**Finite Leaders, Infinite God**

**Exodus 18**

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Pastor Josh Beakley

Leadership is hard. One sector that seems to understand those demands better than most is the military. Yesterday, I spoke with a member of our church about his officer training program. He entered with professionals who were leaders in their fields as lawyers, dentists, and doctors. But even so, the regimen was incredibly rigorous. Within a squadron, a flight of individuals is assigned various tasks to complete. During the training, they’re charged with responsibilities beyond their ability to complete, but they are still held accountable. The flight must decide who will succeed and who will fail and suffer the consequences. The military does this on purpose to simulate life-like intensity. They want to teach aspiring officers the nature of priorities and decision-making. They want to see candidates handle impossible scenarios and expose them to the demands of leadership. Each rank requires increasing responsibility, demands further training, and to be sure, every branch boasts programs that give new definitions to our concept of leader. It is made intense in order to ready candidates for the rigors of war. It’s not merely a matter of life and death for individuals. It’s a matter of victory or defeat for a nation. Stakes that high demand serious leadership.

What is true in the world generally, is also true for God’s people spiritually. Scripture is clear that healthy spiritual leaders are as vital now as they were in the past. God describes the responsibilities of His people with terms that are military; soldiers, armor, fighting. Spiritual warfare is not an option that some choose, it’s a reality we all face. Hence the demand uponleaders and the demand forleaders is fierce. Within the Bible we find plenty of examples of the unhealthy variety, but also a few positive models worth observing. One such leader we’ve grown familiar with over the past few months is the man they call Moses.

Israel has just fought a battle and succeeded in chapter 17. They barely conquered the Amalekites with supernatural help as Moses stood on the mountain with arms raised and the staff high. Hewas the leader to whom the nation looked. He was an unconventional hero commissioned by God to rescue his captive nation from the world superpower with a sudden Exodus. Millions of slaves were freed and sent to secure a new homeland from stubborn enemies. If ever there was a people in need of a leader, it was Israel. On the heels of this victory, Moses has proven himself many times over. But there’s a lesson we learn from chapter 18. Even Moses has his limits.

History is filled with stories of legendary leaders and biographies that capture our imaginations. We become so enamored that we believe every problem would be solved if we only had the right leader. Or every problem is caused because of the wrong one. Now, it is true that our needs are great. But even the best leaders have limits. And this is what we have to remember: Leaders are finite. No matter how great they may be, they can only do so much. But it’s not so with God. He is infinite. Leaders have limits, but God does not. What we realize is that leaders with limits serve a God without. There is always going to be a need for healthy spiritual leaders, but they cannot replace our ultimate hope in God. That’s why God sometimes assigns leaders tasks beyond their ability to complete to expose their limits and ensure that neither they nor their followers miss the true hero.

So, what marks a healthy leader? Around the globe there is a 46 billion dollar industry claiming to have the answer. Interest in leadership development exploded in recent decades with all of this material and gurus and seminars. The mere mention of the topic buries you beneath piles of articles on the secrets of success. There are growing amounts of tests claiming to predict potential. And all of the results of these investments are controversial at best. One survey discovered that out of five hundred executives, two-thirds still ranked leadership development as the top concern. In the World Economic Forum, 1,700 experts out of those 86% saw the world facing a leadership crisis. That’s a fact that may exist in part because experts have a hard time defining even the terms. One article quoted a founding director of the School of Leadership at Harvard. She claimed that the words “leader” and “leadership” have roughly 1,400 different definitions. That’s why a lot of the books on leadership open with a disclaimer that they as scholars have no clear understanding of what leadership is. Good leaders are always in demand, and yet, the world struggles to indentify what they should look like or how they are made.

So what marks a healthy leader? Specifically for our purposes, what marks a healthy spiritualleader? What should we look for? And what should our leaders strive toward? It’s an important question for everyone involved; leaders and followers alike. Clarity is essential because without it, we’re unable to evaluate potential leaders, affirm aspiring leaders, follow the right kind of leaders, encourage, pray for, and honor current leaders, or rightly equip our leaders, or even become leaders. So what marks healthy spiritual leadership?

If ever there was a topic in which I felt exposed as inadequate to address, this would rise near the top. It’s why our hope is not in experience here, but it’s in the Word of God. That’s where the authority lies. If there’s anything that you hear that is novel, or new, then it is highly suspect. Scripture has much more to say about leadership than we find in this chapter alone, especially in regards to church government. But for the sake of time, we have to leave those thoughts for another day. Today we look at Exodus 18. We’re going to examine six lessons on spiritual leadership; six marks of healthy spiritual leaders. Lesson one begins in a place we might not expect. Healthy spiritual leaders are

**Lesson #1 Mortal: The Humanity of Leaders (1-7)**

This is who leaders are. Lesson one is simply appreciating our leader’s humanity. We see leadership depicted through Moses in verses 1 through 7. We see Moses’ humanity.

