

# Three Traits . . . Three Tests

In Search of Leadership – Part I

Numbers 27; Deuteronomy 31:1-8

## Introduction

Today, and in our next discussion, we will address a topic I have entitled, “In Search of Leadership”. We will look at Numbers chapter 27 and Deuteronomy chapter 31 as we come to the conclusion of Moses’ life and begin looking at Joshua’s.

I believe, and have heard others say, that never in the history of the American church has there been more of a need for leadership than today.

George Gallup recently did a survey that resulted in some interesting facts. He found that more people are attending church – any kind of church – today, per capita, than were going during the colonial days of America. Can you believe that?

He also found that never before has there been such a high interest in spiritual things, or in what we view as the spiritual world. We have previously studied, however, that this interest may be unfounded and therefore, is leading people in the wrong direction.

Gallup closed the survey with these words that really startle me every time I reread them, “Never before in the history of the United States, has the gospel of Jesus Christ made such inroads, while at the same time, making so little difference.”

Why is this? I think it is because today, our churches are filling with spectators; with observers, rather than with leaders, disciples, and ministers.

As we come to the end of Moses’ life and see him pass the mantle to Joshua, we are going to discover the traits that make a leader and the reasons we so desperately need leadership today.

## Biblical Definition of Leadership

Let me begin by defining leadership in biblical terms. It is twofold. A leader is one who:

1. accepts the responsibility for ministry (and every believer is a minister in some way);
2. embraces the demands of influencing others.

Leadership, therefore, is the potential lot of every believer who ministers to other believers and influences the unbelieving world.

## Prevalent attitudes concerning leadership

Why then do so few believers take the reigns? There are two attitudes concerning leadership that are prevalent in the church today.

1. The attitude of the hand-off mentality.

This is the attitude that someone else can do it. Someone else is more capable; someone else is more gifted; someone else with a little bit more experience can take the job.

2. The attitude of the pay-off mentality.

I think this is even more tragic. This is the attitude that someone should be hired or a professional should be sought to do a job we should do for ourselves.

So, in other words, if the church needs ministering to and the people have needs, someone else can do it or some professional can be hired to do it.

The church has become the latest spectator sport in America. There are millions of people who are filling the pews to watch the best show possible. Yet, there are so few leaders who are saying, “Where is my niche? What is my part?”

Wilkinson, a former football coach for Oklahoma, was nabbed by a young reporter on one occasion. The reporter asked, “Mr. Wilkinson, what impact has the game of football made on the health of our society?”

Wilkinson responded, “Absolutely none.”

The reporter thought for a moment, not expecting that response, and came back with, “Would you care to elaborate?”

Wilkinson replied, “Yes, I would. The game of football is defined this way, ‘Twenty-two men on the field desperately need rest, while 40,000 people in the stands desperately need exercise.’”

This is like the church today.

## Three Traits of Leadership

Let us turn in our Bibles to Numbers chapter 27 to discover what it takes to be a leader. I think, in this passage, we will also discover the reason so many have shirked the mantle of leadership as it has been passed to them.

There are three traits of a leader in this text. We will look at these traits in Joshua's life today. In our next discussion, we will look at Moses.

### 1. The first trait of leadership is being capable of remembering past grievances, yet responding with grace.

Look at Numbers 27:15-18.

*Then Moses spoke to the Lord, saying,  
"May the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation,*

*"who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the Lord will not be like sheep which have no shepherd."*

*So the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him;"*

As I read this passage, it struck me that Moses is asking God for a man with a shepherd's heart – a man who will lead and care about the people that he will impact for the cause.

It also struck me that Joshua is the one man we would not expect to be appointed because he would not have this trait of leadership.

Joshua was with Moses for decades. He was his assistant and would walk along with Moses. He saw the people rise up and try to take Moses' life. He heard the grumbling. He had seen all of that.

Now Moses says, "Appoint a man who loves these people like a shepherd loves his sheep."

Do you understand what this means? This man, and any leader, having remembered past grievances, must be able to respond with grace.

This trait alone, has taken so many potential leaders off the block. Leadership takes an individual with a shepherd's heart who is controlled by the Holy Spirit.

I think Joshua would have had to hurdle the fact that he had been one of the spies who came back from

the Promised Land and said, "We can do it. We can go in. We can take the land. God is stronger than the giants. Let's go!"

Two of the spies said that. The other ten said, "Uh-uh," and the people followed them.

Joshua would definitely have that emblazoned in his memory. He could easily think, "Me lead these people?! I tried one time to influence them and they rejected me. In fact, they wanted to stone me."

A leader must be able to remember past grievances and yet, respond with grace.

### 2. A second trait of leadership is the ability to face present challenges, yet respond with courage.

Turn to Joshua chapter 1. I frankly, having just studied his life, do not believe that Joshua was the most courageous man in the Bible. I do not happen to think that inherent in his personality was the kind of trait that would stand up and say, "Follow me."

My reason for this conclusion is that so many times we find the phrase given to Joshua, "Be strong and courageous." Look, in fact, at Joshua 1:9a.

