

Lesson 6 | October 6, 2024

Joshua's Spiritual Development for Leadership

Study Text: Exodus 33:7–11; Numbers 11:1–35; 27:12–23; Deuteronomy 31:14–29

Central Truth: Spiritual disciplines cultivate godly leadership.

Key Verse: Exodus 33:11

And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle (KJV).

Inside the Tent of Meeting, the Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Afterward Moses would return to the camp, but the young man who assisted him, Joshua son of Nun, would remain behind in the Tent of Meeting (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will recognize the Spirit's role in shaping leaders.
- Students will be motivated to experience God's presence.
- Students will make time to meet with God every day through prayer and worship.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: Filling the shoes of a great leader is never easy. The challenge is multiplied when the leader is someone like Moses—one of the most important, anointed leaders in history. Joshua was the person God chose for that enormous task. And long before he stepped into the role of leading Israel, God was preparing him.

Discussion Starter—What Makes a Great Leader?

Say: Who is an important leader in your life? What characteristics set that person apart as an effective leader? *(After the characteristics of a good leader have been listed, categorize each as a skill, an attitude, or a spiritual quality. Did one category have more characteristics listed than the others? Why or why not?)*

Say: As we will see in Joshua's story, there's more to effective leadership than being smart, likable, or skilled.

Joshua's leadership journey—as recorded in Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—began when he was a young man leading Israel's army and supporting Moses' leadership. Over the next forty years, a series of events transformed Joshua into an experienced, godly leader who was ready to guide Israel after Moses' death. Each episode in Joshua's spiritual development reveals truths about the way God prepares leaders in His kingdom.

Part 1—Joshua Remains at the Tent

A Sacred Place of Meeting

Exodus 33:7–10

Say: Moses' role as leader of Israel must have been overwhelming. Imagine leading an entire nation out of slavery—the only way of life they'd known for hundreds of years. Suddenly, they were miraculously free . . . but what next? Where would they live? What would they eat? Would the Egyptians chase them down and drag them back into slavery? The only way Moses could navigate all the challenges of leading God's people was by staying close to God. In His presence, Moses found wisdom, courage, and strength to obey Him. And that's why he needed a place dedicated to meeting with God.

God chose Moses to be a prophet, deliverer, and lawgiver. But the most noteworthy thing about his life was his access to God (Exodus 19:9–24; 33:11–23). During one of their encounters on Mount Sinai, God gave Moses the plans for a special tent called the tabernacle (Exodus 26). It would be set up in the middle of Israel's camp. God allowed His glory to reside in its innermost room. This is how God would fulfill His promise to dwell among His people. But until the tabernacle could be built, Moses needed a place to meet with God and receive wisdom, guidance, and strength to fulfill his calling. He had a temporary tent constructed, which he called the tent of meeting. The original language makes it clear that this tent was different from the tabernacle and emphasizes that the tent of meeting was set up "some distance from the camp" (33:7). If it had not been far away, the sinful people would have been destroyed for getting too close to God's holy presence.

When Moses would go to the tent to meet with God, the people reverently watched as God's presence descended. The Source of this cloud was the same as the cloud of glory that protected and guided the nation during their exodus and covered Mount Sinai when Moses met with God there. In the tent of meeting, Moses had a sacred place to encounter God.

Even though Moses' anointing was unique, God's promise to reveal His presence to His children remains in effect today. Moses encountered God's glory externally, and it eventually faded away. But because of Jesus, we can experience God's glory internally through the Holy Spirit living in us. Instead of fading away, that glory should only grow stronger (2 Corinthians 3:7–18).

Discuss

- Do you regularly take time to meet with God? If so, where?
- How would you describe the difference between the way Moses experienced God's presence and the way we can experience God's presence?

Resource Packet Item 1: Your Tent of Meeting

Moses and Joshua regularly met with God in a place designed just for that purpose: the tent of meeting. Students will follow the prompts on the handout to create their own place dedicated to encountering God.

The Persistent Visitor

Exodus 33:11

Say: We usually picture Moses as a solitary figure, walking by himself through the wilderness to meet with God. But at Moses' most dramatic moments in God's presence, there was often another person nearby.

Moses' assistant, Joshua, appears in the biblical narrative a few times before Exodus 33. Chapter 17 records how he led Israel's army to victory over the Amalekites. In chapter 24, Moses, Aaron, two of Aaron's sons, the seventy elders of Israel, and Joshua left the rest of the people in the camp and drew closer to God's presence at the base of Mount Sinai. When the moment came to climb the mountain and enter the presence of God, Moses and Joshua left the other leaders and ascended alone (verses 12–14). Then Exodus 32 records Joshua's reaction as he came back down the mountain with Moses and heard the people worshipping the golden statue Aaron had made (verse 17).

