

*A Tactical Belief Book*

R. Herbert

**LESSONS** *From*  
**OLD TESTAMENT**  
**LEADERS**

# **LESSONS from OLD TESTAMENT LEADERS**

Principles of Leadership for Everyday Living

**R. Herbert**

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# INTRODUCTION:

## The Bible and Leadership

*“Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).*

You may not have thought about it this way, but the Bible is a book about leaders. More than 95 percent of its stories are about individuals who were leaders or who took the initiative when leadership was needed.

This is especially true of the Old Testament which deals with a broad range of social, political and military events, rather than focusing mainly on religious events and concerns as the New Testament tends to do. The Old Testament also often gives more personal details regarding the people it tells us about – details that enable us to draw conclusions regarding their actions and the lessons we can learn from them.

For all these reasons, this book looks at twenty-four case studies taken from stories of individuals found in the Old Testament. As we might expect, many of those leaders are among the Bible’s best-known figures – individuals like Abraham, Moses, and David. But this book also looks at numerous less well-known men and women of the Old Testament who displayed great leadership abilities and from whom we can also learn.

The stories we examine are sometimes well-known ones and sometimes minor ones that you may have read over without noticing anything significant about them. But in every case, we find that the leaders portrayed in the Old Testament have left the recognizable fingerprint of their leadership on the stories recorded about them.

Those leaders were often prophets, warriors, or kings, and this book looks at leadership case-studies from each of these groups. Naturally there is some overlap in the categories. Moses, for example, functioned both as a prophet and a warrior, so individuals who fulfilled multiple roles may appear in more than one section of the book.

Women leaders are given their own category because they often led in non-formal leadership roles. But many of the “leading ladies” of the biblical narrative were women of strength who led in their families, communities, or (in the case of Deborah) even the whole nation of ancient

Israel. These women were all the more remarkable as they often took the initiative to lead in times when no one else would.

But why should we, as readers and followers of the Bible, study the leadership of these individuals? The simple answer is that the Bible is not only about leaders, it is also for leaders, and God calls all of us to be leaders in some way or another. Whether we have formal or societally recognized positions of leadership does not matter. It is not who we are that makes us leaders, but what we do, and leadership is a role that is open to anyone who is willing to look for opportunities to express it.

The leadership principles seen in the biblical stories are also timeless. Principles that were utilized by those who led thousands in epic events of the distant past can be utilized just as well in our everyday relations with our families, friends and peers today.

Finally, studying the leadership stories of the Old Testament can help us to see that there are dozens of areas and dozens of ways in which effective leadership can be brought into play. If we let them, the leadership lessons the Bible records can reach into every area of our lives.

The basic principles of leadership science are not “rocket science.” For the most part, its concepts are straightforward, and anyone can utilize them. The challenge is not in understanding the principles you will find in this book, but in continually and consistently applying them. The principles themselves may be simple, but if we do apply them, they can make a profound difference in our lives and in the lives of those we serve.

**PART ONE:  
PROPHETS**



# 1. ABRAHAM:

## The Patriarch and Preparation

The biblical patriarch Abraham not only became the founder of the Hebrew people, but also the father of the faithful in every nation (Galatians 3:29). Not surprisingly, when we study the accounts of Abraham's life, we find many things from which we can learn. But there is one lesson from which we can profit that is easy to miss.

If we look closely at the stories of Abraham, we find a pattern that is not as evident in the lives of any of the other patriarchs – or of any other figure found in the Old Testament. When we are told in Genesis 12 that God called Abraham to leave his home and to go to a distant land that God would give him, we are told nothing of any preparations Abraham made. Perhaps God's appearance and command were unexpected and left little time for preparation or the preparations are not recorded, but one thing is clear: from the moment of Abraham's calling onward we see him repeatedly utilizing the principle of preparation, of looking ahead and preparing for situations that might arise.

When Abraham and his family arrived in the land of Canaan a famine began, and Abraham took preemptive action by moving down to Egypt until the famine eventually ended (Genesis 12:10-15). But even before he got to that foreign land, Abraham prepared by urging his beautiful wife Sarah to act as if she were his sister in order to avoid his being killed by anyone who might want to take Sarah as his own wife. Genesis 12:11 stresses this was preparation rather than reaction in mentioning specifically that Abraham did this "as he was about to enter Egypt." We need not try to decide on the morality of this deception; the point is that it clearly fits the pattern we see throughout Abraham's life of living with faith yet continually preparing ahead of time for possible problems.

When he returned to Canaan, we are told that the herdsmen of Abraham and his nephew began to argue over the available pasturelands, and Abraham preemptively offered to let Lot choose the area he wanted before the trouble escalated (Genesis 13). Soon after – as we will see in Part Two – when Lot and his family were taken prisoner by invading kings, Abraham was able to respond to the situation with a force of men that he had already trained, arming them with weapons he had already procured and were on hand for emergencies such as this (Genesis 14).

No other biblical accounts show such continued careful planning as we find with Abraham, and it is clear that advance preparation was a deeply ingrained part of his nature. In fact, when God visited Abraham in human form to tell him that Sarah would conceive a son (Genesis 18:1-7), we get the distinct impression in Abraham's rushing to greet and feed his visitors and the repeated use of the word "hurried" that he was stressed by the situation of not being able to plan ahead for this event!

On the other hand, in Genesis 22:1-18 we find Abraham's preparations carefully detailed when he is commanded to sacrifice his son Isaac, and in Genesis 24 we see his planning ahead in the way he sent a servant to look for a wife for his son Isaac (an example not followed by Isaac, whose son Jacob goes off to find a wife for himself!).

Not surprisingly, the same trait of preparation is evident even at the patriarch's death. Genesis records: "Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. But while he was still living, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them away from his son Isaac to the land of the east" (Genesis 25:5-6). Clearly, Abraham's actions were based on foreseeing the possibility of strife between Isaac and his other sons. Abraham prepared for death as he had done for everything important in life.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

We see careful preparation for eventualities in almost all the events of Abraham's life. There can be no doubt that his looking ahead, foreseeing problems, and planning to avoid or lessen them contributed greatly to his success as the leader of his family and his very large household (Genesis 13:2, etc.). The great man of faith was also a man who knew the importance of doing what one can to avoid problems and ensure success.

Later books of the Bible reiterate and stress the principle of preparation – from the proverbs of the Old Testament to the parables of the New, preparation is stressed as key to success in all aspects of life. Preparation is also a key leadership principle that has been embraced by great leaders throughout history. Abraham Lincoln wrote "I will prepare and someday my chance will come." Lincoln also stressed the same truth more humorously in saying "Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe." Lincoln, like the prophet Abraham, knew the value of preparation, and we too must remember this principle upon which all strong leadership is built.

## **2. JOSEPH:**

### **The Power of Patience**

Joseph – the great-grandson of Abraham, grandson of Isaac, and son of Jacob – was the last of the great biblical patriarchs, yet in his divinely-supported leadership accomplishments Joseph eclipsed them all. Rising from slavery to the position of second most powerful man in one of the greatest superpowers of the ancient world, Joseph's story is familiar to all readers of the Bible.

But there is an aspect of Joseph's life that, although it exemplifies his leadership and made his accomplishments possible, is often overlooked. That quality, so clearly found in everything we are told about Joseph, was patience. When we consider the account of his life, Joseph is one of the greatest examples of patience that we can find in the Bible – or elsewhere. The events of his life read like the nominations for a patience awards ceremony and comprise a nearly endless succession of things for which he had to wait in order for them to work out. Consider the following:

The favored young son that God had shown would become a leader of his people (Genesis 37:5-11) was thrown into a pit by his jealous brothers and sold into slavery in Egypt. But over time Joseph patiently worked his way to become the trusted second in command in the household of the wealthy Potiphar. When he was wrongfully accused and imprisoned, Joseph patiently worked in jail for many years, eventually acquiring responsibility over all the prisoners there. We are told that while imprisoned he prophetically interpreted the dreams of two royal servants and although his interpretation proved true, Joseph had to wait yet more years until he was brought before the Pharaoh who elevated him as second leader in the nation (Genesis 41:37-44).

To briefly mention these events fails to give a real sense of the years of waiting – under adverse circumstances – that Joseph endured. Psalm 105:17-22 summarizes the difficulties of those years of patience. But although he doubtless did not understand all that was happening, Joseph trusted God to fulfill his plan for him. He patiently worked in each situation he found himself in until God did elevate him to great power and responsibility.

Under Joseph's patient leadership, Egypt saved and stored grain during seven years of abundance before it was carefully disbursed to the people through seven years of hunger. This was the widespread famine

that prompted Jacob to send Joseph's brothers to Egypt to seek food (Genesis 42-46).

But Joseph and his family were not quickly reunited. Yet more patience was needed when Joseph did not reveal who he was to his brothers immediately. Instead, he waited patiently for them to take the needed food back to their families and eventually return to Egypt for more. Even once he revealed his true identity to his brothers, Joseph waited again while they went back to Canaan to bring their father, Jacob, to Egypt. In an era when international travel – by foot – took months, Joseph's patience was needed repeatedly.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

The book of Genesis makes it clear that God directed the events of Joseph's life, but without Joseph's patience he would not have been able to accomplish God's plan. At every stage of his life Joseph was willing to wait. From the pit of slavery to Potiphar's house, from the depths of prison to the heights of the palace, Joseph displayed the ability to wait for situations to work out while continuing to advance – without succumbing to ineffectiveness and self-pity in his own difficult circumstances.

Joseph's story shows that patience is a foundational leadership attribute. It is one of the first we must learn to utilize, as it allows all other leadership principles to come into play. Successful leaders know that patiently staying on-track is essential for any and every leadership situation – whether it involves a small family or a great nation – and that the effectiveness of our leadership will always be dependent on the patience that supports it.

### **3. MOSES:**

## **The Best Leaders Are Ladders**

When we read the biblical accounts of the prophet Moses, we invariably become caught up in the descriptions of the epic events that occurred during his leading the people of Israel out of Egypt, through the wilderness, to the Promised Land. Many of those events, such as the crossing of the Red Sea and receiving the Ten Commandments, are of such importance that it is often hard to see the small things – the background details of the story from which we can also learn.

The way in which Moses carefully prepared his own successor – Joshua – is an example of this. Unless we are looking for the evidence of this preparation, we may not notice it until we are told, relatively late in the story: “... the Lord said to Moses, ‘Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit of leadership, and lay your hand on him’” (Numbers 27:18). But this selection of Joshua to replace Moses did not happen without preparation – Moses had worked with Joshua, training and developing him for years before the formal commissioning occurred (Exodus 17:8-14; 24:13-18; Numbers 13:8, 16; etc.). Throughout this preparation we see Moses carefully giving Joshua leadership opportunities of different types and increasing responsibility.

