't try to poke holes in Moses' story. What Moses told him was astonishing. It would have been hard for anyone who was not there to believe, but Jethro didn't give in to cynicism or competition. Rather, he was compelled to worship God for being greater than all other gods—his main takeaway from Moses' story. When we come together with other believers and begin to share all that God has done in our lives, we ought to be like Jethro and Moses—joyful and filled with worship.



How does God receive honor when we rejoice at all that He is doing with others?

Point 2: Wise leaders challenge others (Ex. 18:13-18).

¹³ The next day Moses sat down to judge the people, and they stood around Moses from morning until evening. ¹⁴ When Moses's father-in-law saw everything he was doing for them he asked, "What is this thing you're doing for the people? Why are you alone sitting as judge, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?"

¹⁵ Moses replied to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. ¹⁶ Whenever they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I make a decision between one man and another. I teach them God's statutes and laws."

¹⁷ "What you're doing is not good," Moses's father-in-law said to him. ¹⁸ "You will certainly wear out both yourself and these people who are with you, because the task is too heavy for you. You can't do it alone."

Moses was acting as the single judge for all the people's disputes, and what he was doing was *good*. But he was overwhelmed with the task, and the people waited for hours to be heard. There was a better way, and Jethro saw it: *delegate the work*. By distributing the workload, God's people and Moses would be much better off. But Jethro had to take the risk and challenge Moses for the situation to improve.



Why might it be difficult to confront and challenge others?

Jethro's challenge to Moses wasn't meant to discourage him but to equip him to be the leader the Israelites needed. Sometimes, when we're in the middle of a season filled with great responsibility, the pressure and stress keep us from realizing that we need help. Instead of reaching out to others to lighten our load, we go into survival mode and attempt to tackle every task by ourselves. Moses had unknowingly set himself and his people up for failure in this way, and Jethro's gentle suggestion to delegate his responsibilities benefited not only Moses but also the people who depended on him.



Voices from Church History

"God spoke to Moses, did he not? Yet Moses very prudently and humbly yielded to the advice of his father-in-law, foreigner though he was, with regard to governing and directing such a mighty nation. For he realized that from whatever intellect right counsel proceeded, it should be attributed not to him who conceived it but to the One who is the Truth, the immutable God."¹

—Augustine (354–430)

Point 3: Wise leaders share burdens with others (Ex. 18:24-27).

²⁴ Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. ²⁵ So Moses chose able men from all Israel and made them leaders over the people as commanders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. ²⁶ They judged the people at all times; they would bring the hard cases to Moses, but they would judge every minor case themselves.

²⁷ Moses let his father-in-law go, and he journeyed to his own land.

Jethro's principle of leadership impacts more than just national governments; it informs leadership in a more important arena: *our churches*. The ministry of the gospel is an enormous task of eternal importance. This is why God designed the church to function following a Jethro-like model. We share the burdens of ministry with each other as we each work together to build up the body, preserving the unity of the church and glorifying God as people see us work together in unity, humility, and love.

In what ways has God gifted you to be part of your local church?

In what ways do you need others in the church?

Body of Christ: The picture of the church as the body of Christ shows us the _____ of individual Christians, with each member dependent upon one another for _____ and _____.

We are to carry one another's burdens as we help to lead the people of God into greater love of Christ and hatred of sin (Gal. 6:2). But as good as the gift of the church is in this regard, God has also given us Christ, the head of the church. We are to cast all of our burdens for salvation and sanctification on Him who has the wisdom and power to bear them for us perfectly (Ps. 55:22; Matt. 11:28-30; 1 Pet. 5:6-7). May we humbly submit ourselves to our Lord, the One who leads us, equips us, and enables us to help one another carry out the mission we have received as followers of Christ.

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Exodus 18:1-12

When Moses went out to greet Jethro, he asked his father-in-law how he was and then invited him to join him in his tent. There, he told Jethro of all that had happened—all that the Lord had done to that point. But notice something: Jethro had already heard about everything that God had done for His people Israel (v. 1).

Why does this matter? Because it shows us something important about sharing good news and rejoicing in it with others. Jethro didn't interrupt Moses and tell him that he didn't need to share the stories again. Instead, it seems that he wanted to hear about everything that happened again. Good news cannot be heard too much, and surely Moses' firsthand account added deeper richness to what Jethro had heard before. Perhaps this was Jethro's way of confirming what he had heard as well. Either way, Jethro listened once more and then rejoiced with his son-in-law.

For us, this is a reminder that good news—and the gospel is the best news of all—is worth telling and hearing repeatedly. We cannot hear the gospel preached too much; we need it to seep down from our minds into our hearts daily. Nor can we share the gospel too much. Just as with Jethro and Moses, the gospel is worthy of rejoicing every single time it is shared.



When was the last time you heard the gospel? Shared it? Rejoiced over it?

Voices from the Church

“If Christians do not rejoice, it is not because they are Christians, but because they are not Christian enough. Joy is the rational state of the Christian in view of his spiritual position in Christ.”²

—Derek J. Prime and Alistair Begg

Day 2: Read Philippians 2:14-15; 3:1

Jethro offered a positive example of what it looks like to rejoice with others in what the Lord has done, but as we have seen, the children of Israel struggled to get there. Jethro heard and rejoiced, yet the children of Israel experienced and grumbled. And with every sigh, moan, and accusation, the Israelites revealed hearts that were ungrateful for all that God had done.