By Exodus 33, Joshua's role as Moses' right-hand man had been firmly established. Verse 11 describes how Moses regularly went to the tent of meeting, accompanied by Joshua. When Moses returned to the camp, Joshua stayed in the tent. He was learning vital leadership lessons—especially that there is no substitute for spending time in God's presence. Moses led Israel well because God was leading him. Joshua saw this up close. And as he spent time with God on his own, Joshua was being shaped into a leader of the same character and influence as Moses.

Discuss

- Joshua experienced the presence of God by staying close to Moses. Is there anyone in your life who has helped you grow closer to God? If so, how?
- Moses made room for Joshua to encounter God. Is there anyone in your life you can help grow closer to God? If so, how?

Part 2—The Spirit Rests on Leaders Necessary for Spiritual Leadership

Numbers 11:24–25

Say: Moses needed help leading the Israelites into the spiritual battles and the physical battles that lay before them. So, God raised up Spirit-empowered leaders to assist him—elders who had experienced God's presence for themselves.

Imagine the weight of responsibility Moses was carrying. His leadership included the civil, judicial, and spiritual care of an entire nation. Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, had

encouraged him to delegate some responsibilities to other leaders (Exodus 18), but this was not enough. Ultimately, the Israelites needed more than strategic leadership practices; they needed leaders who were empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Numbers 11 records the people's complaints about the food God was miraculously providing. Moses was aggravated by their ingratitude and lack of faith and felt overwhelmed by the responsibilities of leadership (verses 10–15), but the Lord intervened. Since the problem was spiritual, the solution also needed to be spiritual. More food, different food, or better distribution wouldn't address the real problem. Instead, God told Moses to gather seventy seasoned leaders and bring them to the tabernacle (verse 16). If Moses did that much, God would do the rest.

As was customary, God's presence descended in a cloud, and He spoke with Moses (verse 25). But this time, there was an audience. As the group listened, God did something amazing: "He gave the seventy elders the same Spirit that was upon Moses." God's gift was obvious because of a unique sign that happened as the Spirit came on them: "When the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied." This spiritually enabled speech proved to Moses, the people, and the elders themselves that they had experienced something life-changing. The same power that worked through Moses was now equipping them to help carry the burden of the leadership. Although verse 25 clarifies that they only expressed this prophetic gift one time, it was a lasting sign of their anointing as leaders.

The Holy Spirit's power is a necessary requirement for spiritual leadership. Natural ability and the willingness to learn new skills are important, but they can never replace God's Spirit at work in a leader—or any believer. God's plan is to fill every believer with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17–18, 38–39). Through His power, we can all share the gospel and advance God's kingdom, whether we serve in church leadership or not.

Discuss

- Why is practical ability not enough for spiritual leadership?
- When the elders prophesied, this was evidence that they had been set apart and empowered by the Spirit to lead. Does God still use signs to show His power in people's lives today? What are some of the signs that the Bible talks about?

Resource Packet Item 2: Another Pentecost Parallel

Just as the giving of the Law was a parallel to the Day of Pentecost, so was the Spirit's power coming upon the elders of Israel. This handout enables students to compare the events of Numbers 11 and Acts 2.

An Important Lesson about Spiritual Leadership

Numbers 11:26–30

Say: Joshua's devotion to Moses caused him to misunderstand the way God's presence and power works. We can all learn from this account that God empowers anyone and everyone He chooses, whether we think they're worthy or not.

When Moses gathered the seventy elders at the tabernacle to meet with God, two men, Eldad (*EL-dad*) and Medad (*MEE-dad*), remained in the camp for some unexplained reason (Numbers 11:26). When the Spirit came upon the sixty-eight elders around the tabernacle, the Spirit rested on these two absent elders as well. Everyone in the camp knew something miraculous had happened, because the same sign was happening simultaneously both inside and outside the camp. The elders' prophesying was dramatic and supernatural, marking these men as recipients of the Spirit's power.

When word reached Moses and Joshua that Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the camp, Joshua, "who had been Moses' assistant since his youth, protested, 'Moses, my master, make them stop!'" (verse 28). Joshua had not responded negatively to the sixty-eight leaders prophesying in Moses' presence, but the report about the other two stirred a strong emotional response.

Moses asked Joshua why he was so upset and then taught him an important lesson about spiritual leadership. The power of God is not a commodity to be hoarded by a few spiritual elites. The Spirit has enough power to equip everyone. Moses longed for the day when everyone could be fully empowered by God's Spirit (verse 29). God's long-term plan for His people was to make them a "kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exodus 19:6, KJV). These words anticipated the time when the Spirit would be poured out on all God's people, beginning with the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4).

The gifts of the Spirit are not the exclusive property of a select few. Like Joshua, we need to understand the value of all God's people operating in His Spirit's power. We should seek all He has for us and encourage others to do the same.

Discuss

- What attitudes and habits should we develop to avoid becoming proud about our experiences with God?
- How can we help others experience everything God has for them?