It was only after these events, near the end of Moses’ life, that Joshua was publicly commissioned and charged with leadership of Israel (Numbers 27:15-23). Then, a second time, immediately before Moses’ death, Moses assembled the people and commanded them to follow Joshua (Deuteronomy 31:1-8, 14, 23).

But if Moses’ preparation of Joshua sounds natural and unremarkable, we need only compare what happened after the deaths of the two leaders to see that it was not. Compare the first verses of the two biblical books that describe these events:

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant ... (Joshua 1:1 ESV)

After Joshua died, the Israelites asked the LORD, “Who should lead the invasion against the Canaanites and launch the attack?” (Judges 1:1 ESV)

The difference could not be clearer. After the death of Moses, Joshua was already trained and was able to take over the leadership of the nation. After the death of Joshua, however, there was no one who had been prepared in the same way, forcing the people to enquire of God who should lead them into battle. Joshua was clearly a man of great character and righteousness (Joshua 24:15), but could it be that Moses, whose humility was exceptional (Numbers 12:3), was better equipped through his deep humility to plan and prepare his own replacement? Perhaps it was because Joshua had not prepared his own replacement that God did not answer the Israelites' question "Who should lead the invasion" with the name of an individual who should lead them, but simply told them that the tribe of Judah should lead (Judges 1:2).

Whatever the reason Joshua did not prepare a successor, we see the results of this throughout the book of Judges in the lack of leadership that ensued and the fact that "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit" (Judges 21:25). If the principle that Moses followed in preparing his own successor had also been followed by Joshua and later leaders, many if not most of the tragic problems recounted in Judges might have been avoided.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

If we are in formal positions of leadership in our communities, churches, or other groups, the application of Moses' example is obvious, but there are other ways the principle can be applied. How much do we, as husbands, prepare our wives – or vice versa – to be able to deal with situations or needs that we normally take care of? Often, one of the greatest difficulties faced by bereaved spouses is not knowing where important records are or what needs to be done to continue key aspects of household functioning. In the same way, how much do we think about the principle of developing our children to take on the adult responsibilities we hold? And how seriously do we take the concept of helping and developing those newer to the faith who will be the next generation of believers?

There are many situations in which we can, and should, prepare others to take over our responsibilities. That is not a negative approach based on "preparing for the worst" – it is a positive way to help others develop to their full potential. It's part of being a good leader, because, as the old saying goes: the best leaders are also ladders.

## 4. SAMUEL: Leading with Others in Mind

Whatever his salary might have been, the prophet Samuel was doubtless greatly underpaid! We can say that with a good degree of confidence as he functioned in more roles than any other person recorded in the Bible. Samuel served in an era when there was no centralized administration of ancient Israel, and he bore many responsibilities in leading the people at that time. Consider some of the many roles he fulfilled:

*Prophet:* Samuel's primary role was that of prophet or messenger of God and his work in that area was extensive. He appears to have led an order of prophets (1 Samuel 19:20), and in the New Testament he is even said to have been the foremost prophet after Moses (Acts 3:22, 24).

*Seer:* While prophets conveyed verbal messages from God, seers saw visions which were also a form of divine communication. Samuel is called both a prophet and a seer (1 Samuel 9:11) and this dual role was significant because Samuel functioned at a time when both words and visions from the Lord were rare (1 Samuel 3:1).

*Priest:* Samuel may have been from the priestly tribe of Levi (1 Chronicles 6:27), but he was certainly trained, and perhaps adopted, by the high priest Eli. He served in the tabernacle as a youth (1 Samuel 2:18), and continued to fulfill many priestly roles, as we see in his anointing of Saul and David (compare 1 Samuel 10; 16; and Numbers 27), making burnt offerings and peace offerings (compare 1 Samuel 13:9-14 and Leviticus 1), and in other ways.

*Judge:* Samuel was the last of the judges who ruled Israel between Moses and the institution of kingship with Saul. We are told that he regularly traveled on a judicial circuit, and "Then he would return to Ramah, for his home was there, and there also he judged Israel" (1 Samuel 7:17 ESV).

*Military Leader:* There is no evidence that Samuel himself fought, but he appears to have acted as a military leader – much as Moses also did. He is specifically mentioned along with the great fighters Jerubbaal (Gideon), Barak and Jephthah (1 Samuel 12:11), and his role as Israel's leader must have necessitated his involvement in the nation's security.

*Scribe:* The book of Chronicles mentions “... the acts of King David, from first to last, are written in the Chronicles of Samuel the seer...” (1 Chronicles 29:29 ESV). Samuel clearly spent a great deal of time in recording the events of his own time and the period between Moses and himself. He is generally acknowledged as the author of 1 and 2 Samuel as well as several other books of the Old Testament.

So, Samuel was far more than only a prophet. Somehow, as one man, he fulfilled all the other roles we have seen here. In a sense, he combined the roles of Moses, Aaron and Joshua – which must have been immensely time-consuming for a single individual. But there were other roles that Samuel also fulfilled and one that we should consider in particular:

*Intercessor:* The Old Testament gives numerous examples of Samuel’s work as a mediator and intercessor for his people. For example, when Israel was attacked by the Philistines the people begged Samuel “Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines” (1 Samuel 7:8 ESV). When the Israelites were accused of wrong behavior in desiring a king, they likewise asked him “Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil ...” (1 Samuel 12:19 ESV). Samuel’s tireless prayer for his people was evidently heard by God on numerous occasions, and his effectiveness as an intercessor is reflected in the book of Jeremiah where God states “Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people ...” (Jeremiah 15:1).

### **Leadership Lessons:**

Given the many pulls on his time, Samuel must have been as busy as a person can get. But his many roles and massive responsibilities did not prevent Samuel from interceding for those who needed help. In fact, rather than being an additional role that was often overshadowed or crowded out by other responsibilities, intercession seems to have been one of the prophet’s major traits and ongoing activities.

In our own lives it is easy to become overwhelmed by the various responsibilities we may shoulder, and it is especially hard at those times to focus on others and to make our helping them a priority. But the life of Samuel reminds us that if we are leading others for *their* sake, and not for ours, we will never be too busy to help them by interceding on their behalf, and to assist them as much we can.



## 5. NATHAN: Leading with Tough Love

The prophet Nathan served during the reigns of both King David and David's son, Solomon. Although Nathan was usually "behind the scenes" during the reigns of these kings, it is probable that no other single person was more influential during that pivotal era of biblical history.

Nathan is mentioned many times throughout the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles – mainly during the darkest and most troubled times of King David's reign. We first meet him in 2 Samuel 7:2 when David told the prophet about his desire to build a temple for God. At first Nathan encouraged the king, saying God would be with him, but later that night God spoke to Nathan, telling him in detail why he would not accept a temple built by David, stressing that David had shed much blood (1 Chronicles 28:3).

It was not a flattering message to have to relay, but we see something of Nathan's character in that he did not attempt to smooth over the reason for God's refusal of David's offer or to cover the fact that he himself had been wrong to originally encourage the king. We are specifically told that "Nathan reported to David **all** the words of this entire revelation" (2 Samuel 7:17, emphasis added). It is obvious that Nathan loved the king he served enough to bring the truth to David even if it was at the expense of his own status as a prophet of God.

Later, Nathan had to confront David with the king's sins of adultery with Bathsheba and of having her husband Uriah killed (2 Samuel 12:1-15). Considering the fact that David had already killed to hide this situation, we see Nathan's tremendous strength of character and faith in boldly accusing the king. Nathan not only accused David as God had commanded him to do, but also predicted that David's first child by Bathsheba would die, and that the king would suffer great anguish as a result of the actions of his own family members.

Close to the end of David's life, Nathan related to David the bad news of his son Adonijah's plan to seize the throne. But in this way the prophet skillfully enabled the hasty coronation of David's chosen heir – Solomon.

Nathan was not simply a bringer of bad news, however. He also encouraged the king and informed David that his throne would be established forever (1 Chronicles 17:1-15). He was clearly a trusted advisor throughout his service to the king and a man of important

accomplishments. There appears to have been a book written either by Nathan himself or about his service as a prophet (1 Chronicles 29:29), and Nathan apparently wrote a history of King Solomon along with two other writers (2 Chronicles 9:29).

But Nathan's major accomplishment was undoubtedly the faithful service he repeatedly gave in expressing tough love for David and confronting the king with his errors. Nathan's character and faithfulness in conveying the word of God, no matter how negative the message sometimes may have seemed, obviously gained him the respect of Israel's greatest king. True to his name (Nathan means "Gift from God"), the prophet surely was a gift to David in helping him to correct his course when he went astray – something the king must surely have appreciated over time. In fact, it is doubtless a sign of David's deep respect and love for Nathan that the king named his third son after the prophet (1 Chronicles 3:5). It is through this third son of David, named for the prophet Nathan, rather than Solomon or another of King David's powerful sons that Jesus Christ was descended (Luke 3:31).

### **Leadership Lessons:**

The prophet Nathan served in a "behind the scenes" role his whole career, but he had a tremendous leadership effect for good. Nathan's approach was the antithesis of smooth talking, flattery, and avoiding problems that needed to be addressed. In that way, the prophet led others by being the "conscience" of his nation, the "eye opener" who helped people to realize what they were unwilling or unable to see themselves. Nathan is an example to all of us of the value of service that includes, when it is needed, truth spoken in love for those we strive to serve.

It is often said that "we must love tough to bring out the best in those we lead." But for tough love to work, love must come first and be clear in the minds of those to whom we speak the truth – that is the only way we will be perceived to be "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Just as Nathan loved David enough to take the truth to the king even when it potentially endangered the prophet himself, if we are to lead in our own spheres of influence, our love for others must be obvious enough to make tough love work.

## 6. ISAIAH: How We Deliver the News

At a time when Jerusalem lay under the shadow of the brutal Assyrian Empire – which had already conquered the northern tribes of Israel – the prophet Isaiah was given the difficult task of taking bad news as well as good news to the people of Judah. The book of Isaiah not only records those messages, but also shows us an important aspect of how they were delivered.

After an introduction recording Isaiah's calling and commission, the seventh chapter of this book begins to show the actual messages delivered by Isaiah, and it is at this time that the prophet's two sons are introduced. Isaiah's firstborn son was called Shear-Yashub, meaning "A remnant shall return" (Isaiah 7:3). His second son, introduced a little later, was named Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, meaning, "Pillage quickly, plunder quickly" (Isaiah 8:3). In modern terms these two sons might be said to represent "good news and bad news."