*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble . . .*

The implication is that Joshua is standing there trembling; his knees are knocking together. He is saying, "Oh, I don't know about this. I don't know if I can take on this challenge with courage."

So God is constantly, Himself or through Moses, saying, "Be strong! Be courageous! Don't tremble."

When Joshua looked at the challenge, it must have been an incredible thing. God was anticipating, or had given Moses the anticipation of, going into the Promised Land through the leadership of Joshua. However, Joshua knew that the people were unpredictable. He knew that the people could turn on their leaders in an instant. He stood there trembling and quaking, and God had to repeatedly say, "Don't be afraid. Be courageous."

Many have seen the challenge of some ministry; have seen the opportunity of witnessing for Christ to a neighbor or a boss or whoever and have stood there paralyzed with fear.

Leadership involves facing current challenges and yet, responding with courage.

I think this is the reason the last part of Joshua 1:9 is so important.

. . . *Do not . . . be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.*

Jesus Christ said this to future leaders of the church,

. . . *I am with you always . . . (Matthew 28:20)*

. . . *I will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5)*

We have the same promise today.

**3. A third trait of leadership is the ability to anticipate future trials, yet respond with trust.**

This is the hinge in Joshua's ministry. Can he trust the word of the Lord? Can he take, at face value, that God means, "I will be with you."?

The *only* way Joshua, or any leader, could ever handle a leadership position is to trust the Lord in the face of future trials.

## Three Tests of Leadership

Now let me give three tests or trials that I think Joshua faced as a leader. I tried to climb into Joshua's sandals and take a look at the several million people that he is now to lead. I wondered what must have been racing through his mind. What kind of tests would he face? What kind of tests do those who will lead; those who will influence and impact; those who will be involved in ministry today, face? I believe they are the same three tests.

**1. The first test we will call the test of expectations. This is a personal test.**

Joshua probably thought, "Excuse me, Lord, but You want *me* to fill the shoes of Moses? Why the book of Deuteronomy ends with the statement,"

*Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses . . . (Deuteronomy 34:10)*

"You want *me* to fill the shoes of someone whose shoes cannot be filled?"

One of the problems we have today, is the number of expectations we place on ourselves. This is a personal test, "Can I do this? Can I fill these shoes? Can I handle this ministry? Can I do this job?"

So often we come to the conclusion, "No, I can't."

Expectations sideline so many potential ministers; so many potential servants.

Joshua probably asked himself the question, "What if I fail?"

Remember that Joshua was with Moses when Moses took his rod and parted the Red Sea. He was with Moses when Moses ascended Mount Sinai, while it was red with fire and thundering. Joshua had seen Moses come down with his face glowing, having spoken with God.

Joshua is thinking, "You want *me* to fill those shoes?"

I think one of the misconceptions concerning ministry in the church is a result of the leadership style that we have seen presented in our society. This is that if you are a leader, you are always on top of things; you are always right; you, as a leader, are never wrong. A leader is always, in some ways, unreal, right?

So we come into the church and we think that if we are to lead or impact or influence or direct, then we have to be perfect; we cannot be real; we cannot let anyone see what we are really like because that may hinder. It does not hinder the ministry. I do not care what it may do in society, which tells us, "Never let anyone see you sweat," but in the church, it is okay. Let others see the real you because you cannot be perfect in ministry. You might as well forget this expectation.

Do you want to be a leader? Do you want to be a parent? Do you want to be a teacher? There is no other arena than that of leadership in the church that reveals the imperfections of people. It may be awkward and embarrassing and someone may see the real you. So what?

A funny thing happened a couple of weeks ago. A lady came up to me and said, "I saw you driving down the road the other day."

I thought, "What was I doing?"

Fortunately she is a very dear friend. I asked, "What was I doing?"

She said, "Oh, nothing. You were yawning."

I thought, "So?"

Then it hit me, and I asked, "Did I have my hand over my mouth?"

She said, "No. You were yawning as big as the world, driving down the street in front of everyone."

I thought, "Man, I'll *never* yawn in my truck again! If I do, I'll use both hands."

That was embarrassing! Every time I yawn now, I think of that!

I will never forget hearing the story of one pastor who is known for being rather real, which is so appreciated. Early in his ministry, he was driving his old Volkswagen bug down the street with his three children in the car. They were singing at the top of their lungs, the song, “If you’re saved and you know it, say, ‘Amen.’ Amen! If you’re saved and you know it, say, ‘Amen.’ Amen! . . .”

Do you know this song? They were singing and got to the third verse, when you do all three things that the song says to do and, at that moment, they pulled up to a red light. They were sitting at the red light, and they sang, “. . . Do all three, ‘Amen,’ clap hands, stomp feet.”

Suddenly, this pastor said he could feel the eyes of someone looking. He glanced over and there was a mid-forties couple staring at him. He then realized that they were seeing him shout and clap and stomp – and his children were too little to be seen over the windows!

One thing that encourages me that I will share so you might be encouraged as well, is that the greatest leaders; the greatest people of impact in the early church were men and women with imperfections. These leaders still turned their world upside-down for Christ.

