



Unit .05

Session .02

A Leader's Wisdom

Scripture



Exodus 18:7-18,24-27

7 Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. And they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent. **8** Then Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them in the way, and how the LORD had delivered them. **9** And Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the LORD had done to Israel, in that he had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians. **10** Jethro said, "Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. **11** Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people." **12** And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God. **13** The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening. **14** When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was

doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?" **15** And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God; **16** when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make them know the statutes of God and his laws." **17** Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. **18** You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone. ... **24** So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. **25** Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. **26** And they judged the people at all times. Any hard case they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves. **27** Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went away to his own country.

Option 1

Throughout history great leaders—men and women—have risen to the occasion and led their people through the best and worst times. Men and women of courage and conviction, who have done what needed to be done, even if it came at great cost.

▪ **Who do you consider to be some of the world's greatest leaders? Why?**

As we read through the Scriptures, we encounter some of these great leaders. One of the most well-known is Moses, perhaps the biggest star of the Jewish world. God used Moses to lead His people out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and he would later take them to the edge of the promised land. All along, Moses had not only given God's people direction, He also served as God's mouthpiece, telling the people what God told him.

But leading millions of people out of slavery toward a new home was no easy task. The people struggled to trust God. They complained. They were normal people with normal problems, compounded by being a large nation of people traveling together through a difficult situation. As problems arose among the people, Moses tried to carry the load of managing them by himself—something he discovered wasn't good in effective leadership.

Option 2

Play the “Signs” game with your group. Instruct students to sit in a circle and choose a sign. Once every student has chosen a sign, they must demonstrate it for the rest of the group. Then, choose one student to be the guesser. Instruct the guesser to stand in the middle of the circle, eyes closed. While the guesser's eyes are closed the rest of the students will silently choose who will start the game. Then, allow the guesser to open their eyes. The first student will perform their own sign and then perform the sign of another student to “pass” the sign to that student. That student will “catch” their sign by repeating it, and then perform another student's sign to pass it again. Students will continue to pass the sign to other people until the guesser figures out who currently has the sign.

- **How closely did you have to pay attention to what everyone else was doing to see when someone performed your sign?**
- **As the guesser, how closely did you have to pay attention to catch the sign?**

Moses was a good leader, someone the people listened to and followed; however, he still had a lot to learn by listening to and watching his father-in-law. We need others to help us lead.

TEACHING PLAN

At an unknown point, for an unknown reason, Moses sent his wife (Zipporah) and their two sons (Gershom and Eliezer) to live with his father-in-law (Jethro). Jethro heard what God did for Moses and the people of Israel and he set out to meet Moses in the wilderness to reunite the family, sending word ahead to Moses that they were coming.

Read Exodus 18:7-12.



Think about what Moses had experienced to this point. He, along with the people of Israel, had seen God work incredible wonders to bring them out of their captivity in Egypt and provide for their needs as they journeyed. Moses had quite the story to tell Jethro, and he told his father-in-law all of it.

Notice how Jethro responded: He rejoiced. Just hearing what God had done stirred something deep within Jethro, and he was compelled to worship. The power of God is designed to lead us into worship. God's works are a blessing to those who experience them first-hand and to all who hear of them, even if they are separated by distance, time, or both. When we come together with other believers and begin to share all God has done in our lives, we should respond like Jethro and Moses—joyfully and filled with worship.

- **When have you praised God because of His work in someone else's life?**
- **How does God receive honor when we rejoice at all He is doing with others?**

Read Exodus 18:13-18.



Moses was making a mistake many well-meaning Christians make: He was not involving the people around him in the task God had given him. Moses was acting as the single judge for all the peoples' disputes and it was a burden he could not bear. It was too much; he had bitten off more than he could chew. What Moses was doing was good; He was trying to help the people and preserve peace. This makes it difficult for us to see when we are doing something the wrong way. Moses' problem was not his desire to help the people, or his judicial oversight of the people, it was the way he was helping them. He was overwhelmed with the task and the people waited for hours to be heard. But there was a better way. Jethro saw a way for Moses' burden to be eased and the people to be heard more quickly. So Jethro gave Moses advice that nearly every leader needs to hear: Delegate the work.

- **When has someone in a leadership position delegated responsibility to you?**
When have you delegated responsibility while in a position of leadership?

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God equips His
people with wisdom.