At the beginning of the prophet's work, God instructed Isaiah to take his first son, Shear-Yashub ("good news"), with him to meet Judah's ruler Ahab and to prophesy to the king regarding an impending invasion of Judah by two local Syrian kings (Isaiah 7:3). The prophet began: "Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart..." (Isaiah 7:4).

Isaiah doubtless introduced his son Shear-Yashub to the king and the meaning of his son's name was one of hope, like the prophet's initial message. Only after this encouragement did Isaiah then introduce the bad news that if Judah continued in its rebellious ways, God would bring the Assyrians upon them (Isaiah 7:17, 20). This "bad news" was to be symbolized in Isaiah's second son: Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, whose name was tied directly to God's coming judgment (Isaiah 8:1, 7).

Both sons – representing "good news" and "bad news" – were part of Isaiah's message, as we see in the words of the prophet himself: "Here am I, **and** the children the Lord has given me. **We** are signs and symbols in Israel from the Lord Almighty ..." (Isaiah 8:18, emphasis added here and in the scriptures below). But we should notice that God directed the order of the two son's roles. Just as the good news of hope and eventual return from captivity was delivered with the first son, "A remnant shall return," the second, cautionary part of Isaiah's message was symbolized by his second son, "Pillage quickly, plunder quickly."

This duality to the prophet's message – the good news, then the bad – is seen throughout the book of Isaiah in the successive “good” oracles and “bad” oracles. Repeatedly, God establishes his fatherly role and love for his children before addressing their sins and problems (Isaiah 1:2, 4-17, etc.). Then, after enumerating some of Judah's sins, an encouraging positive message is given again before more problems are stressed (Isaiah 1:18-19, 20-31, etc.). Time and again we are given the good news before the bad – even in individual verses: “Zion will be delivered with justice, her penitent ones with righteousness. But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the Lord will perish” (Isaiah 1:27-28).

This pattern of encouragement first, then judgment, found throughout Isaiah's messages for Judah is also clearly seen in his prophecies of the promised Messiah which contain the same duality. We can see this, for example, in Isaiah chapters 9 and 11 which both show the news of messianic love preceding the news of messianic judgment.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

The prophet Isaiah was sent to deliver good news and bad: “to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor *and* the day of vengeance of our God” (Isaiah 61:2). But there is a clear pattern in the way these messages were delivered – the good news was always delivered before the bad. The principle is found continually throughout the book of Isaiah, in every aspect of his prophecies.

We can learn from the format of Isaiah's messages and we can apply this same principle in many areas of our own lives, adding it to the principle of tough love leadership we learn from the prophet Nathan. For example, we can apply the principle in the workplace by stressing what employees get right before what they get wrong. Or we can adjust the guidance and correction of our young children so that the “bad news” we must sometimes give them is preceded by the good news of love and acceptance.

By sharing the good news before the bad in any area in which we lead or influence others, we can help them accept the truth they need to know. The prophecies of Isaiah remind us it is not just the news we deliver that is important – it is also how we deliver the news.

**PART TWO:  
WARRIORS**

## 7. ABRAHAM: The Importance of Allies

We may not think of the biblical patriarch Abraham as a warrior, but the book of Genesis shows that he was, in fact, a skilled military tactician and leader. The story is a fascinating one that carries important reminders for all who are in leadership positions.

In Genesis 14 we are told that the cities of the Dead Sea Plain had long been subject to the kings of Mesopotamia and the surrounding region, but while Abraham (called Abram at this point) was living in the area of nearby Hebron, the cities of the plain rebelled against this foreign rule. As a result, the foreign kings assembled a large army and this massive force overwhelmed Sodom and its neighboring cities, seizing their goods and taking many of their inhabitants as captive slaves. In doing this they also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since Lot was living in that area (Genesis 14:12). When Abram was informed of what had happened, he took immediate and decisive action:

Now Abram was living near ... Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshkol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people. (Genesis 14:13-16)

Notice that Abram had over three hundred "trained men," but these men were not simply workmen hastily handed a sword or other weapon. The Hebrew word *hanik* used in the story means an "armed servant" and was used of men whose primary function was to provide military protection. These men were essentially a small private security force in full-time service to Abram. Together with his allies, Abram and his men pursued the returning invaders, catching up with them and freeing the captives.

What is truly surprising in the account is the skillful nature of the raid that Abram and his relatively small force executed. Militarily, a raid is invariably a carefully planned attack on enemy forces, conducted covertly

with speed and surprise – often at night and behind enemy lines – on an unsuspecting enemy. An extraction raid is one planned to rescue captured soldiers, hostages or other friendly elements, and Abram’s operation against the Mesopotamian allied forces was a classic extraction raid conducted under the cover of darkness in a skillfully planned attack.

Abram and his men gladly gave credit to God for their victory against a vastly superior force (Genesis 14:20), but we should not forget the part these men played in the conflict and the things Abram did that were militarily sound. Even apart from the fact that his men were properly trained and ready (Genesis 14:14), the successful tactics he employed in utilizing a night attack to maximize confusion, and with his forces closing from different directions (Genesis 14:15-16), we see a key factor aiding the mission’s success – Abram had allies.

Abram didn’t try to go it alone. He made and involved his allies, the men of Mamre, Eshkol and Aner (Genesis 14:13, 24). These men were not just his neighbors – the Hebrew says they were “sworn allies” (literally “possessors of the covenant of Abram”), so these were men Abram could trust. Without these allies Abram’s mission objective might well not have been fulfilled.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

Of the principles of effective leadership we see Abram utilized in the story of his raid to rescue Lot, one stands out in particular – gaining the assistance of allies. This is the first fact mentioned in the biblical account of the event and probably the most important.

Choosing allies who can be trusted and gaining their help is just as fundamental to many leadership situations in our own age as it was to military operations of the distant past. In any leadership position we need to prepare and maintain allies wherever possible.

As Christians we need to utilize the allies we are given in the form of fellow-believers – allies we can trust – for fellowship, encouragement and help. We see this truth in the words of G.K. Chesterton that apply equally to the Christian life and to any other aspect of leadership interaction: “There are no words to express the abyss between isolation and having an ally. It may be conceded to the mathematician that four is twice two. But two is not twice one; two is two thousand times one.”

## 8. MOSES: Fighter against Injustice

If you were to think of a warrior-hero who seems to come out of nowhere to block tyranny, thwart injustice, and assist those needing help, perhaps you would think of some fabled medieval knight or caped comic book hero. But one person mentioned in the Bible displayed the trait of heroically fighting against injustice to an exceptional degree, and that individual, surprising as it may seem at first, was Moses.

We usually think of Moses as a great prophet and man of God. We seldom, if ever, think of him as a warrior figure, but the Bible paints a very interesting picture of the character of Moses in exactly that role. Moses tells us nothing about his childhood and youth apart from the fact that he was raised by Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2:10). The first time we are given a glimpse into the adult life of this future leader we are told:

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. (Exodus 2:11-12)

We must understand that this was not homicide on Moses' part. When the text tells us he "looked this way and that and saw no one," it does not mean that he checked to see that he could get away with intervening, but rather that he saw there was no one who would help the man and so intervened himself. The furious slave driver may even have turned on Moses who may have killed him in self-defense as well as defense of the slave who was being ruthlessly beaten. Importantly, the word used of the slave driver's "beating" of the Hebrew man is *makeh* – which can connote abuse that involves injury or even death. Moses stepped in and physically halted a tyrannical situation that may well have been life-threatening for the man he protected.

We are told that the very next day a similar situation arose in which Moses attempted to intervene in another unjust situation: "The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, 'Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?'" (Exodus 2:13). Note that in this case there was no casual argument involved. The expression



translated “the one in the wrong” in the NIV and some other versions is literally “the wicked one” – clearly an individual who was wrongfully assaulting another Hebrew. But once again Moses stepped in when he saw the altercation and realized that what was happening was an unjust situation.

Exodus tells us that Moses fled to Midian after these events (Exodus 2:15). In Midian, the next incident recorded is that Moses stepped in to defend and help a group of women – the daughters of a local shepherd – when they tried to draw water from a well for their sheep: “Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock” (Exodus 2:17). This is the third and final glimpse we are given into the life of Moses before God appeared to him in the burning bush and called him to lead his people out of Egypt.

What we are told – and all we are told – about the life of Moses before God called him to the great leadership position he was given is that on three occasions Moses stepped in to physically fight injustice under various circumstances. But notice that these incidents do not run from the least to the greatest – they do not show the growing heroism of Moses as an individual. Instead, they run from the most serious offense he countered to the least, so they show his gradual coming to awareness of and willingness to stand up against even small injustices that he encountered. In any event, Moses was clearly not unused to fighting for the oppressed – even physically as a warrior against injustice.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

Given what the Bible records of Moses’ life before his calling to lead the nation of Israel out of the slavery they were enduring, God may well have called Moses to free his people because of his obvious hatred of injustice and his willingness to fight it – in physical combat if necessary. God doubtless knew he could use such a person to fight the great injustice of the slavery of the Hebrews in Egypt.

Moses was certainly a humble person (Numbers 12:3) and clearly avoided strife when he felt he could (Numbers 16:1-4, etc.). But like all good leaders, Moses recognized when problems needed to be attacked with intensity and responded appropriately. Leaders must learn to act with self-control, but also with true intensity when the situation requires it – especially when injustice, oppression, and wrong are involved.

## 9. JOSHUA: The Power of Persistence

Although we sometimes use the words interchangeably, there is a major difference between patience and persistence. Patience involves things for which we must simply be willing to wait. Persistence, on the other hand, involves things for which we must continue to work. If patience is exemplified in the life of the biblical patriarch Joseph, persistence is equally exemplified in the life of the warrior-leader Joshua.

This does not mean that Joshua was not patient, of course. We see Joshua's patience, for example, in his willingness to spend long hours alone, on guard (Exodus 33:11). We see it again in the way Joshua patiently waited on the slopes of Mount Sinai while Moses communed with God for forty days (Exodus 24:13, 18; 32:1, 15-17).

But it is this warrior's persistence that is his most notable trait. When we read the book of Joshua, one of the first things we notice is the way he is told at least three times to "be strong and courageous" (Deuteronomy 31:7, etc.). We might wonder if this repeated stress on being courageous shows some timidity on Joshua's part, but that is hardly likely. We first meet Joshua as the warrior Moses chooses to lead the Israelites into battle against the attacking Amalekites (Exodus 17:9), and his performance then is that of a strong and capable leader (Exodus 17:13). This is the picture we consistently see of Joshua, and we should remember that he was one of only two men not afraid to enter the Promised Land after spying out its defenses (Numbers 14:30) – with Joshua urging the people not to be afraid at that time (Numbers 14:9).