Part 3—God Commissions Joshua Joshua's Public Ordination

Numbers 27:18–23

Say: Eventually, Moses' era of leadership came to an end. In the plains of Moab, the Israelites set up their last campsite before crossing into the Promised Land. God would allow Moses to see the land, but he would not enter it during his life. Knowing his death was at hand, Moses asked God to "appoint a new man as leader for the community" so they would not be like "sheep without a shepherd" (Numbers 27:16–17).

God chose Joshua to be Israel's new leader—not because he was Moses' longtime assistant but because he was a man in whom the Spirit dwelled (Numbers 27:18). God

then gave Moses specific instructions for establishing Joshua as leader in the people's eyes. There were to be three steps in Joshua's public ordination:

1. *"Lay your hands on him"* (verse 18). The Israelites were familiar with the act of laying on hands. The people had laid hands on the Levites when they were presented before God and dedicated as workers in the tabernacle (8:10). Priests would also lay hands on animals being sacrificed before offering them to God. Laying on hands indicated a person or animal had been set apart and symbolized transfer of authority, responsibility, or guilt. By laying his hands on Joshua, Moses was setting him apart and transferring leadership.
2. *"Publicly commission him to lead the people"* (verse 19). According to the modern idea of democracy, authority flows up from the people. But in the ancient world, authority was viewed as a reality that moved from the top down. When a leader issued a command, those words carried as much authority as the person who issued it. In Joshua's case, the chain of command was clear. God had commissioned Moses, and Moses was now commissioning Joshua. He would lead not because he was popular or respected, but because his authority came from God.
3. *"Transfer some of your authority to him"* (verse 20). Moses passing his leadership authority to Joshua was like a king passing his crown to a prince. The text makes it clear only part of Moses' authority was given to his successor. Joshua was not Moses; he could not do everything Moses did. Unlike Moses, who met with God personally, Joshua would use the prescribed means of the priest's Urim to discern God's will (verse 21; see Exodus 28:30). Joshua was not expected to lead exactly the same way Moses had. God worked uniquely through each of them..

Discuss

- How can we resist the pressure to compare ourselves to others as we pursue God's will for our own lives?
- Why was it important for the Israelites to see Moses affirm Joshua as their new leader? How can we help others fulfill their God-given calling?

Joshua's Divine Mandate

Deuteronomy 31:14, 23

Say: Public affirmation of Joshua's leadership was important, but it was not enough. He needed to hear directly from God himself.

Numbers 27 records how Moses presented Joshua before "all the congregation" (verse 19, KJV) of Israel, carrying out his public ordination. But Deuteronomy 31 relates another part of the story. Joshua had spent time as an outsider to the conversations between Moses and God. And the familiar tent of meeting was the setting for a powerful moment in Joshua's life: his personal commission from God.

Joshua's charge and promise from God (verse 23) would sustain him during the difficult days of the conquest of Canaan. The command to be strong and courageous was spoken three times in this chapter and four times in Joshua 1. It was the primary instruction to Joshua and the nation as they entered the land. Not just empty words, the directive to be strong and courageous was founded on sound reasoning. Joshua could boldly approach uncertainty and danger for one reason: God had appointed him to lead the people into the land. Strength and courage were reasonable attitudes, because God's plan ensured success.

Spiritual preparation for leadership is built on God's will and God's promises. You can face challenges boldly and courageously when you know God has called you and will be with you.

Resource Packet Item 3: Be Strong and Courageous

God commissioned Joshua for an extremely important and extremely difficult job. But He reminded Joshua to be strong and courageous. God would never leave him on his own. Students will consider certain promises from Scripture and describe how they build strength and courage.

Discuss

- In what challenging areas of your life do you need to hear God's words to Joshua: "Be strong and courageous" (Deuteronomy 31:23)?
- Do you ever struggle to believe God's promise that He will always be with you? What are some ways you could remind yourself of this truth?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Every follower of Jesus has been called to lead. Maybe you're a leader in your family, church, workplace, community, or group of friends. Whatever your circle of influence, God wants to show himself to you, empower you, and commission you to make a difference in the world. Learning to lead as we follow Jesus is a lifelong endeavor. Sometimes growth as a leader is exciting and joyous while other times it's challenging and difficult. Don't give up in the middle of the process. Let God continue to develop you into the leader He has called you to be.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Set aside time and find a specific place to meet with God at least three times this week.
- Intentionally build a relationship with someone who could mentor you in spiritual growth or someone who needs help growing in their walk with the Lord.
- Ask God to fill you with His Spirit and empower you to live out your leadership calling.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Abram Builds Altars to God.

Genesis 12:4–9

Tuesday:

David Brings the Ark to

Jerusalem. 1 Chronicles 16:1–3

Wednesday:

Josiah's Covenant Renewal.

2 Chronicles 34:29–33

Thursday:

Andrew Introduces Peter to Jesus.

John 1:35–42

Friday:

Priscilla and Aquila Disciple Apollos.

Acts 18:24–28

Saturday:

Paul Prays for Fellow Believers.

Philippians 1:3–11