

LEADERSHIP

Lessons from Joshua on Christian Leadership

“Leadership is the ability, the aptitude, and the will to rally men and women toward a common goal, and to possess a character that inspires confidence.”

Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery

Everyone is a leader

Even if you do not hold a formal leadership position, you are always a leader wherever you exert influence.



In the community

where you live



In your family

day by day



At your job

among colleagues



In church

among God's people

So the question is not whether you lead, but how — and to what end.

Who does the LORD choose to be a leader?

Looking at these two images — which one is most characteristic of a leader?



Seven lessons from Joshua

We open the Bible to see who a Christian leader is — and to what he or she is called.

1 God does the actual work

2 A Christian leader must unlearn

3 A Christian leader has vision

4 A Christian leader is not self-assured

5 God's promise is no licence for laziness

6 A Christian leader lives in dependence

7 A Christian leader serves others

1

God does the actual work

Joshua's first experience of leadership: he is nothing more than an instrument in the hand of the LORD. Ex. 17:10–13

- Why Joshua? The danger is that we start with him — his qualities, his bravery, his insight, even his fear of God. But with true Christian leadership we never start with man. Humbling and encouraging at once.
- Moses had his eyes opened by grace and saw the work of the Spirit equipping him: “Joshua, in whom my Spirit is” (Num. 27:18).
- Joshua does defeat the enemy (v. 13) — but leadership becomes visible on the hilltop: the staff of God in Moses’ hand (v. 10–11). Lowered for a split second, and the battle is lost.
- Therefore intercessors were needed: Aaron and Hur.
- Afterwards there is no flag for Joshua — he is not the victor — but an altar: “The LORD is my Banner.”



My power is made perfect in weakness — that is precisely how it is revealed (2 Cor. 12:9–10).



Election is not a “power play” (1 Cor. 1:26–31: on what God has chosen).

2

A Christian leader must unlearn

Before he began to lead, Joshua learned that a leader may be respected, but must not be worshipped. Num. 11:28–29

- Did he want to make a good impression on Moses? Was it love and respect for him? The answer comes as a question: “Are you jealous for my sake?”
- A leader must not be swayed by people who are fond of him, but who stand in the way of the Spirit by silencing others when the Spirit is speaking.
- In Moses, Joshua sees a wonderful example. A leader does not become any less of a leader when the LORD places others around him who are called to lead and gifted for it.



A leader needs people around him who are led by the Spirit. Filled with the Spirit himself, he recognises the gifts of others instead of inflating his own ego.



The importance of mentoring other people.

3

A Christian leader has vision

He did not live by what the senses perceive, but by what God has promised. Num. 14:6–10

- He believes the word of the LORD (Num. 13:1): “I am giving it to the people.”
- His faith-based trust drives the reconnaissance of the promised land.
- How you face reality makes a world of difference. All twelve spies saw the same giants; only Joshua and Caleb looked at them in the sight of God. That, and not their own bravery, is what counts.
- Christian leaders must have a clear understanding of God’s mission — and realise that the greatest danger is that they themselves get in His way (14:9).



A leader needs the eyes of faith, enlightened eyes and insight (wisdom), in order to think and act from God’s perspective.

4

A Christian leader is not self-assured

Joshua apparently needed to hear “Do not be afraid” three times. Josh. 1:3, 5, 9

- The LORD makes no superfluous statements and does not speak just to say something — so Joshua evidently needs these words. God does not choose people “without fear.”
- This “do not be afraid” only works, by grace, in the way of obeying God’s instructions: meditating on the Law day and night (1:7–9) — the blessed man of Psalm 1.
- Only then can we show moral leadership.
- Along that path — constantly listening to the Word — it becomes clear that he is a suitable leader (3:7).



We actually overcome fear by continually living according to God’s words.



We will only show true moral leadership when we ourselves are ongoing listeners to the voice of God.

5

God's promise is no licence for laziness

The conviction that God will fulfil His promise does not exempt a person from leadership, nor licence laziness, recklessness or complacency. Josh. 2–8

- He sends two spies — and does so “in secret” (2:1).
- He must mobilise all the warriors, while it is the LORD who will conquer Ai (8:1–2).
- He gets up early to get everything organised in time (3:1).
- “Without the essential quality of self-discipline, other gifts will not develop; they cannot grow (...). Someone who is lazy and does not have their life in order will never become a true leader.” (Sanders, Spiritual Leadership, Chicago 2014)



God's strategy does not preclude the use of our strategic thinking and tactics.



The fulfilment of God's promise does not preclude our diligence: getting up early. And wouldn't prayer have had a place there?

6

A Christian leader lives in dependence

Successes can be blinding — constant discernment is needed. Josh. 7:2; 9:1–15

- By human standards the conquest of Ai was a far smaller “project” than the conquest of Jericho.
- Jericho was given to them as a gift — yet even what we receive from God can make us overconfident, as if our success were itself the blessing. The defeat at Ai shows it (7:2).
- The deception by the Gibeonites (9:1–15) shows that constant discernment is needed, and that a leader must always be on his guard.



What God gives is never a possession we can lean on: the gift calls for renewed dependence, not for self-confidence.



A Christian leader serves others

Joshua is the last to choose a portion of territory. Josh. 19:49–51

- Do not provoke envy by what we choose for ourselves.
- Do not seek personal gain, but seek what is best for the whole of the community you serve.
- There are many temptations in this area.



Whom do we serve under leadership? Are you a giver or a taker? Do you cause harm, or do you help others flourish?

IN CONCLUSION

From Joshua to Jesus

The lessons from Joshua's leadership call us to pay attention to the lessons from Jesus' leadership.

Hebrews 4:8-11

The parallel: Joshua did not give them rest — there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

A final thought: looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.