Why then do we find the repeated urging of Joshua to be courageous? First, we should realize that the expression "be strong and courageous" is found a number of times in the Old Testament. In addition to being said to Joshua, it is also said by Joshua to the people (Joshua 10:25) and by other leaders to the people at other times (2 Chronicles 32:7, etc.). Considering all the biblical instances of this phrase, it is most likely that it was a kind of battle cry – an affirmation of faith in God's help rather than an urging to drum up courage and faith that were not there.

If that is the case, we can see the repeated instances of "be strong and courageous" as a repetition under continuing danger – a positive reaction to an ongoing external threat rather than a plea to overcome internal weakness. That is, in fact, exactly the situation we read about in the book

of Joshua. Throughout this book we see Joshua continually having to fight battles against the Israelites' enemies. God granted them victory, but only gradually. Time and again – over a number of years – Joshua had to engage the enemy due to the nature of the geography and topography of the land and the settling of different tribes in different areas.

But Joshua's persistence and his refusal to stop fighting when the threats were "largely under control" meant that by the end of his long career the majority of the Promised Land had indeed been claimed (Joshua 23:1). It is true that some small pockets of enemy resistance remained, and these would cause Israel many problems in the future, but that was not Joshua's fault (Joshua 23, 24).

### **Leadership Lessons:**

Joshua's capability as a military leader was all the more remarkable since the Israelites had not been in a position to develop such skills as slaves in Egypt. Yet Joshua clearly was a powerful leader whose military engagements were almost entirely victories. His long and distinguished career was only made possible, however, by the persistence Joshua continually displayed.

Persistence is a necessary trait for every leader. There are many situations where we must be patient and wait for things to work out, but there are many others where we must work – and work tirelessly – for the desired result. Sometimes that is a leader's greatest and most important contribution. As is so often said, rivers cut through rocks not because of their power, but because of their persistence.

Persistence also applies in our spiritual lives, of course. We may sometimes wonder why problems that we fight in our lives continue despite our best efforts to conquer them. The truth is that such problems, like the enemy Joshua faced, will never be wholly rooted out in our lifetimes. God may grant us many victories in fighting temptations or the tendencies of our own nature, but temptations and tendencies will always be there. It is our persistence in never giving up our rejection of what is wrong and continuing to fight against it that God seeks (Hebrews 10:36). Like Joshua, it is our persistence that helps make us victorious.

## **10. PHINEHAS: Defusing Misunderstandings**

Most readers of the Old Testament remember Phinehas as a high priest. The grandson of Aaron, Phinehas functioned in this role directly after the conquest of the Promised Land. But Phinehas also functioned as a warrior when that became necessary. Numbers 25:1-9 records how he slew two individuals to bring to an end the plague sent to punish the Israelites for their sexual immorality and idolatry with the pagan Midianites.

Phinehas also showed that he could function as a warrior with words rather than weapons – on one occasion defusing a potentially deadly misunderstanding among the tribes of Israel. As the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land, the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh asked permission to stay on the eastern side of the Jordan as their own area of inheritance. Joshua gave the two and a half tribes permission to do this (Joshua 22:1-9), but when they settled in their own area they built what seemed to be a large altar next to the Jordan, on their own side of the river (Joshua 22:10).

It was at this point that the potentially fatal misunderstanding occurred. The other tribes were immediately incensed at what appeared to be the rapid apostasy of the Transjordan tribes into their own system of worship rather than honoring the altar of God which was with the rest of the tribes. So “the whole assembly of Israel gathered at Shiloh to go to war” against the eastern two and a half tribes (Joshua 22:12). Doubtless tempers flared, and many were calling for the destruction of the apparently apostate tribes. But due to the wisdom of Phinehas, an effort was made to defuse the situation. Along with ten tribal elders, Phinehas bravely went to confront the eastern tribes and told them:

... How could you turn away from the Lord and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him now? ... And are you now turning away from the Lord? If you rebel against the Lord today, tomorrow he will be angry with the whole community of Israel. If the land you possess is defiled, come over to the Lord’s land, where the Lord’s tabernacle stands, and share the land with us. But do not rebel against the Lord or against us by building an altar for yourselves, other than the altar of the Lord our God. (Joshua 22:16-19)

It was at this point that the eastern tribes explained how they had not built an altar in disobedience to the commands of God, but had built a structure to serve as a “memorial” to remind their descendants and those of the other tribes of the shared heritage of the tribes on both sides of the Jordan (Joshua 22:24-29, 34). Fortunately, war was averted – but only narrowly. Had the ten tribes acted on their misunderstanding, there would have been great bloodshed. But we should notice how this catastrophe was avoided.

First, Phinehas and the tribal elders presented their case clearly, giving all the facts they knew, but then asking: “... are you now turning away from the Lord?” (Joshua 22:18). This *asking* rather than *accusing* was probably the primary reason the negotiations were successful in defusing the potential disaster. The discussion was framed from this perspective throughout. The Israelites said, “If you rebel against the Lord...” (Joshua 22:18), not “You have rebelled against the Lord...”

The other aspect of the story that we should clearly note is the way in which Phinehas and the elders did not pronounce rebukes or issue ultimatums before they had heard the other side of the story. But they left a way open to be in harmony with the eastern tribes, even if they were guilty of what they suspected: “If the land you possess is defiled, come over to the Lord’s land, where the Lord’s tabernacle stands, and share the land with us” (Joshua 22:19).

### **Leadership Lessons:**

Leaders all too often have to de-escalate difficult situations that arise between the individuals or groups they lead. When we speak of “defusing” situations of this type, we are using an analogy from military bomb disposal that is a useful one. Like Phinehas and the ancient elders of Israel, the brave individuals who take on great personal risk to defuse actual bombs in today’s world have two basic rules: they tread lightly, and they handle things very carefully. Those basic rules have saved many lives in the course of disarming live munitions and bombs; and they can save a great deal of heartache if we apply them to “defusing” misunderstandings and other tense situations in everyday life, too.

While we may not function in a military context, we can remember and apply the lessons we find in Phinehas’ wielding of words. Those who lead through words may sometimes secure deeper and more lasting victories than those won by the sword.

## 11. JONATHAN: Leading by Example

As the son of Saul, the first king of Israel, Jonathan was in line to become Israel's second king. But Saul's eventual rejection due to his unfaithfulness in his position meant that Jonathan lost the opportunity to rule that should have been his. Yet Jonathan is remembered as a beloved warrior prince whose life exhibited great loyalty and many other traits of true leadership.

Jonathan's loyalty to his friend and brother-in-law David is clear in the Scriptures, and we cannot read the accounts of his life without being impressed by the selfless way in which he protected David – saving his life on several occasions – although he knew that David would eventually take the kingship that would have been his (1 Samuel 23:17).

But this is only one small part of Jonathan's loyalty. Despite Saul's foolishness and problems, and even knowing that David would soon replace him, Jonathan nevertheless did not reject his own father and remained loyal to him. As a result, Jonathan stayed with Saul and suffered the same fate as his father when he died with him in battle. That same loyalty is what lies beneath David's epitaph of the two men in which he wrote that they remained "undivided even in death" (2 Samuel 1:23). And Jonathan's loyalty extended in every direction. He was equally loyal to his own men – a trait they reciprocated when he himself was endangered (1 Samuel 14:24-45).

Yet there was another – and perhaps even greater – reason Jonathan was universally loved and admired by the men he led (2 Samuel 1:23): his willingness to lead not by command, but by example. We see a wonderful example of this in the story of Jonathan's capture of the strategic city of Michmash during ancient Israel's wars with the Philistines.

Michmash was set on a high area a few miles north of Jerusalem. The area was well positioned and protected on one side by steep cliffs which rose from a surrounding ravine. The Philistines had taken advantage of this natural fortifying aspect of the site and made it the main camp for their troops invading Israel. The Bible tells us that many of the Israelites fled at this time and only a small force stayed with King Saul (1 Samuel 13). As a result, the situation looked grim, but without telling his father, Jonathan and his armor bearer carried out a daring raid by way of the cliffs of the Michmash ravine (1 Samuel 14).

This was no easy task: “On each side of the ravine that Jonathan intended to cross to reach the Philistine encampment was a cliff; one was called Bozez and the other Seneh” (1 Samuel 14:4). Bozez appears to mean “slippery” and Seneh means “thorny” or “jagged.” But Jonathan was undeterred. The Philistines had posted guards on the cliff edge, but when they saw only the two Israelite warriors, they arrogantly called down insults, daring the two men to climb up to them. While it might have been easy for Jonathan to bring in other men and command them to mount the attack, he personally led his armor bearer up the sheer cliff, and after overpowering the guards they attacked the Philistine camp, killing some twenty of the enemy. Panic struck the confused Philistines and they began to flee from the site, thinking they were surrounded. As a result, the much smaller Israelite force camped nearby was able to pursue and defeat the invading army (1 Samuel 14:15, 22-23).

There is no question that Jonathan’s leadership in this situation enabled the Israelite victory that day and other victories that followed in the continued fight against the invading Philistines. It is equally clear that his leading by example was a major characteristic of one of ancient Israel’s greatest warriors.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

The quality of loyalty so clearly exemplified by Jonathan is certainly one of the lessons we can take from the account of his life, but this warrior is also one of the Bible’s greatest examples of the value of leading by example. The story of his exploits recorded in 1 Samuel underscores the fact that those who lead by example are not only loved by those they lead, they also inspire far greater things in their followers than those who simply command or preach action.

When we combine Jonathan’s story with that of Saul, we see that leaders actually are always leading by example – the important question is how their example affects others. While Saul’s fear and indecisiveness were not infrequently reflected in the soldiers he led, Jonathan’s faith and courage were equally reflected in the men he inspired. In our own lives we can better lead if we remember this principle – that we are always leading by the example we give. We can also be inspired by Jonathan’s story to remember that loyalty to those we lead, as well as to those for whom we lead, combined with an example of doing what we want others to do, is always a formula for leadership at its best.

## **12. BENAIAH: Lion-Killing Leadership**

Among the band of heroes the Bible tells us were King David's leading soldiers – his “special forces operatives” – one warrior is particularly interesting: Benaiah the son of Jehoiada. We might well call this warrior “Benaiah the lion-hearted,” considering what is said about him:

Benaiah son of Jehoiada, a valiant fighter from Kabzeel, performed great exploits. He struck down Moab's two mightiest warriors. He also went down into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion. And he struck down an Egyptian who was five cubits tall. Although the Egyptian had a spear like a weaver's rod in his hand, Benaiah went against him with a club. He snatched the spear from the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear. Such were the exploits of Benaiah son of Jehoiada ... And David put him in charge of his bodyguard. (1 Chronicles 11:22-25)

Consider these exploits. Living in a time when ancient Israel was frequently attacked by surrounding nations, he is first said to have killed the two greatest warriors of Israel's arch-enemy Moab. We don't know if he fought these enemies separately or together, but the Hebrew term used of them seems to imply that they were “lion-like.” Yet that is only the beginning of Benaiah's reputation.