In Philippians 2:14-15, Paul warned about being constant complainers, like the Israelites. There is no place for grumbling and arguing because when we do, we fail to reflect minds, hearts, and a worldview transformed by the gospel. Our complaining is camouflage that makes us appear not as our true selves—forgiven men and women who have been given Christ’s righteousness—but as the world around us. But if we cast aside grumbling and arguing and instead rejoice in the Lord (Phil. 3:1), we will shine as beacons of light in the dark world around us. This is why we fix our gaze on Christ—who He is and what He has done—so that we might anchor our joy on this unchanging truth and not on our ever-shifting situations in life.



What makes you rejoice in the Lord? What has He done recently to make you rejoice?

Day 3: Read Exodus 18:13-18

The day after Moses recounted all the Lord had done, Moses went out and judged the people from morning until evening. Jethro noticed how Moses heard case after case and how Moses was not the only one who had such a long day; the people stood and waited for their cases to be heard just as long. But notice what Jethro did next: he asked Moses what was going on. Then, only after Moses confirmed what he had seen did Jethro play the judge for Moses.

Showing such wisdom and restraint is difficult for us at times. We tend to rush from observation to judgment, a problem only heightened by the information and digital age in which we live. But true wisdom takes time to listen. It takes time to consider that we might not see the whole story or that we might not see the story clearly. Wisdom is not just what we share, it is also how we share: in humility, with love and respect.



How does approaching others in humility reflect the gospel?

Day 4: Read Matthew 7:1-6

Jethro took a risk when he confronted Moses. Confrontation is difficult for many of us. We are uncomfortable with it. We aren't sure if the risk is worth it. And at times, we question our place to confront someone else, especially since some have used Matthew 7:1 to argue that we should not confront others at all. However, when we look closely at this passage, we see Christ not forbidding confrontation but clarifying the right way to do it.

First, He tells us that before we confront someone else about an issue, we should examine ourselves in the mirror, looking for that issue specifically. Second, we need to make sure our motivation for confronting the person is right. We confront a person for one reason: *to help him or her*. In this way, our confrontation is a selfless act of love; we take on the risk solely for the other person's gain. Because we care about others and we care about how they reflect the gospel in how they live, we confront.



Whom might you need to confront for God's glory and their good? Who has confronted you in the past that you might want to thank and encourage for their love for you?

Day 5: Read Exodus 18:19-27

Jethro's suggestion that Moses share his burden of judging the people was wise; it was a way for Moses and the people to be more efficient and to avoid burnout. But sharing our burdens with others is more than that; it is gospel-centered as well.

When we carry our burdens by ourselves, we are walking in pride. We want to show others and ourselves that we are strong enough to carry the weight, or we don't believe anyone else can help us. But when we share our burdens, when we gladly invite others to come alongside us and share the load we have been given, we walk in humility, the natural posture of people under the power of the gospel. We recognize that we are not strong but weak. We are not independent but dependent on Christ and His church. Christ's strength is manifested in our weakness, His glory in our humility and neediness, His love in His faithful provision. Sharing burdens with one another is for His glory and our good.



When have you refused to share a burden? Why? What happened?

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The Books of Genesis and Exodus are meant to be read together, providing an important clue for our approach to the rest of Scripture. The story begins in Genesis and unfolds with breathtaking speed, but then the pace slows as the rest of the book tells us the story of four generations of the one family through which God promised to bring blessing to the world.

As Genesis winds down, we encounter Joseph, one of Abraham's great grandsons, and see that God's promises are not always easy for His people. But through Joseph's difficulties, we encounter the vital concept of redemption. His life was one of setbacks, frustration, and disappointment. But all the while, we see that God was at work *through* Joseph's adversity, not *despite* it. God brought about redemption for Joseph and his family; God is always bringing glory to Himself and good to His people through their hardships, even by overriding their sins.

Then as we move from Genesis to Exodus, we pass over nearly four hundred years to a time when God's people are enslaved. The stage is set for an even greater display of God's desire and ability to redeem His people. When they cry out to God for deliverance from their slavery in Egypt, He provides a rescuer in Moses to free His people and to provide for them.

God's deliverance of Joseph and the nation of Israel were the early stages of a beautiful crescendo of God's plan to redeem His people that culminated in Christ Jesus. In Him we have experienced redemption from the slavery of sin and death. As we study these sessions, let us pray that the Holy Spirit stirs our hearts anew so that we are captivated by the love, grace, and mercy of God made known to us in our redemption through Christ so we can share Him with others.



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UNIT 4

SESSION 1

1. Søren Kierkegaard, in *The Diary of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Peter Rohde (New York: Citadel Press, 1988), 111.
2. Horatio G. Spafford, "It Is Well with My Soul," in *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: LifeWay Worship, 2008), 447.
3. R. Kent Hughes, *James: Faith That Works*, in *Preaching the Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 94.

SESSION 2

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2. "Never Alone," Hymnary.org, accessed May 16, 2018, https://hymnary.org/text/ive_seen_the_lightning_flashing.

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SESSION 4

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SESSION 5

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2. Daniel Wilson, "Obituary: The Rev. Basil Woodd," in *The Christian Observer*, vol. 31 (London: J. Hatchard and Son, Piccadilly, 1831), 312.

SESSION 2

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SESSION 3

1. Martin Luther, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 26 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 131.
2. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1973, reprint 2018), 46.

UNIT 6

SESSION 1

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SESSION 2

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SESSION 3

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