Exodus 18

18:7-12. 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. Yet, their typical response was not worship, but doubt. They complained to Moses about not having enough food and water, questioning God's ability, and maybe even His willingness, to provide for them. They saw the plagues in Egypt, they heard the wails of the Egyptians who lost their firstborn sons while they looked into the eyes of their own, but it still didn't produce the type of amazement Jethro had from just hearing of God's mighty works.

We are good at finding a list of reasons to complain: weather, politicians, family, sports, work, and even our churches. We tend to focus on the negative and forget the positive. This was certainly true for the people of Israel. They began complaining on the heels of seeing the mighty Egyptian army washed away in the Red Sea—the same sea they had passed through on dry land mere moments before.

We share the Israelites' core problem: sin. We are a fallen, broken people. We complain because it is our nature. In our rebellion, we turn our eyes and hearts away from God—the One who is good and gives us what is good—instead fixing our gaze on our own selfish ambitions and desires. So, complaining is the natural posture of such unsatisfied, sinful hearts.

We cannot miss that Moses did not give in to this sinful inclination. Yes, he told Jethro of the difficulties they experienced, but it was not with a spirit of complaining. Rather, Moses wanted to show God's faithfulness and goodness through them. Moses refused to follow in the way of the people he led. He did not complain to Jethro about what it was like to lead such a stubborn, ungrateful people; instead, he pointed Jethro to the works of God. To Moses, the story that deserved to be told focused on God and His faithfulness rather than the Israelites and their faithlessness. So, Moses and Jethro rejoiced in the Lord together.



99 Essential Doctrines (p. 72, DDG)

Body of Christ

The New Testament describes the church as the body of Christ. The church lives and operates as Christ's representative here on earth, with Christ as its head (Col. 1:18). This means that the church is an extension of Christ's ministry, carrying out His work by fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). In addition, the picture of the church as the body of Christ shows us the interconnectedness of individual Christians, with each member dependent upon one another for growth and sanctification (1 Cor. 12).

TEACHING PLAN

If Moses' father-in-law had not challenged him to look for able men among the Israelites who could perform the same duties and meet the same needs as him, Moses very well might have continued on and eventually burned out. If he let himself get to that extent of feeling overwhelmed, there would have been no one to meet the needs of the people afterward, which would have negatively affected the Israelites, who obviously needed spiritual and practical guidance. He had unknowingly set himself (and his people) up for failure, and Jethro's gentle suggestion to delegate his responsibilities benefited not only Moses but also the people who depended on him.

- **How might a solo leader, no matter how good he or she is, hurt the people being led?**

Read Exodus 18:24-27.



Jethro's willingness to challenge Moses paid off. Moses chose a group of men who were God-fearing and trustworthy; people of character, not of status (Ex. 18:21). He then instructed them about the law and taught them about their responsibilities in their new roles (Ex. 18:20). These men were then appointed as judges over different groups of people, bringing only the more difficult cases to Moses. Jethro's hope was realized: Moses did as he suggested, God appears to have been in the midst of the plan, and Moses was able to endure while the people were able to go home satisfied (Ex. 18:23).

- **In what other areas of life do you think this leadership principle exists?**

Jethro's principle stands even today: Governing an entire nation of people is too great a task for one man or woman, no matter how qualified. Many governments apply this same principle, using different branches of government to oversee different areas. In addition, churches also model this type of leadership. In the New Testament, Paul established several church leadership positions designed by God to work together to lead and help the body of Christ fulfill her mission (Eph. 4:11-13). Those leadership positions exist to train up the people for the work of the ministry—that means us! If we are not careful, we can miss partnering with others, just as Moses did. 

But as good as the gift of the church is, God has given us an even better way. He has given us Christ—the head of the church, our perfect leader. We are invited to share our burdens with one another as we all cast those same burdens on Christ, the one who has the wisdom, strength, and power to bear them for us (Ps. 55:22; Matt. 11:28-30; 1 Pet. 5:6-7). The gospel calls us to come to Christ for salvation with nothing to offer except our sin, which He takes upon Himself. In Christ, we follow Christ still with nothing to offer except for what He has given to us—His righteousness and giftings. This should be the posture of the church—humble submission to our Lord, the One who leads, equips, and enables us to carry out the mission we have received. 

- **What burdens are you carrying that you need to let God handle?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God equips His
people with wisdom.