We are also told that Benaiah slew a giant Egyptian warrior. This man is said to have been of approximately the same height as the famous giant Goliath whom David killed – but it seems that Benaiah was armed only with a staff and that either through cunning or sheer strength he snatched the Egyptian's huge spear and killed him with his own weapon.

But the most notable of Benaiah's feats is that he “went down into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion.” This is the deed we need to think about in order to truly appreciate its magnitude.

At that time lions frequently preyed on flocks and herds (1 Samuel 17:36), and this predator may well have also been endangering the people of the area where the incident took place. As a warrior, it is likely that Benaiah was called in to help them. Whatever the reason Benaiah ended up fighting the lion, the story gives us some important details about the contest. Military ground operations must always take three major factors



into account: the strength of the enemy, the terrain – including options for mobility and withdrawal, and the ambient conditions (fog, smoke, bad weather, etc.). If any one of these factors is disadvantageous, military units must operate with great care. In Benaiah's case, all three of these factors were against him. The simple statement "a lion in a pit on a snowy day" indicates an enemy of vastly superior strength, in very difficult terrain, and with very negative ambient conditions.

The snowy day meant visibility may have been limited by flying snow. Being in a pit meant that the sun would not melt ice on the ground, making it easy to slip, plus the fact that the wind may have blown more snow into the pit, making it hard to move. These are all difficult conditions in which to find oneself with no easy way of retreat. A fully-grown lion can smash a human skull with a swipe of one of its paws and can bite completely through a human body. Although the lion may have been trapped in the pit, once Benaiah entered it, so was he.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

With the exploits that are recorded of him, it is perhaps not surprising that Benaiah is said to have been made the commander of King David's bodyguard. Anyone who could take on lion-like warriors and an actual lion with equal success had doubtless earned that high leadership position. Benaiah's story is one of a leader who was willing to directly face seemingly insurmountable difficulties: he reminds us that leaders sometimes must face the lions.

Unfortunately, it is a very real part of human nature that many people do not choose to do this, but tell themselves that a problem is someone else's responsibility. This is a trait that can weaken and hurt small families and large organizations alike. Effective leaders know that problems almost always must be addressed for improvement to occur. When problems are met head-on and dealt with, the results are usually good. Whether we deal with difficult issues at home, at work, or in a pit on a snowy day, the way of leadership always involves dealing with problems when they arise.

**PART THREE:  
WOMEN**

## **13. PUAH AND SHIPRAH: Leading with Principles**

Puah and Shiprah are not commonly known biblical figures, but considering what they accomplished, they should be. They were the two women mentioned in the book of Exodus who oversaw the midwives who delivered the children of the Hebrews while they were in Egypt. The book of Exodus tells us:

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives ... “When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.” The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. (Exodus 1:15-17)

Because these two women placed their fear of God before their fear of the Egyptian pharaoh, commentators sometimes presume that they were Hebrew-born women. But while one ancient tradition identifies Puah with Miriam, Moses’ sister, and Shiprah with Jochebed, the mother of Moses, another – and more likely accurate – tradition claims the women were Egyptian Jewish proselytes who were not related to Moses at all.

The fact that they are said to be “Hebrew midwives” could mean that they were Hebrew or that they were midwives to the Hebrews. The names of the two women also seem to reflect underlying Egyptian names, and the possibility that they were Egyptian converts seems all the more likely as we continue to read the story:

Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, “Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?” The midwives answered Pharaoh, “Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.” So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. (Exodus 1:18-21)

The fact that Puah and Shiprah could contrast Hebrew with Egyptian births suggests that they may have acted as midwives for both, and their

excuse would be all the more believable if that were the case. The ancient Jewish historian, Ibn Ezra, states that the two women were in charge of “more than 500” midwives; if this was true, the women were likely appointed by the pharaoh’s administration and would almost certainly have been Egyptian women.

In any event, these women acted according to their pro-life convictions and did so at considerable risk to themselves. They not only initially avoided killing the Hebrew infants; they also maintained their principled actions through their careful answers to the Egyptian king.

The Bible stresses that their bravery was rewarded. We are told not only that “God was kind to the midwives” in the sense that they were spared the anger of the Egyptian king, but also that “...because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own” (Exodus 1:21).

This gift may have been a particularly appreciated one, as scholars believe that midwives in that era were very often women who could not have children of their own. In the Hebrew of the Old Testament the expression “families” is literally “houses,” however, and Jewish tradition has it that these were “distinguished” houses from which many Hebrew leaders descended.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

The story of Puah and Shiprah is the earliest known example of civil disobedience. In the face of a specific command by a powerful regime to act against their principles and beliefs, these women accomplished great good in difficult circumstances. The two courageous women were a force for good not through blatant resistance and disobedience, however, but by the use of careful strategy and speech. With only the weapon of wisdom, they helped protect both themselves and others – and in doing what they did, Puah and Shiprah saved not a few, but a generation.

Whatever the case regarding the various traditions about them, Puah and Shiprah clearly exercised their potential for leadership in their community by maintaining principles that they were not willing to compromise. Their situation can be contrasted with many other biblical examples where principles were compromised by leaders who failed. Puah and Shiprah remind us not only of the potential for achieving good through leadership, but also of the necessity of maintaining principled leadership in order to do so.

## 14. RAHAB: Acting on Information

*“Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies ...‘Go, look over the land,’ he said, ‘especially Jericho.’ So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.”* (Joshua 2:1)

In this ancient spy story, whatever else the two spies did in Canaan is not disclosed, but the Bible tells us that the spies came to the house of the prostitute Rahab which was “on” or “in” the great wall of Jericho (Joshua 2:15). Some ancient city walls contained rooms in which people lived, and it is possible that Rahab’s “house” was actually an inn. This tradition is mentioned by the first-century historian Josephus, as it was not uncommon for inns to function as places of prostitution in the ancient world. In any event, the spies came to the house of Rahab and were hidden there from the king of Jericho who was searching for them. As former CIA director Allen Dulles once remarked, it was the first known “safe house” for spies in history – and it proved, of course, to be the only “safe” house when the city was destroyed (Joshua 6:17)!

The story of this Canaanite woman is an interesting account at a number of levels, not least that of the leadership Rahab exhibited despite the fact that, as a woman, and one of no social standing, she had no power or influence in that ancient society. Yet Rahab single-handedly affected the outcome of the spies’ mission and saved her whole family in doing so.

The second chapter of Joshua shows us that first, Rahab hid the spies in her home. She then successfully diverted the search for them. She also negotiated with the spies for the future safety of her family. She then arranged a method of escape for the spies, and finally she carefully followed the instructions they gave her for the safe identification of her home in the coming destruction of the city.

Rahab evidently did these things because she believed that God was with the Israelites, but the Biblical account makes it clear that most of the inhabitants of Jericho felt the same way. Notice what she told the spies:

“I know that the Lord has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what

you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed ... for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.” (Joshua 2:9-11 and see also Joshua 5:1)

The people of Jericho had access to the same information Rahab had, and they knew the Israelites posed a great threat to them because we read that “... the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in” (Joshua 6:1). Yet apart from locking their gates, the people of Jericho did nothing. What made Rahab different? While the other inhabitants of Jericho knew what she knew, they hardly reacted to that knowledge – they shut themselves in and refused to act on the information available to them. Rahab, however, reached out and used the information she had decisively.

What became of Rahab? She evidently married Salmon – one of the two spies she had saved – and with him became one of the ancestors of Joseph, adoptive father of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). Her active faith – willingness to act on what she believed (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25-26) – enabled her to save not only the spies, but also her family and herself.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

Rahab was a woman who acted on what she knew. Her story provides a wonderful example of assessing and utilizing “actionable intelligence” – information that can be followed up on and put to positive use. Unlike the other inhabitants of Jericho, Rahab was willing to act on the information she had rather than just locking her door and hoping for the best.

While non-leaders often adopt a posture of “wait and see what happens” when faced with difficult information, effective leaders know that certain types of information must always be translated into action. Although the principle is basic, it is one that many people continually ignore – in situations ranging from not taking our children’s school reports seriously or ignoring our own family health history to avoiding dealing with complaints in the workplace.

Good leaders make a habit of assessing the information they have and of differentiating simple facts from information that can and should be acted on. We all learn to separate the advertisements from the bills to be paid in the mail we receive, but true leadership involves carrying that principle into every aspect of our lives.

## 15. DEBORAH: Sharing Leadership

Deborah is one of the most remarkable female characters in the Old Testament. In addition to her role as a wife, she served Israel as a prophet, judge, and national leader at a difficult time in her nation's history, some 3,000 years ago. As Israel had little centralized authority and was under continual threat from surrounding nations in this era, her role as national leader was particularly important.

We are told that “She held court under the Palm of Deborah ... and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided” (Judges 4:5). But Deborah did far more than settle disputes. She directed Israel's national defense when the nation was threatened by the army of the powerful Canaanite king, Jabin. At that time Deborah:

... sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: ‘Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.’” (Judges 4:6-7)

The response of the warrior Barak to Deborah's message is interesting: “Barak said to her, ‘If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go’” (Judges 4:8). Barak's response shows the leadership status of Deborah: that he – and doubtless the fighting men of Israel – would only want to fight if she were to accompany them.

Clearly, everyone respected Deborah to the degree that her presence would give them confidence. But although she was not a military commander herself, Deborah's leadership shines in her decisive answer to Barak: “Certainly I will go with you” (Judges 4:9). Deborah was unflinching in her willingness both to obey God's command and to risk her own life as much as the fighting men risked theirs.

The battle that followed was a complete success for the Israelites. The enemy general and his army were annihilated, and Israel's victory was so resounding that the nation had peace for forty years afterwards. Judges 5 records the great celebration that followed this victory, and in that

chapter we see another important aspect of Deborah's character and leadership. Notice particularly three things that we are told:

On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song: "When the princes in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves – praise the Lord! ... Villagers in Israel would not fight; they held back until I, Deborah, arose, until I arose, a mother in Israel. God chose new leaders when war came to the city gates ... The princes of Issachar were with Deborah; yes, Issachar was with Barak, sent under his command into the valley." (Judges 5:1-15)

First, notice the leadership context and motif in these verses, with a word such as lead, leaders, or command appearing in every passage. Next, notice that in these verses we see that Deborah – although she was the undisputed leader in whom the Israelites placed their confidence – shared the spotlight with Barak. Deborah is mentioned first whenever the two are mentioned, but they are said to have sung together at the victory celebration. This could only have been at Deborah's invitation and shows Deborah's approach was not simply one of delegating responsibility, but of actually sharing the leadership role – both in the battle and in the celebration afterward. We see her inclusive attitude in many ways throughout her story, and it is clear that Deborah's leadership embraced and elevated those she led.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

Deborah's story makes it clear that she was a "one woman show" who effectively led her nation alone: she was a leadership magnet to whom the whole nation came for guidance and decision making. Yet when important things needed to be done, Deborah did not just command that others do them – she was willing to share the responsibilities, risks, and rewards of her leadership.

