

Leadership strong and courageous

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WORSHIP

Read Joshua 1:6-9 to begin thinking about the foundation on which leadership is built.

Hymn

Sing "How firm a foundation" (HVB 567 or MH 260).

Verse 1 asserts that God's Word is a foundation for our faith and Jesus is the leader to follow. Verse 2 speaks of the God who promises to be with us.

If your class is not a singing group, you could have a soloist, quartet or choir record it ahead of time. Then simply play the recording for the group to listen to the words as they follow along in the hymnbooks.

Prayer

Ever-present God,
we praise you for providing us with leaders.

We confess that we have not always followed.

When asked to lead, we have not been bold or courageous.

Thank you for your promise to always be with us.

We ask you now to be with our leaders.

May they dwell in your Word and act in accordance to your will.

AMEN

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UNIT I
LEADERS IN THE
COVENANT
COMMUNITY

Background
Scripture
Joshua 1

Key Verse
Joshua 1:9

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

Tim Geddert

NEW BEGINNINGS

Thank God for new beginnings: New Year and the accompanying resolutions; spring's budding flowers; the fresh forgiveness and new start in discipleship offered by conversion. Yet New Year's resolutions are broken, the warmth of spring also produces weeds; we follow Jesus but will sometimes step sideways or backwards. We love new beginnings but discover over and over again that they are made by the same people whose weaknesses reemerge.

Jesus is the author and the perfecter of our faith. Yet the faith journey can be long and winding; we are easily distracted from that which Jesus calls us to be and do. Long before Jesus came to live among God's people, Israel experienced the very same phenomenon. How easily the Israelites averted their eyes from their Creator and Deliverer, Leader and Provider. Sometimes they fixed their eyes on false gods, sometimes on their own human resources, and sometimes on those whom God sent to lead them—prophets, priests, judges, and kings. As we examine Unit I, "Leaders in the Covenant Community," we will see how they point beyond themselves to the One who truly leads God's people, Yahweh, whom we call Father; and Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

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JOSHUA 1:1-11, 16, 17**TNIV**

¹After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ²"Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. ³I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. ⁶Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

⁷"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. ⁹Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

¹⁰So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: ¹¹"Go through the camp and tell the people, 'Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.'"

¹⁶Then they answered Joshua, "Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. ¹⁷Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses."

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**Monday, August 31**

1 Timothy 2:1-6

Pray for leaders

Tuesday, September 1

Exodus 24:12-18

Training as a leader

Wednesday, September 2

Numbers 11:24-29

Misplaced zeal

Thursday, September 3

Numbers 32:6-13

Following without reserve

Friday, September 4

Numbers 27:15-23

Commissioned to lead

Saturday, September 5

Deuteronomy 34:1-9

Ready to lead

Sunday, September 6

Joshua 1:1-11, 16-17

A leader led by God

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The people of Israel were in the midst of change and uncertainty with the death of their leader Moses. It is in times like these transitions that we need leaders who can guide us in the right direction. What are the characteristics of such leaders?

God called Joshua to be a strong and courageous leader to succeed Moses. Joshua's strength, courage, and obedience to God as a leader enabled the people to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land.

A leader needs followers. The people of Israel promised to do whatever Joshua asked of them. They prayed that the Lord would be with Joshua.

GOALS

During this session teachers and class members will:

- Identify characteristics of a good leader.
- Identify characteristics that made Joshua an effective leader.
- Reflect on the role of those who follow a leader.

TEACHER PREPARATION

a. Write the scrambled names ahead of class time on the chalkboard or on chart paper so that class members can be working on deciphering them before class begins. AHJOSU, DEGINO, AERZ, AEEHHIMN. These names will provide an overview of the upcoming unit on leaders in the covenant community.

b. Have chart paper to record members' ideas of characteristics of a good leader. Tear off the sheet as it gets filled and tape it on one side of the room. Create and tape a similar list of the characteristics of a good follower on the opposite side of the room.

c. Have four index cards ready with a separate Scripture text written on each one of them. *Exodus 17:9-10, Exodus 24:12-18, Exodus 33:7-11, Numbers 27:15-23.*

d. The discussion questions are provided to lead you through the lesson. The questions are listed in the order that the material is presented in the *Adult Bible Study*. For members of the class who do not read or study the material in the quarterly ahead of class time, this approach will help them cover the material presented.

e. Have a one-fourth sheet of paper and pencil for each person for the final activity of listing leaders for whom they will pray.

f. In this lesson, pages 6 and 7, *Adult Bible Study* writer Tim Geddert discusses the topics of leadership and holy war. Read these carefully in preparation for dealing with these subjects should class members comment on or raise questions about them.

