

Leadership Lessons in the Desert

Exodus: Life in the Wilderness- Part 3

Discussion Questions:

1. **Defining Influence:** Leadership is defined not as a position, but as influence. Where do you currently have influence in your "everyday spaces of life" (home, work, school, etc.)?
2. **The Gift of Teachability:** Moses had every reason to be "puffed up" because of his miracles, yet he was humble enough to listen to his father-in-law. On a scale of 1–10, how teachable are you when someone offers you constructive criticism?
3. **Character Over Ability:** Jethro's criteria for leaders focused more on character (fearing God, being trustworthy) than on raw ability. In our culture, we often prioritize talent first. How can you intentionally "work on your character" as much as your skills this season?
4. **Flourishing vs. Surviving:** Is the environment you create in your home, workplace, school or relationships one where people are "thriving"? What is one practical change you can make to help those around you flourish?
5. **The Danger of Isolation:** Moses was trying to do everything alone, which Jethro warned would wear him out. What are the warning signs in your own life that you are trying to do it all without delegating or asking for help?
6. **Identifying the "Capable":** Jethro's advice was to select men who "fear God" and "hate dishonest gain." If you were looking for a mentor or someone to delegate to today, what specific character traits would you look for beyond just their skills?
7. **Leading Through Seasons:** For those who are not yet in a formal leadership role, the advice is to "not waste the season God has you in." How can you be faithful in developing your skills and character right now, even if you don't have a "big L" title?
8. **The Power of Observation:** Jethro spent time *watching* Moses work before offering advice. How can we improve our ability to truly observe the needs of those around us before we try to offer solutions?

Leadership Lessons in the Desert

Do you consider yourself a leader? Before you answer "no," consider this: **leadership is not first about position, it's about influence.** Every follower of Jesus has influence somewhere—whether at home, with friends, at work, at school, or in the church. As Eric Geiger notes in *Designed to Lead*, every follower of Jesus is called to lead.

In **Exodus 18**, we find Moses attempting to lead a massive group of people entirely on his own. The results were exhausting for everyone involved. Through the wisdom of his father-in-law, Jethro, we see how leadership can be restructured to help others flourish rather than just survive.

A Reunion and a Transformation

The chapter begins with a family reunion at the "mountain of God," also known as **Mount Horeb or Mount Sinai**. This location is significant because it is the very place where God first called Moses from the burning bush and promised that the people would return to worship Him there. This reunion serves as a powerful reminder of **God's faithfulness to His promises.**

During this visit, Moses recounts the wonders God performed in Egypt. Many commentators believe this was the moment **Jethro came to faith in the LORD.** Though Jethro was a priest of Midian who likely served other gods, his response to Moses' testimony shows a clear progression of faith:

- **Acknowledgment:** He declared that the LORD is greater than all other gods.
- **Sacrifice:** He brought burnt offerings for atonement and sacrifices of gratitude.
- **Worship:** He praised God for His mercy and salvation.

This transformation reminds us that God's plan of salvation was always intended to reach all nations, using Israel as a light to draw people like Jethro to the truth.

The Problem: Leadership Exhaustion

The day after this celebration, Jethro observed Moses' work routine. Moses sat as judge for the people from morning until evening. Jethro's assessment was blunt: **"What you are doing is not**

good.”

He warned Moses that he and the people would wear themselves out because the work was too heavy to handle alone. Jethro didn't just offer criticism; he offered a **constructive solution**. He advised Moses to represent the people before God, teach them the decrees, and then delegate the judicial workload to capable, trustworthy men.

4 Principles for Leading Well

Based on the interaction between Moses and Jethro, we can identify four leadership principles that apply to any area of influence.

1. Good Leaders Remain Teachable

Despite his incredible resume—confronting Pharaoh and witnessing the plagues—Moses remained humble. He listened to Jethro's advice and implemented it. This mirrors the New Testament example of **Apollos**, a great preacher who was humble enough to let Aquila and Priscilla—tentmakers by trade—teach him a fuller understanding of the Gospel. As **Proverbs 12:15** states, "a wise person listens to advice."

2. Good Leaders Equip and Empower Others

True leadership isn't just about getting tasks done; it's about **mentoring others to act on their own**. Jesus modeled this by training the twelve disciples and the group of seventy before releasing them to preach and perform miracles. A practical way to do this is a **three-step model**:

1. **I do:** The leader models the behavior.
2. **We do:** The leader provides guidance and encouragement while they try it out.
3. **You do:** The leader steps back and gives them full responsibility.

3. Good Leaders Prioritize Both Character and Ability

Jethro told Moses to select "capable men... who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain." Notably, **three of these four traits are about character**, and only one is about ability. Paul echoes this in the New Testament, where the qualifications for leaders (such as in 1 Timothy 3) focus almost entirely on integrity, self-control, and greed-free living rather than just talent.

4. Good Leaders Create Environments Where People Flourish

Before Jethro intervened, Moses had created an environment that was exhausting for everyone. Good leadership is about designing a culture where others can grow and succeed, not just survive. Your influence affects people more than you realize; the environment you create in your home or workplace matters deeply.

As followers of Jesus, we are all called to use our influence to help others thrive and to bring glory to God. Pay attention to how your actions and attitudes are shaping those around you. Seek to create environments that help others see Jesus more clearly. True flourishing only happens when we are in a right relationship with Him.