This is far more than simply delegating responsibility. The principle of shared leadership exemplified by Deborah can be applied in many ways. But when this principle is utilized, it frequently accomplishes – as it did with Deborah – goals that are widely accepted, actions that are energetically supported, and successes that are long lasting.



## **16. ABIGAIL: Taking Evasive Action**

If you have read the Bible's account of King David's life, you will remember the story of Abigail – the woman who became one of David's wives (1 Samuel 25). Her story is a short but memorable one that tells us much about the woman and contains an unusual lesson in leadership.

When David was forced to flee from the jealous King Saul and to live precariously in remote areas of Israel, his band of warrior-supporters provided needed protection and help for the servants of the wealthy rancher Nabal over an extended period of time. When David's men eventually asked Nabal for food in return for the protection they had given his men and flocks, Nabal rebuffed them in such a way that David threatened to kill the surly and ungrateful man.

The foolishness of Nabal (whose name in Hebrew means “fool”) that put his own life, and probably those of others, in danger was mitigated only by his beautiful wife Abigail who quickly gathered a supply of food and secretly took it to David, imploring him to accept the gift and not to act in anger that would lead to bloodshed (1 Samuel 25:31). We are told that David relented, but that when the drunken Nabal learned what had happened he suffered a heart attack in his intense anger and died (1 Samuel 25:37-38). Soon after, David married Abigail, whom Jewish tradition records as one of the four most beautiful women (along with Sarah, Rahab, and Esther) mentioned in the Hebrew Bible.

Much has been written regarding Abigail's role in this situation. She is often praised for her wisdom, kindness, generosity, and tact – all of which were clearly qualities that she exhibited. However, we should see this story in perspective. Although we might think of David as a king and Abigail as simply the wife of a rancher in the remote countryside, the opposite is true. David was a penniless fugitive at this time and Abigail the wife of a very rich man, which gave her a far higher socioeconomic status than David. Yet Abigail not only personally took the requested food to David and his men, she humbly addressed him as “lord” and acted as a servant in his presence (1 Samuel 25:28-30).

Although the Bible does not tell us much more about Abigail beyond what we read in 1 Samuel 25, her story stands in contrast to the later story of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11, 12; 1 Kings 1, 2), who was also a very beautiful woman married to another man – whom David did kill – and who also

became David's wife. But in contrast to the story of Bathsheba, Abigail's story is one of a woman who prevented the murder of her husband through her wise actions – as David himself acknowledged (1 Samuel 25:33-34).

As a result of her actions, we remember Abigail as a wise as well as beautiful woman whose wisdom saved the day. Yet to simply ascribe "wisdom" to Abigail is to miss the leadership lesson that is so clear in her story of evasive action.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

While we can summarize Abigail's chief characteristics as being ones of "wisdom" and related qualities, those are the underlying attributes of her nature that caused her to act as she did; but the principle that she followed was very specifically that of "evasive action." By taking the initiative when her husband was clearly endangering himself and others, Abigail's efforts exemplified the principle of acting swiftly to counter a problem that has come into being. This is different from Abraham's looking ahead and preparing, when possible, for problems before they occur – it is a rapid response to problems and dangers when they unexpectedly occur.

Evasive action may be associated in our minds with things such as military operations or defensive driving, but it is a principle that can be applied in every aspect of our lives. We can exercise the principle by smoothing down an argument or dispute in the making, by changing our young children's friends when we get indications they are not good influences, and in countless other ways. Abigail's story is a classic example of a basic leadership principle that can be remembered and utilized whenever situations arise in which evasive action might be wise. As leadership experts often stress, evasive action can help us overcome problems before the problems overcome us.

## 17. HULDAH: The Power of Influence

Her name was Huldah and she was an exceptional woman. If you don't recognize the name, don't feel too badly, however – there is only one discussion of Huldah in the whole Bible. But that story was considered important enough that it was included twice – in the two virtually identical accounts of 2 Kings 22:14–20 and 2 Chronicles 34:22–28. Huldah lived during one of ancient Israel's most pivotal times – during the reign of King Josiah who restored the worship of God after a disastrous period of national decline and idolatry.

Considering the role this woman played at such a crucial point in Israel's history, it is amazing that we know so little about her. The Bible simply tells us that Huldah was a prophet who lived in the “New Quarter” or “Second Quarter” in Jerusalem and was the wife of Shallum, who was the keeper of the royal wardrobe under Josiah (2 Kings 22:14).

But Huldah's reputation as a leading prophet can be seen in what happened when an ancient copy of a book of the Law (probably the book of Deuteronomy or the whole Pentateuch) was found in the temple during Josiah's reign. This biblical book led Josiah to realize that his people had forgotten the law of God and broken the covenant they had made with him. The king then sent to Huldah to ask God's guidance.

Josiah had other options. He could have asked one of the great male prophets, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum, or Habakkuk – all of whom prophesied during the king's reign. But the biblical account shows that Josiah specifically commanded his officials to approach her rather than any of the other prophets. Clearly, her influence was great enough to warrant the king seeking her opinion as opposed to that of the other servants of God.

Second Chronicles 34:23 shows that Huldah began her response by saying, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me ...”. There was no polite formality, just a command to “Tell the man ...” rather than “Tell the king ...”. Huldah then proceeded to prophesy national ruin (a prophecy that was fulfilled some 35 years later) because of Israel's turning from the law of God. There was no leniency in the message she gave, except in saying that Josiah himself would be spared because of his righteous attitude. This direct and unapologetic portrayal of the truth doubtless influenced the events that the Bible tells

us then occurred. Josiah assembled the people of Jerusalem and then: “He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, ... and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord—to follow the Lord and keep his commands ...” (2 Chronicles 34:30-31).

This was no small reform – it figures prominently in the history of ancient Israel (see the chapter on Josiah) – but Huldah’s influence upon the king and his reform cannot be minimized: she ranks among the greatest biblical figures who led by influence rather than by position.

According to Jewish tradition, Huldah, along with Deborah, was regarded as one of the principal female prophets of the Hebrew Bible. The Huldah Gates in the southern wall of the temple enclosure are often said to have been named for her, and there is another tradition that Huldah was not only a prophet, but also taught publicly in the Jerusalem school or “college” (Targum to 2 Kings 22:14); but we have no way to verify these traditions.

What we can know for sure is that Huldah’s influence clearly helped propel Josiah into action in accomplishing a huge national reform. Her leadership through influence is clear to see, and we can learn an important lesson from it.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

Huldah’s reply to Josiah is a perfect illustration not only of the power of influence, but also of the leadership principle that bases responses to situations on the attitude and intent of those involved. Huldah made no blanket message of condemnation or of acceptance. She spoke kindly to Josiah because his attitude was right before God, but she unequivocally spoke out against the actions of the majority of people in Jerusalem and Judah who had turned from God. For those who lead in family and work situations, it is often much easier simply to hand out universal criticism or credit, to react overly harshly in some cases or without the firmness needed in others. Huldah’s reply to Josiah shows the kind of balance for which we should aim.

Above all, Huldah’s story reminds us of a vital leadership lesson: that influence can be just as important as position, and that the greatest changes are sometimes brought about by the combination of the two factors. Even when we have no power to lead, we can often lead through influence.

## **18. ESTHER: The Empathy Factor**

The story of Esther – the beautiful young Jewish girl who became queen of the Persian Empire some 2,500 years ago – reads like a novel and has fascinated Bible students for centuries. In 539 BC the Persians conquered Babylon where the people of Judah had been captive, and of the Jews who did not return to Jerusalem at this time, many settled in Persia.

The book of Esther tells how, when a search was being made for a wife for the Persian king, Esther's relative and guardian Mordecai helped the young woman prepare and Esther was chosen as the great king's royal wife (Esther 2:17). Unfortunately, the Jews throughout the empire were greatly endangered by the Persian official Haman who plotted to have them all killed. But Esther and Mordecai were instrumental in saving their people through a combination of Mordecai's wisdom and Esther's charm and leadership.

When the evil Haman succeeded in getting the king to proclaim the destruction of the Jewish people, Mordecai arranged to get a copy of the king's edict to Esther in the royal palace and told her she was in a unique situation to do something to save her people. Although Mordecai was apparently Esther's legal guardian and had clearly led the situation to this point, after Esther received his message we see a noticeable change in her behavior.

Esther immediately started to assert herself and told Mordecai how the situation must be handled. She stressed the fact that even though she was chosen as queen, Persian law meant that if she simply took the matter to the king she would be in danger of execution. Nevertheless, the young queen informed Mordecai that the Jewish people must fast for three days, that she would fast also, and then she would approach the king. Esther did this and carefully led during her interactions with the king, so that the plot to annihilate the Jews was uncovered and the scheming Haman was executed, rather than his intended victims.

We should ask ourselves what caused this sudden emergence of forceful leadership on Esther's part. It cannot be simply that she was now a queen and felt that she had more power. Mordecai was still legally her guardian, and social as well as legal considerations meant that she would normally show great deference to him. So what propelled Esther into the

leadership role she assumed? The story gives us the likely answer in a detail that is easy to miss.

We are told the specific reaction of Esther when she received Mordecai's dire message of impending danger for all the Jews: "When Esther's eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress" (Esther 4:4). When we look at the Hebrew in which the book of Esther was written, we find that "great distress" is somewhat of an understatement. The Hebrew word *chul* that is used means to "writhe" as in the expression "writhe in pain" and is often used of the intense pain of giving birth.

In modern English, the expression "I feel your pain" has been overused and devalued, but this is exactly what the book of Esther is saying: that Esther deeply felt the pain of her people, that she truly empathized – and to such a degree that she was propelled into action to help to save them.

Esther could have done nothing in the situation. No one in the palace knew of her Jewish background, and she might well have been safe if she had not been moved to dangerous action. But we are told that she emotionally "writhed" – empathized so deeply – directly before we are told how she sprang into an active leading role in saving her people.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

Esther achieved a successful leadership posture not because she had been elevated to royalty, but because she was able to empathize deeply and actively. The young queen clearly achieved decisive leadership not through outward training, but through inner empathy; and it is probably true to say that it is only through a deeply empathetic attitude that the greatest leaders are born. No great social improvement has been brought about by those who did not care deeply about others. No movement to end a social or moral injustice such as slavery or racial segregation has been birthed without leaders who deeply felt the pain of empathy.

