

Biblical Principles of Leadership

By Dale Johnson

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read John 13:1–20 and Philippians 2:1–11. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: How did Christ lead by being a servant?

Assignment Two

Read 2 Samuel 6:1–11 and Numbers 4:1–15. Note that God provided specific instructions for carrying the ark of the covenant. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: How did David reveal he wanted God's presence but without obeying God's clear instructions?

Assignment Three

Read Genesis 37:18–36 and 41:38–49. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: In what ways did Joseph's life serve as preparation for his eventual leadership role? What role did the ridicule of his older brothers, his time as a slave, and his time in jail have in preparing him for leadership?

Scripture to Memorize

It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. Matthew 20:26–28

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will be able to discern leaders worthy of following and also know which skills God may be growing in them that will prepare them to lead others.

Dale Johnson is assistant professor of Biblical Counseling at Southwestern Seminary. He became a disciple of Christ at age eleven. He received his BS in psychology from Jacksonville University. After college and a brief baseball career, he received his MDiv from Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. Dale served as the associate pastor of Family Life at Raiford Road Church for nearly eight years before coming to Southwestern Seminary, where he earned his PhD in 2014. He is a frequent speaker in churches on issues related to marriage, family, and biblical counseling. He is the proud husband of Summer, and the father of six children, Easton, Titus, Will, Ellie, Annadale, and Caroline.

It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

A leadership position has opened up in a Christian organization near you. You want to apply to help in leadership, but you are concerned the position will be filled by those who are more popular rather than those who may be gifted to lead. As you examine your own abilities, you begin to question whether you would be a good leader for the organization. What should the organization look for in a leader? What biblical principles of leadership should the organization use in their search?

Read Joshua 1:1–9 out loud.

First a Servant

Studying the Passage

The long-awaited time had come for Joshua to lead the children of Israel into the promised land. Fortunately, Joshua could follow the example set by Moses by becoming a servant leader. God called Moses “My servant” (v. 2).

One prerequisite for leading other people is to realize we are servants of the Sovereign God and servants of those we lead. Our leadership is only a stewardship God has granted us.

Verse 1. the LORD said to Joshua. Joshua was the servant called by God to replace Moses and to lead His people.

Verse 2. Moses my servant is dead. As a reminder that we always operate on God’s schedule, God announced that Moses was dead. This was an indication that Joshua, ready or not, should take the responsibility as leader.

A leader must patiently wait until the God-appointed time to fulfill his role. As Jesus came to this earth at the appointed time (Galatians 4:4–5) and took on the form of a servant to lead us (Philippians 2), we must follow His example to lead as a servant of God. A great leader must first be a great follower. He must learn to submit to Christ and His ways before he is fit to lead others.

Joshua 1:9–11 presents a “spiritual chain of command.” God commanded Joshua (v. 9); Joshua commanded the leaders (v. 10); the leaders were to command the people (v. 11). This is spiritual leadership under the command of God.

God’s purposes will outlast what we are able to accomplish in our strength. We are to make sure we are in step with His ways to ensure His work is not hindered from generation to generation.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share an answer to the following question: How did Christ lead by being a servant?

Be Strong and Courageous

Studying the Passage

Verse 6. Be strong and courageous. Being a good leader does not mean you are always confident in yourself or your abilities. Too much self-confidence can distract a leader from placing his trust and confidence in God. God reminded Joshua several times to be strong and courageous and that He would be with him. Joshua continually needed to be reminded of God's abilities.

Leaders face opposition. This forces us to depend more on God, which results in strength and resolve in leadership. Strength is found as we fix our gaze on God's promises and the wisdom of His Word.

Love God's Word and Be Careful to Obey It

Studying the Passage

Verse 7. careful to do according to all the law. To lead well, one must be led by the Spirit of God through His Word. Psalm 1 describes the blessed man who shuns the counsel of the world and delights in the law of the Lord. This is the type of man God called Joshua to be as the leader of Israel. The Word of God provided stability for his task ahead.

We may be passionate to see godly ends for those we lead, but we must not compromise God's ways of achieving those ends. We may be tempted to take shortcuts birthed by worldly wisdom. In the end, this will not be pleasing to God or beneficial to the people we lead.

First Chronicles 13 recounts the story of transporting the ark to Jerusalem. King David wanted the presence of God in the capital. However, he did not lead his people to transport the ark in the way God had prescribed. His failure to lead God's way resulted in Uzzah's death. We must carefully obey God's Word in our leadership because the lives of others may depend on the direction we give them. Patience and following God's Word are better than rushing into a decision based on emotions or the tyranny of the urgent.

We must be diligent in our study of God's Word so we are able to obey God's commands. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Diligent care to know and obey God's Word demonstrates love for Christ and those under our leadership.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share an answer to the following question: How did David reveal he wanted God's presence but without obeying God's clear instructions?

Fear God Alone

Studying the Passage

Verse 9. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed. A leader's fear (awe and respect) of God must be greater than fear of people and situations. God acknowledged in this passage that Joshua's leadership assignment would be difficult. Joshua was going into a land filled with giants and fortified cities. The task would not be easy. **for the LORD your God is with you.** The remedy for fear of the unknown is trust in the nearness of God. That trust is rooted in the character of God and not in the performance of the leader. God called Joshua to fear Him alone

because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now share answers to the following questions: In what ways did Joseph's life serve as preparation for his eventual leadership role? What role did the ridicule of his older brothers, his time as a slave, and his time in jail have in preparing him for leadership?

Discussion Question

What are your greatest personal challenges in living according to the leadership principles above?

On Your Own

In the space below, write a principle of leadership from the study of Joshua that you would like God to refine and deepen, so you will be better prepared to lead others.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: “In our last session I made a commitment to. . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . .”

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

Disciples called to lead others must realize that they are servants of God and servants of those they lead. Leadership is only a stewardship God has granted to leaders. God called Joshua to follow in the footsteps of Moses as a servant leader.

Jesus came to earth and took the form of a servant to lead us (Philippians 2). We follow His example to lead as servants of God.

Disciples who lead are not always confident in their own abilities. In fact, too much self-confidence can keep a leader from placing his trust and confidence in God. God reminded Joshua several times to be strong and courageous and that He would be with him. Joshua continually needed to be reminded of the abilities of God.

Leaders face opposition. This motivates disciples to depend more on King Jesus, which results in strength and resolve in leadership. Disciples find strength as we fix our gaze on God's promises and the wisdom of His Word.

To lead well, a disciple must be led by the Holy Spirit through His Word. This is the type of man God called Joshua to be as the leader of Israel. The Word of God provided stability and wisdom for his task.

Disciples may be passionate to reach a goal with those we lead, but we must not compromise God's ways of achieving that goal. Leaders may be tempted to take shortcuts reflecting worldly wisdom. In the end, this will not be pleasing to God or beneficial to the people we lead.

A leader's fear (awe and respect) of God must be greater than fear of people and situations. God acknowledged that Joshua's leadership assignment would be difficult. Joshua was going into a land filled with giants and fortified cities. The task would not be easy.

The remedy for fear of the unknown is trust in the nearness of God. That trust is rooted in the character of God and not in the performance of the leader. God called Joshua to fear Him alone because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. God's call to leaders today is the same.

Follow up Question

What are several biblical principles of leadership seen in the life of Joshua?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.