STEPS THROUGH THE LESSON

Overview

Have these four scrambled words in view as the class arrives:

AHJOSU, DEGINO, AERZ, AEEHHIMN

Say to the class, "These words are names of four leaders we will be studying in the four lessons of this unit" (names are: *Joshua, Gideon, Ezra, and Nehemiah*).

1. Sharing and reflecting on our story

Say: "Think of a person that you considered to be a good leader in your congregation or class. Tell us about that leader and share what characteristics of a good leader she or he demonstrated." List their characteristics on chart paper under the title:

"Characteristics of a Good Leader"

EXAMINING THE BIBLE TEXT

Joshua succeeds Moses (Joshua 1:1-2). "After the death of Moses . . ." (1:1), ". . . of Joshua . . ." (Judges 1:1), ". . . of Saul . . ." (2 Samuel 1:1). Generations come and go. New situations provide new challenges for God's people. God provides new leaders when those who have faithfully served pass on.

The spotlight now shines on Joshua, previously "Moses' aide" (1:1), now Moses' successor. Joshua's commission is to carry on God's unfinished work, providing for God's covenant people in a new human community, where justice and equality flourish.

Were conquests and sometimes slaughter really commanded by God?

As followers of Jesus, we read these texts and are troubled. Does God intend unquestioning obedience to human leaders? Were conquests and sometimes slaughter really commanded by God? Does faithful obedience to God's Law really guarantee "success wherever we go" (1:7)?

Answers may not come easily. We magnify the problem when we do not read carefully nor discern to whom these texts point.

A promise renewed (1:3-5). Through Joshua, God will fulfill promises given to Moses (v. 3) and long before that to Israel's ancestors (v. 6). Joshua's armies will not be "taking" the land but "receiving" it. God is keeping promises once made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The verb tenses in verse 3 are carefully translated by *NRSV*: I "have given" to you (earlier), the places your feet "will tread." Joshua is taking possession of what God already gave. Grace, not conquest, stands out most clearly.

The land is God's gift with the obligation to live in it as a contrast society, a light to the nations.

The land was never an empty land given to a landless people. Troubling questions remain. Still, God never tells Joshua: "Go conquer as much as you can! Whatever you take, you can have." The land is God's gift with the obligation to live in it as a contrast society, a light to the nations.

Israel shared the land with its original inhabitants, as God intended! They were to be a blessing to the other peoples by offering them a sign of God's justice and peace (Leviticus 19:33-37). As Jerome Creach writes: "The story is punctuated, not by records of how many Canaanites were killed in battle . . . but by

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accounts of Canaanites who were grafted into Israel because they acknowledged the power of the Lord” (*Interpretation*: Vol. 6, 19).

The primary charge (1:6-9). We might imagine the primary charge to Joshua would be, “Go in and conquer the enemies; go take the Land I promised you.” But it is not. God’s primary charges are: “Be strong and courageous” (1:6-7, 9, 18); be careful to do everything written in the law (vv. 7- 8); meditate on God’s law (v. 8); and “do not be afraid; do not be discouraged” (v. 9).

Yes, Joshua will lead Israel into battle, but success will not depend on their military might. It will depend on their obedience to God, their covenant faithfulness, their readiness to use even nonviolent means to make God’s claim crystal clear: The battle belongs to the Lord!

The charge to be “strong and courageous” is not a call to fight valiantly but to trust God unflinchingly. The human actors in this drama fade into insignificance. “I have given,” says God (v. 3); “I promised” (v. 3); and “I will be with you” (v. 5).