But we do not have to be involved in world-changing movements to see the effects of real empathy on effective leadership. Empathy is a key ingredient at every level of the leadership process and one which cannot be faked or replaced. Whatever our level of leading, empathy is an irreplaceable trait in earning the trust, loyalty and even affection of those we lead. In the last analysis, empathy is not for the good of the leader, of course, but for the good of those the leader serves.

**PART FOUR:  
KINGS**

## 19. SAUL: Growing in Leadership

Saul could well be described as the king who failed. He was the king whose leadership fell short and led to his increasing alienation from God and his own people, and finally to an ignominious death. But because we are so familiar with Saul's obvious weaknesses and ultimate downfall, we often fail to see a valuable positive leadership principle in this king's life.

We see Saul's tragic ending and although we may sorrow for him, we tend to write off his example and never think to learn anything from him except how not to do things. That may be a mistake. His successor David was as aware of Saul's faults as anyone (1 Samuel 19:1, etc.), but David was still able to praise him for a number of good qualities when Saul died (2 Samuel 1:17-27), and we can find some positive lessons in the story of Israel's first king if we look closely enough.

First Samuel 10 describes how Saul was anything but a leader in the beginning. When God chose Saul as the king for whom the people of Israel clamored, Saul clearly felt fear and went and hid himself (1 Samuel 10:21-22). As a result, some people despised him and expressed doubts about Saul's fitness for leadership (1 Samuel 10:27).

Yet after Saul was anointed king, we see the growth of real leadership qualities in his actions. His people were in a difficult situation. To the west, the warlike Philistines threatened Israel and would not allow the Israelites to work with metal so that they would have no swords or other weapons (1 Samuel 13:19-22). To the east, the equally warlike and cruel Ammonites also threatened Israel and the danger they posed was even more pressing. The Ammonites besieged the Israelite city of Jabesh and refused its offer of peaceful surrender – saying that they intended to mutilate its unarmed people, regardless.

Hearing of this situation, Saul launched into action by sending a powerful message to all the other cities of Israel warning them of what he would do if they did not send men to help their fellow Israelites in Jabesh (1 Samuel 11:6).

It seemed an impossible situation. The Israelites had only a few days to organize an army to defend Jabesh. They had no trained soldiers – most of them were simple farm workers. They had no military weapons or armor – all they had to fight with were the farm tools they possessed. Yet Saul was able to stir up his people and to amass a large army that came



together to fight the invaders. Saul then acted decisively and with excellent military strategy and tactics. Planning a night-time attack, he organized his army into three groups which attacked the enemy soldiers from different directions just before dawn when most of them were still sleeping. The attack was completely successful, and the Ammonites were routed. Many of the enemy were killed and the rest fled in disarray.

Saul, the chosen king who hid himself from responsibility, had grown from fear to ferociousness, from limpness to leadership! The king's popularity soared, and the people even wanted to execute those who had originally argued against his kingship (1 Samuel 11:12). Saul graciously forbade this and gave credit to God for the victory, saying "No one will be put to death today, for this day the Lord has rescued Israel" (vs. 13).

Such was Saul's growth in leadership and his acceptance by the people that the prophet Samuel organized a special ceremony to re-appoint Saul as Israel's king. Things looked so good regarding the new leader that after many years of guiding Israel, Samuel now gave a farewell speech – effectively turning over the control of the nation completely to Saul.

Saul continued to grow in leadership beyond this point. He established a regular army and won numerous battles that gained a large degree of independence for Israel. He also acted wisely as a king in some areas. Sadly, however, as the Bible so clearly shows, Saul's very real growth in leadership eventually became poisoned by personal failings of jealousy, self-centeredness, and lack of faith. Yet the early career of this king can be an encouragement to all who might doubt their own leadership abilities.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

If we are willing to look past the ultimate failure of Saul's kingship, we can see positive things from which we can learn as well as negative things by which we should be cautioned. Saul was not a leader, but Saul became a leader. Saul's leadership developed from being non-existent to a remarkable height, and his tragic ending should not obscure from us the way in which he grew in the ability to inspire and lead those over whom he was placed. If we experience doubts regarding our own aptitude or abilities as a potential leader, we should remember that leadership qualities can be grown – sometimes, as in Saul's case – from the smallest seeds to impressive levels. Whatever our own feelings or fears, we too can grow as leaders if we are given the opportunity for greater service.

## **20. DAVID:**

# **Giving Credit Where Credit Is Due**

Every year in Hollywood the Academy Awards Oscar ceremony celebrates and gives credit not only to leading actors, directors, and producers, but also to a host of others who work behind the scenes in the year's top films. This on-stage giving of credit is all well and good, though it can often seem artificial when we compare how infrequently people tend to give credit to others in real-life situations. But there is plenty of biblical precedent for giving appreciative credit to others in our daily lives, and there is good reason to believe that this is a leadership principle that benefits everyone.

A great example is found in 1 Samuel in the story of David rescuing the people of the city of Ziklag, who had been taken captive by raiding Amalekites. David divided his forces in order to have some men protect the supplies so that others would have lighter loads and could quickly catch up with the enemy. After a completely successful engagement in which the enemy raiders were destroyed, their equipment captured, and the people of Ziklag freed, some of David's men insisted that only those who had actually fought in this campaign should receive a share of the captured goods. Speaking to those followers who wanted to give credit only to those directly involved in the fighting, David said:

“No, my brothers ... The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike.” David made this a statute and ordinance for Israel from that day to this. (1 Samuel 30:23-25)

Not only did David credit all who had taken part in the campaign – whatever their roles – but also he sent some of the captured goods to the elders of the cities in Judah in recognition of their support at other times (1 Samuel 30:26). The list of towns David recognized for their help and support is long (and almost Oscar-like!), as David gives credit to:

...those who were in Bethel, Ramoth Negev and Jattir; to those in Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa and Rakal; to those in the towns of the Jerahmeelites and the Kenites; to those in Hormah, Bor Ashan, Athak and Hebron ... (1 Samuel 30:27-31)

Notice that even this long list is not complete, as verse 31 adds: “and to those in all the other places where he and his men had roamed.” So David used the opportunity to give credit not only to all who had helped him directly or indirectly in his rescue mission, but also to all of his friends and supporters who were not even involved in that campaign, but who had supported him up to that time.

This trait showed not only David’s genuine appreciation, but also his skillful use of a leadership technique that helps others. In the book of Psalms, we read that God:

... chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them. (Psalm 78:70-72)

David certainly proved himself a wise and capable leader who led his men, and later the whole nation of Israel, with both upright character and skillful leadership. He was greatly loved by his people (1 Samuel 18:16), and his giving credit where it was due doubtless contributed to that fact.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

The story of David’s rescue mission contains several points worth remembering. David gave credit widely and generously, and this is both a point of character and a positive leadership principle that we can apply in our relationships with the people with whom we live and work. To apply the principle fully, we should notice that it is sometimes appropriate to do more than simply say “thank you” for help given. When circumstances allow it (as when David found himself the possessor of a great deal of surplus Amalekite equipment!), we can consider sharing what we receive with those who have helped us recently, or perhaps in the past. This is not some calculated principle of payback or trading favors, but a matter of showing appreciation and giving credit when that is possible.

Good leaders know the wisdom of remembering and appreciating the people who support their leadership and who make it possible. If we think about it, there are always people behind the scenes to whom credit is due!

## **21. SOLOMON: A Lesson from a “Superking”**

The wisdom of Solomon is proverbial. Even many who have never read the Bible know that Solomon, the son of King David, was acknowledged as one of the wisest men of his time (1 Kings 4:30). The book of Kings also tells us that Solomon was the greatest king of his generation (1 Kings 10:23). Building on the foundation of David’s reign, Solomon developed the economy of ancient Israel, greatly increased its military power, launched maritime fleets, and accomplished many other major projects. Not least of Solomon’s accomplishments was the construction of the temple in Jerusalem which is described as a veritable marvel of the ancient world (1 Kings 6-8).

Solomon also followed the laws of God for a good portion of his life, and we are told that early in his reign “Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David” (1 Kings 3:3 ESV).

Yet we get the first hint of a problem near the beginning of the king’s reign when we find that: “Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter” (1 Kings 3:1). This was a practice that was to continue throughout his reign, and we read:

King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh’s daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, “You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.” Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. (1 Kings 11:1-2)

Solomon knew instructions had been given by God regarding the conduct of Israel’s king, forbidding multiple wives “or his heart will be led astray” (Deuteronomy 17:17), but that is exactly what occurred:

He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and ... his wives turned his heart after other gods ... So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done. (1 Kings 11:3-5)

Every young reader of comic books knows that although the superhero Superman had great strength and could accomplish amazing deeds, he could be fatally weakened and his strength rendered useless by the imaginary substance “kryptonite.” There is no doubt what the “kryptonite” of Solomon – the man who was “Superking” – was. Somehow, despite his otherwise right attitude and approach and all his great accomplishments, Solomon did not root out his major failing, and it progressively poisoned his personal life and royal leadership.

Just as a magnet can affect a compass needle and pull it away from its intended direction, Solomon was pulled away from his original intents and purposes and he gradually lost his direction. We see this in the book of Ecclesiastes that was doubtless composed by Solomon (Ecclesiastes 1:1) – a book that shows how the king lost his bearings and endlessly sought satisfaction in pleasure and other transient things. Ecclesiastes also shows how Solomon’s leadership was eventually compromised through wasting his own opportunities and his country’s resources in his vain quest for personal gratification.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

The story of Solomon is that of a king whose early reign exhibited all the traits of great leadership. But in the latter part of his rule, Solomon fell into failure through the influence of his many pagan wives and acceptance of their gods. As a result Solomon’s leadership was greatly compromised.

In our own lives, our ability to lead will eventually be undermined if we do not watch for, identify, and remove personal traits and behaviors that are antithetical to effective leadership. Rather than allowing this to happen, skilled leaders know that we grow and accomplish the most when we prioritize in our lives to match our goals and missions.

This is not simply a matter of identifying our own personal “kryptonite” and avoiding it. To be successful, leaders do need to treat personal problem assessment and avoidance as a central part of everyday living, but the positive side of the equation is just as important. To lead most effectively, we must focus on living lives in which our major ongoing use of time and energy contributes to the goals in which we believe (1 Corinthians 10:31).