Exodus 18

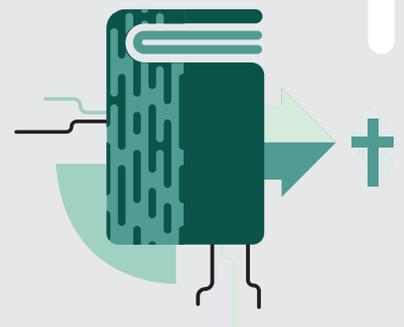
18:13-17. Now, Moses wasn't in sin per se, but he was leading the people of Israel in a way that prevented him from being the best leader he could be while the people were not being served the best way they could be. Our study through Exodus up to this point demonstrates why Israel needed an efficient leader! Jethro's challenge to Moses wasn't meant to discourage him, but to equip him to be the leader the Israelites needed. Even if he had been a good leader to this point, he could be a better leader and Jethro wanted to help him become that leader.

Sometimes, when we're in the middle of a season filled with great responsibility, the pressure and stress keep us from realizing 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. This is what Moses had been doing since the Israelites escaped Egyptian slavery, and he was likely at his wit's end.

18:24-27. Moses should have realized his need for sharing his leadership burden right before he met Jethro. In Exodus 17, we read of the Israelites battling against the armies of Amalek. While Moses' arms were raised, the Israelites prevailed, but when his arms fell, the Amalekites began to win the battle. Because Moses' arms were weary, Aaron and Hur held them up and the Israelites conquered their foe. The armies of Israel would have been destroyed had Moses not received support from Aaron and Hur. If Moses needed help holding up his tired arms while the people of Israel fought, how much more did he need help when it came to judging every issue that came up between the people? Moses should have realized this, but he couldn't on his own. He needed someone else (Jethro) to help him see it, proving the wisdom of his father-in-law's counsel.

(p. 74, DDG) Christ Connection

Moses needed others to help him complete the task of preserving the unity of God's people and teaching them God's laws. God has provided us the church body, with Christ as the head, to work together to fulfill our task of sharing the gospel to the world and bringing others into His body.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



Read Ephesians 4:11-13. In your own words, describe the purpose for these offices within the church.

Why do you think God designed it so that no one person could fulfill each of these roles?

Heart



Why should we be more like Jethro, rejoicing over what God has done in someone else's life?

How might God use our rejoicing to draw others to Himself?

Hands



In what areas do you need to practice better leadership skills? How will you go about making those changes?

Who do you know who needs godly counsel this week? How can you point them toward Christ?

Main Point: God equips His people with wisdom.



Head

In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul listed a few spiritual gifts God gives His people to help build up the body of Christ. Notice the diversity even in this short list. Think of the different skills and passions necessary for each one. No one person could fulfill each of these roles, no matter how talented he is or how much he desires to. That is because none of us were meant to. The work of building up the body of Christ is meant to be shared by many people within the body (Rom. 12:4-6). Each of us must use our own individual gifts to help share the load of this great task. We need one another. Our dependence on one another is not a sign of weakness, but understanding. Weakness is when we believe we can do it on our own without help—when our pride causes us to push others away and we see ourselves as the stars of the church. We are not, and we were never meant to be; that is Christ's place alone.



Heart

One of the distinguishing marks of a wise, godly person is his or her ability to rejoice in what God has done—even if He has done it for others. Notice Jethro didn't try to poke holes in Moses' story. What Moses told him was astonishing. It would have been tough for anyone who was not there to believe. But Jethro didn't give in to cynicism or offer input about what God could have done differently. Jethro passed no judgment of how undeserving the people were of God's kindness. Instead, the two men simply rejoiced. Jethro was compelled to worship God for being greater than all other gods—his main take-away from Moses' story.

How about us? Are we prone to rejoice? If we want to be godly men and women—godly leaders in whatever context God has placed us—then, we need to recognize the ways God has moved in our lives and ministries. Our rejoicing as leaders encourages those who follow us to join in and worship the Lord too.



Hands

Moses, like all of us at times, needed a wake-up call. He needed Jethro to rejoice with him—to encourage him. But he also needed Jethro to point out an area of weakness so he could improve in his leadership. Moses was not a perfect leader, even after heeding Jethro's counsel; we aren't perfect either. We need each other's help to lead the way God's people need us to lead—the way they deserve to be led. But our need of others and our leadership imperfections shouldn't discourage us. Instead, they should point us to the only leader who is perfect: Jesus.