Why do we have such high expectations that we would rather sit on the fence or on the sidelines rather than get involved? Why do we expect so much that we say, “I just couldn’t do that. No, not me.”?

God uses us, flaws and all, for His cause.

## **2. The second test, we will call the test of inexperience. This is a national test.**

Look at Joshua 1:10-11. Moses has died and Joshua stands up for the first time to take command; to take charge, and this is what he says. I love this.

*Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, “Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, saying, ‘Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are to cross this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you, to possess it.’”*

I wrote in my text the word, “Right.” Imagine that I am one of these possibly as many as four million people. This guy, who does not have even one day of experience, stands up and says, “Okay, prepare

provisions, we’re going across the Jordan and we’re going to possess the land.”

Turn to Deuteronomy chapter 31, where we will discover how this turns out.

Joshua is the man who is about to fill the shoes of the greatest prophet who will ever live. He is about to take the job of a man who has experienced or performed, by God’s power, more miracles than anyone prior to this date. The Israelites are on the brink of the Jordan and Joshua is supposed to take Moses’ place as their leader.

Notice what happens just prior to this point, when Moses is still living. Look at Deuteronomy 31:14-15. Imagine now that you are Joshua. You are standing there listening, knowing that you are going to be the next leader.

*Then the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, the time for you to die is near; call Joshua, and present yourselves at the tent of meeting, that I may commission him.” So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves at the tent of meeting. The Lord appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood at the doorway of the tent.*

Now note Deuteronomy 31:16.

*The Lord said to Moses, “Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them.”*

You are Joshua and you have just been told that you are going to lead these people. Now God informs Moses, in your hearing, that these people are going to disobey. They are, in fact, going to become idolaters. They are obviously going to create great problems for the one who will now lead them.

I can just imagine Joshua thinking, “Boy, let me at it. I can’t wait.”

Joshua already knows how this is going to turn out.

Can you imagine being given the position of CEO for a company that you know, and had been told in the interview, is going to go “belly up” within the year? I am sure we would all say, “Oh yeah, I want this on my résumé. Oh yeah, I’ll take *this* job.”

Imagine being asked to coach a little league baseball team, after being informed that the team has never won a game and no one expects them to ever win a game. That would be exciting.

Here is a man who is being told, “You’re going to lead people – who will not follow you.”

I am sure that Joshua, at this point, was thinking, “Thanks a lot!”

The national test comes – Joshua stands up to take command. When he does, he stands up as an inexperienced individual.

One of the great problems claimed by those who will not minister in the church is the lack of experience. Those who will not share their faith outside the church say, “I’ve never done that before. I don’t have experience.” Or worse, “I’ve had a bad experience.”

In the same way as Joshua, we need to stand on the threshold of ministry and take God at His word. We need to believe that He wants us to be involved in that arena or field, and say, “By the grace of God, even though I’m having difficulty with my expectations – believing I can do this through God’s power – even though I don’t have experience, I will do it.”

### **3. The third test, we will call the test of innovation. This is a relational test that relates to change.**

Joshua is taking over the leadership of a people who are unpredictable. To be honest, God seems very unpredictable as well.

Look at the first few chapters of Joshua’s life as the commander. The Israelites come to Jericho, and God says, “Joshua, I want you to walk around the city once a day for six days. Then, on the seventh day, I want you to walk around it seven times. Then, I want the elders and the leaders to blow their trumpets. And then, the walls will come tumbling down.”

Joshua says, “Okay, I want to be a good leader. I want the Lord to call the shots. So everyone walk around this city.”

They walked around the city, once a day for six days. Then, on the seventh day, they walked seven times. The men blew their trumpets and, lo and behold, the walls came tumbling down.

A few chapters later, God says, “I want you to go and conquer Ai.”

Joshua says, “Okay, everyone get ready. Get your trumpets.”

God says, “No. This time I want you to take 30,000 valiant men, sharpen your swords, and go fight.”

I kind of like the walking around the city better, myself.

One of the great tests for leadership, or for people involved in ministry, is flexibility – the ability to change – because change comes simply because we work with other people.

There is the thought of change being some hideous monster, yet ministry involves change.

God changed methods over and over again. We would expect God to say, “Now, here’s how you’re going to defeat the enemy once you’ve crossed the Jordan: you’re going to pray for three days, you’re going to fast for three days, you’re going to sharpen your swords, you’re going to walk into battle in a certain formation, and the enemy will be destroyed.”

This would be much better than God coming to us, as leaders, and saying, “This time, you pray. This time, you blow your trumpet. This time, you fight.”

Do you see the problem of innovation? Most people would say, “I quit. I want it in black and white now.”

Joshua, however, was somehow, by the grace of God, willing to do it.

## **Conclusion**

The things that made Joshua a great candidate for leadership, ladies and gentlemen, are these three traits and these three tests. The very same things make for good leadership today; for profitable, effective ministry today. And every believer is a potential minister, leader, person of influence and impact – *all* of us.

These three traits, will we develop them? These three tests, will we, by the grace of God, pass them?

I believe, with all my heart, that the church; the cause of Jesus Christ is searching for people who will say, “Yes, I will lead.” Would it surprise you to think that one of the people the church is looking for is you?