## **22. ASA:**

# **Turning Problems into Opportunities**

King Asa of Judah was the great-grandson of Solomon and ruled two generations after the split between Judah and the northern tribes of Israel. The son of King Abijah, who appears to have trusted in God (2 Chronicles 13:18), Asa was clearly zealous in maintaining the worship of the one God and acted decisively to root out idolatry and its associated immorality, destroying the pagan altars and sacred places throughout the kingdom. Asa even deposed his own grandmother for worship of pagan gods and turned the people back to the traditional worship. In fact, this king is one of the few of whom we are told that he did what was good and right in the eyes of God (2 Chronicles 14:2).

Asa ruled Judah for forty-one years and appears to have led his people well. He is depicted as a careful strategist, fortifying a number of cities in Judah and successfully repelling an invasion by a hugely outnumbering Cushite-Egyptian force (2 Chronicles 14:11). The book of Chronicles tells us that, as a result, the kingdom had peace under Asa and for many years no one tried to make war against him.

But in his thirty-sixth year of rule Asa was confronted by Baasha, king of the northern Israelite tribes, who allied himself with the king of Syria, then constructed a fortress at Ramah, less than ten miles from Jerusalem. This fortress presented a clear and present danger to Asa's kingdom, as it effectively controlled the area around his capital and provided a strong staging area for a likely invasion and destruction of Judah. Asa responded to this threat by taking all the gold from the temple and sending it to Ben-Hadad, ruler of Syria, to convince that king to negate the treaty he had made with Baasha and to invade the Northern Kingdom (2 Chronicles 16:2-6). Ben-Hadad accepted the gold and invaded his onetime ally, Israel, forcing Baasha to withdraw from Ramah.

Considering his earlier faith under the sudden intense pressure of Egyptian invasion, we can only conclude that Asa bought his way out of this later situation with the temple gold because he was under more prolonged and unrelenting stress as his enemies began to build their forces on Judah's border (2 Chronicles 16:7-9). Perhaps Asa discovered that if we let it, slow attrition can erode our confidence more than sudden danger. It is certainly true that the greatest need for faith is sometimes

not in times of sudden crises, but in the ongoing problems of everyday life.

But militarily and from a leadership perspective, Asa's next move was an interesting one. With his enemy gone, Asa first tore down Baasha's stronghold at Ramah and then used the stone from that structure to build not one, but two fortresses in more defensible locations in Judah's territory.

Whether consciously or by coincidence, Asa's actions reflect a classic principle of leadership strategy in removing a problem and turning the resources previously taken by that problem to a more positive outcome.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

Asa's strategy of tearing down his enemy's fortress and using its resources to build two new structures for the defense of his own nation provides an historical illustration or, at the very least, a perfect analogy for an important leadership principle. Psychologically it's easy to simply deal with a problem and then just breathe a sigh of relief when it is gone. But good leaders know that even the worst problems can often be turned into opportunities.

You may have read of how the life of John Newton, the nineteenth century slave trader (who later wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace"), was turned around, as he used his first-hand knowledge to become a champion of the fight to end slavery. In our own society, it is not difficult to find examples of individuals who have been part of the pornographic film industry, have worked in abortion clinics, or have been held in the grip of alcohol or substance abuse, who have turned to God and now use their experiences to help others to turn from these evils.

We can all utilize this same principle in our everyday lives by putting our own experiences – positive as well as negative – to good use. We can do this to benefit our children, friends, co-workers, or others. Whenever we take a past problem or experience and turn it into a lesson or encouragement that can guide others, we are giving a true gift and – at the same time – exercising one of the great principles of true leadership.

## **23. HEZEKIAH: Leaders Must Look to the Future**

Hezekiah was one of Judah's very few good kings. He ruled a few generations before the back-sliding nation was conquered by Babylon and its people taken into captivity. The Bible tells us that Hezekiah "... did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David ... had done" (2 Chronicles 29:1-2) – a positive assessment made of only two other kings of Judah: Asa (1 Kings 15:11) and Josiah (2 Kings 22:2).

Hezekiah certainly was a remarkable leader in many ways. He led his people militarily – successfully resisting the looming Assyrian Empire and defeating Israel's historical enemies, the Philistines. Spiritually, too, Hezekiah led his people well. He was the son of King Ahaz who turned from the ways of David by leading Judah into idolatry. But Hezekiah did not follow his father's bad example, and he did away with many of the cult places where the Israelites engaged in pagan idol worship. He even destroyed the bronze snake in the temple that Moses had made in the wilderness, because the people had begun to worship it. Hezekiah accomplished a renewal in the religion of Israel, returning the people – at least temporarily – to the worship of the one God.

Yet for all his courageous acts and good leadership skills, if we read his story carefully, we see that Hezekiah appears to have had a noticeable blind spot – his not infrequent failure to look to the future. In the book of 2 Kings we read that the king of Babylon sent diplomatic messengers to Hezekiah in Jerusalem, and Hezekiah unwisely:

... showed them all that was in his storehouses – the silver, the gold, the spices and the fine olive oil– his armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them. (2 Kings 20:13)

This was a huge tactical error as the Babylonians reported all they had seen to their king and were able to judge that they could overthrow Hezekiah's forces and garner considerable riches.

But failing to see the future implications of "showing his hand" to a potential enemy was not an isolated blunder. When the prophet Isaiah chastised him for this error and told him that it would result in Hezekiah's descendants being attacked by Babylon, we are told that the king accepted



this situation, thinking “Will there not be peace and security in my lifetime?” (2 Kings 20:19). It is as though Hezekiah was unable to project his view beyond the present and to try to act to right the wrong or to help those who would suffer in the future because of his mistake.

We see the same failure to look to the future in that – despite his own good reign and faithfulness to God – Hezekiah clearly did not prepare for the time beyond his own life and make arrangements for his people to continue in the right way. When he died, his son Manasseh, who succeeded him, almost immediately turned to idolatry, rebuilt the idols and pagan cult places that Hezekiah had destroyed, and became one of the worst kings in all of Judah’s history. It was because Judah sank so low in Manasseh’s reign that we are told that God allowed Babylon to conquer the Jewish nation. Although a leader cannot be held accountable for the actions of his successor, it is clear that Hezekiah did not plan for the future and failed to put in place any safeguards against Judah’s return to idolatry.

### **Leadership Lessons:**

There is no question that Hezekiah led his country well in almost every way. He was – by the Bible’s own account – one of the best leaders to sit on the throne of David, and we can learn much from his good example. Yet even this king, for all his excellence, could have led better by giving more thought to the future. Hezekiah had a promise from God that his reign would end in peace and security and didn’t seem to want to focus on Isaiah’s prophecy that his descendants would be taken into captivity.

When things go well and problems are successfully overcome, it is tempting for all of us – whatever our level of leadership – to embrace the present without due concern and regard for the future. If we live only in the present and for the present, we too will never accomplish the level of leadership that we could have achieved.

The best leaders not only lead well in the present, as Hezekiah unquestionably did; they realize that ultimately their actions will affect the future – potentially for generations to come.

## **24. JOSIAH: “All-In” Leadership**

Josiah was the great-grandson of the good king Hezekiah, but his grandfather and father were particularly evil rulers, and Josiah’s story (2 Kings 22–23; 2 Chronicles 34–35) is all the more remarkable for this fact. During his reign, Josiah was informed that a copy of the book of the Law (likely Deuteronomy or the entire Pentateuch), doubtless hidden during the reign of one of his predecessors, had been discovered in the temple. When Josiah heard the words of the Law read out, he tore his robes in grief and sent a message to the prophet Huldah to acknowledge that Judah had strayed far from God’s commands and to ask for guidance. Huldah’s reply revealed that God would overthrow Judah for its transgressions, but that Josiah himself would be spared the punishment:

‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people—that they would become a curse and be laid waste—and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I also have heard you, declares the Lord. Therefore I will gather you to your ancestors, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place.’ (2 Kings 22:18-20)

Unlike Hezekiah – who appears to have accepted a similar warning from God without any great effort to try to avert the future punishment – Josiah threw himself completely into trying to change and save his nation. With Huldah’s encouragement, the king instituted a great religious reform even more far-reaching than that of his great-grandfather Hezekiah. Josiah cleansed the temple of all the pagan idols that had been set up there and burned them – grinding the burned remains of the worst pagan artifacts and scattering the dust on graves to render them completely unclean. He did away with pagan shrines dedicated to the sun, moon, and stars and other gods from the whole land and destroyed all the facilities where cultic prostitution had been carried out. He also got rid of the mediums and spiritists in the land and removed all the household gods and idols in Jerusalem and Judah (2 Kings 23).

The king's reform was so thorough and all-encompassing that we may even see archaeological indication of it in the fact that seals and seal impressions discovered from the period of this king show a change from those bearing images of the moon and stars, to seals that carry only names – very likely as a result of Josiah's return to monotheism.

Josiah dedicated himself totally to his reform – he was, as we say nowadays, “all in.” In fact, the word “all” typifies Josiah's leadership – it is used more of this king than any other. Consider Josiah's actions after he had done away with pagan worship in Judah:

Then the king sent and gathered together **all** the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up to the house of the Lord, with **all** the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the Levites, **all** the people both great and small. And he read in their hearing **all** the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the Lord. And the king ... made a covenant before the Lord, to ... keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes, with **all** his heart and **all** his soul... Then he made **all** who were present ... join in it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. (2 Chronicles 34:29-32 ESV, emphases added)

In summary of Josiah's life, the book of 2 Kings tells us: “Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did—with **all** his heart and with **all** his soul and with **all** his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses” (2 Kings 23:25, emphases added).

### **Leadership Lessons:**

Like Hezekiah, Josiah was told that ruin would come on his nation after his lifetime – but Josiah threw himself into a total effort to bring about change. The change proved to be short-lived because the people of Judah were so entrenched in their ways that within a generation they brought upon themselves the punishment they had been repeatedly warned about. The story of Josiah provides us not only with a view of the reign of one of Judah's greatest kings, but also gives us a clear picture of leadership with total dedication. The concept of “all-in” in modern American English captures that kind of dedication and resolve and reflects one of the most basic yet important of all leadership principles.

Effective leaders know that those they serve can sense the level of dedication with which they lead. They know that it is to the degree that we are “all-in” that our leadership efforts will succeed. It is a fitting thought on which to end this book. In modern leadership discourse it is sometimes said that “if we are going to be all in, we must go all out, until it is all over.” That trait is what made Josiah one of ancient Judah’s greatest kings, and it identifies great leaders in every age. It is the principle by which we live out the understanding that we are not just doing a job: in whatever capacity we lead, we are serving people who deserve our best efforts. Ultimately, that’s what leadership is **all** about.

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