The promise of success, if Joshua will obey and trust God, is not a secret recipe for prosperity, health, and happiness. Obedience does not guarantee a life without difficulties. God’s law is given to recipients of God’s undeserved grace; it is not the means of earning that grace. God’s law shapes God’s people into a community of peace and justice. To the extent that we follow God’s instructions, we experience that community, *that way* of being “prosperous” and “successful.”

Joshua is to meditate on and unswervingly obey God’s Law. But what kind of Law is this? Creach writes: “The Lord commands Joshua to meditate not on a lifeless legal code, but on precepts that have the purpose of liberating the oppressed, ensuring justice for the weak, and forging an egalitarian society” (*Interpretation*, 28).

Instructions for moving into Canaan (1:10-15). Israel is about to cross the Jordan and take (i.e., receive) the Land of Canaan—both verbs are justified by Joshua 1. They also contain a charge to those tribes already in possession of land east of the Jordan. They too are to join the invasion and the battles before they are permitted to find rest in the land already theirs.

Yes, Joshua will lead Israel into battle, but success will not depend on their military might.

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2. Hearing the life-giving Story and Vision

Today we are learning about the leader Joshua. Hand out four index cards, each having one of these references written on it: Exodus 17:9-10, Exodus 24:12-18, Exodus 33:7-11, Numbers 27:15-23. Ask: “What do we learn about Joshua from these texts?” and then have the people with the cards read the text aloud for the class to hear.

What do we learn about Joshua from these texts? (*Joshua was (a) Moses’ field commander; (b) Moses’ young assistant; (c) accompanied Moses to receive the law from God; (d) a devout man who stayed in the tent of the Lord, and (e) Moses’ successor as leader of Israel.*)

The printed text, page 3, *Adult Bible Study*, introduces us to the first assignment given to Joshua as the new leader of Israel. Divide up the text among the following readers—narrator (verses 1, 10, 16a); God (verses 2-9); Joshua (verse 11); officers (can be read by the rest of the class) verses 16b-17). Have readers stand as they read.

3. Conversing with the Story

a. What made Joshua an effective leader of God’s people?

I was struck in this study how Joshua had been Moses’ “right hand man.” The people would have recognized his knowledge and connectedness to their leader. Joshua did what Moses told him to do. He was a team player. He was not only obedient to Moses but also to God. It seems rare that a leader would spend so much time listening to God, staying in the tent of the Lord, being able to hear God’s voice, and obeying what God told him to do, even when it seemed to be against conventional wisdom.

b. We've all heard the phrase "too many cooks spoil the broth." Too often individuals want to be in control. They want to lead. They want everyone to do as they wish. But every leader needs someone to follow him or her; otherwise they are not a leader. What is the role of followers to human leaders? List characteristics of a good follower on another sheet of chart paper as you did in Step 1.

"Characteristics of a Good Follower"

Discuss, "Does God intend unquestioning obedience to human leaders?" and "What is the role of church members in following a pastoral leader?"

c. Were conquests and sometimes slaughter really commanded by God? See Tim Geddert's comments on "receiving" the land as a gift on page 4, *Adult Bible Study*. What difference would that mentality have on how one occupies a land?

d. Does faithful obedience to God's law really guarantee "success wherever we go"? What good does following God's instructions have on our lives? See Geddert's discussion on page 5, *Adult Bible Study*, where he speaks of obedience not guaranteeing a life without difficulties. What does he say is our "prosperity," our "success"?

e. What law are we to meditate on and obey? How can this law be more than a lifeless legal code? How does one meditate on what it takes to liberate the oppressed and ensure justice? What resources should we be reading? What would obedience to these "laws" look like? See Geddert's comments on page 5, *Adult Bible Study*. "Success will not depend on their military might. It will depend on their obedience to God,

A misplaced allegiance (1:16-18). Israel's leaders promise Joshua: "Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go." They prescribe the death penalty for those who disobey! What a noble-sounding pledge of allegiance! Yet readers are invited to discern a misplaced allegiance. Israel's leaders overestimate not only their own capacity to hear and obey *Joshua*, but also *Joshua's* capacity to hear and obey *God*.

"Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you" (v. 17). Truth is, they did not obey Moses in all things, nor will they always obey Joshua. Truth is, Moses did not always lead them according to God's instructions, nor will Joshua. Truth is, their ultimate allegiance must always be to God, not to earthly leaders.

Leaders must always point God's people beyond themselves to the One who delivers, who keeps promises, and who ultimately provides rest for them.

God uses chosen and anointed servants to lead God's people. But they are always fallible leaders. They must always point God's people beyond themselves to the One who delivers, who keeps promises, and who ultimately provides rest for them.

LIVING THE TEXT

1. **Follow the leader.** It is a terrible mistake to draw a straight line from Moses and Joshua to those humans who lead God's people today. No church pastor is a "new Moses." No denominational leader is a "new Joshua." The straight line we draw from Old Testament leaders points directly to Jesus.

Jesus leads us out of slavery, fulfills and rightly interprets God's Law, and gives us God's new command to love God, neighbor, and even enemies. *Jesus* leads us into the Promised Land, establishes a kingdom of justice and peace, and brings us to God's promised rest (Hebrews 4:1-11).

The New Testament passes on the roles of "prophet, priest, and king" beyond Jesus, not to apostles and then to shepherds and elders who lead local congregations, but to *the church*. The church (not its leaders) is God's "royal priesthood." Leaders help us to discover our gifts and our calling. They equip us to be what in ancient Israel only the leaders could be—called and anointed mediators of God's Word, God's forgiveness, and God's authority.

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God's people were misguided when they pledged blind allegiance to their leaders in Joshua's day. How much more today! Leaders facilitate the mission of all God's people and point us to our true Leader. (See further comments in lesson 10.)

2. Holy war. Joshua 1 introduces a book about war against the native inhabitants and all the accompanying rout and mayhem.

Prospective battles were not carefully considered using abstract categories of a Just War Theory (no more than is done today!). All Christian readers struggle with the meaning and implications of this text. What justifies the conquest? God's inscrutable will? The sinfulness of the inhabitants? The greater end that justifies questionable means?

Christians in a peace tradition struggle even more with such questions. But we also may have more resources to deal with the challenges. We always choose to fix our eyes on Jesus, who models for us the way of peace.

The New Testament guides us beyond what the Old Testament seems to say. Joshua's conquest is seen in the New Testament as a pointer toward the greater Joshua/Jesus (the names are the same) who leads us into a new Promised Land already glimpsed in the past by people of faith (Hebrews 11:13-16) and into a new rest promised to God's faithful people (Hebrews 4:1-11).

We follow the Prince of Peace, who waged "holy war" by laying down his life. The battles we wage are not against flesh and blood. As we allow God's Law to shape us into Shalom communities, as we resist the temptations of false gods and sometimes misguided human leaders, we need to heed God's charge more than ever: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).

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their covenant faithfulness, their readiness to use even nonviolent means to make God's claim crystal clear: The battle belongs to the Lord! . . . to trust God unflinchingly."

f. Joshua stepped into Moses' role of leadership. What fears might accompany such a step? What rewards? When have you felt that you were stepping into "big shoes" of a former leader?

g. Do a computer search on "just war theory" and find the requirements for claiming a war to be "just" or "holy." Call attention to Gedder's comments about Holy War in item 2, page 7, *Adult Bible Study*. Jesus waged "holy war" by laying down his life. What/who are our battles waged against if it is not against flesh and blood?

h. How do you "fix your eyes on Jesus"? How does doing so help you deal with the challenges of this story of conquest and occupation?

4. Living out the Vision

a. In what area of your life is God commanding you: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go"?

b. What leadership traits do you have that were included on the list your class made? How can you develop and cultivate them? Is God telling you to be bold, strong, and courageous in using your gifts?

c. Hand out paper and pencils for everyone. Have them list five leaders in your covenant community for whom they will pray this week that they may be strong and courageous. How else can we demonstrate support for leaders? Have them keep their list in their date book or checkbook where they will see it frequently throughout the week and remember to support them in some way this week.

CLOSING

In Joshua 1:9, God promises to be with us wherever we go. Read this passage to the class or have them sing "God be with you" (*HWB* 430 or *MH* 503). Allow it to be a blessing to each one.