Mr. G was a third grade teacher in Texas. Over the weekend he put on some casual khakis and a shirt and made a visit to Target. While there, he bumped into a student with her mom. They had a quick conversation and then he carried on with his day. Later in the week they have class and he assigns the students to write personal stories of life moments. He comes across one essay and discovers that the brief encounter had left a unique impression. The essay was called, “The Super Target True Story Incident.” It goes like this:

“How would you feel if you saw your teacher at Super Target with shorts on? So me and my mommy went to Super Target. First mommy parked the car. Then we were walking in the parking lot. I saw a familiar face. It was my teacher, Mr. G. He had shorts on. I didn’t even know he had shorts.” (Laughter!) She goes on later to say, “I asked my mommy, ‘Could you believe that was Mr. G with those shorts on?’” Her story finishes with “That day I learned Mr. G does have shorts at home to wear.” (Laughter!) It’s a moment that a student realizes that her teacher is just like her, a person. We laugh because it’s a common experience. But how easy is it for us to imagine certain leaders and celebrities in particular ways and forget the fact that they are people? They are just merely human. All the challenges that we face are upon them as well.

We’ve seen Moses at high points, and here the chapter begins with just a lesson on appreciating his humanity. I don’t think it’s anything crazy. We won’t spend much time here, but it’s just realizing first that leaders have an actual family. It may seem simple, but verses 1 through 3 and 5 just help us appreciate that they have relationships beyond their public ministry. Whether or not they’re married, there are just relationships beyond public ministry.

Moses had led the nation out of Egypt in victory. He had miraculously brought

forth food and water. He helped the people win a battle, but he has a family. He has a father-in-law named Jethro. He has a wife named Zipporah. He has two sons; Gershom and Eliezar. And there’s actually an interesting back story with how he met his wife. We just remember that he is a person. Once Yahweh called Moses to Egypt, he actually had to make some decisions. It seems that he sent his family back to stay with the father-in-law. Maybe he was aiming to spare them from what was happening, but he had life decisions to make. We see that at this point, the news of what has happened has spread. As the nation has arrived at the mountain of God, it says in verse 1

***1*** *Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses’ father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt.*

The network news of word of mouth through the desert, spread. Jethro knows what God has done for Israel, for Moses and for the people. Yahweh brought them out.

***2*** *Now Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, had taken Zipporah, Moses’ wife, after he had sent her home,* ***3*** *along with her two sons.*

And in verse 5,

***5*** *Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was encamped at the mountain of God.*

They are reunited together. And it seems that this is just a simple reminder that of all the great feats of Moses’ leadership, even after the role in the battle of Rephidim in chapter 17, he’s just mortal. He’s human. He’s a person, and he has relationships beyond his public ministry. And even in that, we see in verses 3 and 4 a reminder that he has an emotional history. I mean, this is a guy with a past. He has life he’s going through. He has two sons.

***3*** *The name of the one was Gershom (for he said, “I have been a sojourner in a foreign land”),* ***4*** *and the name of the other, Eliezer (for he said, “The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh”).*

Gershom’s name means “banishment.” Eliezer’s name means “my God is help.” This guy is a man with an emotional history. He has feelings. We can appreciate that. It’s where he came from. And we also see just a general social responsibility in verses 6-7. For all that Moses is and who he has become, he has more than one role in society. He is a son-in-law. That’s what we see in verse 6. Jethro, who understands all that is happening, cautiously and tactfully sends word to Moses.

***6*** *And when he sent word to Moses, “I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her,”*

Moses responds respectfully in this role as a son-in-law.

***7*** *Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. And they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent.*

He’s just engaging in this other role. He has an actual family, an emotional history, social responsibilities. It’s just the humanity of Moses. At his very best, he’s still mortal. He’s human. And we easily forget that we or others are human. Sometimes we believe our own hype and we think we are superhuman. We live on that excitement and then we reach our limit and we realize we’re disappointing ourselves and others. Or maybe we’re trusting in a particular leader and we imagine that they could not fail; a father or a teacher or a pastor or a boss. We pretend they’re the savior of our every problem, and we discover that they too are human. It’s a simple lesson, but sometimes we place inhuman expectations and demands upon leaders as if they didn’t have these realities. We need to appreciate that leaders are mortal.

But what is amazing about our God is that He doesn’t disregard that. He shows love and glory by stooping and taking on flesh. Think of that! God come as a man. God, who came as an infant, experienced fatigue, temptation, even death, and yet without sin. He had a mother. He had siblings. He experienced exile in Egypt. He showed social responsibility and respect in ways that are appropriate. We worship a God who was made like us in every way except for sin, and then died in our place so that we could join Him in His. This is our God. He understands the weakness of our mortality. And yet, without compromising any of His divinity, this is the God-man. He is the ultimate hope for leaders and followers. And that’s why lesson 2 is, healthy leaders are

**Lesson #2 Worshipful: The Sincerity of Wonder (8-12)**

This is what leaders do. Verses 8 through 12 give a reason to celebrate. We’ll just call this the sincerity of wonder. The leadership depicted through Moses is now demonstrated with Jethro. The wonder is about God.

Volkswagen, in 2011, aired this commercial that ended up being surprisingly successful. Maybe you’ve seen it. It features a small kid dressed in a Star Wars costume with an oversized Darth Vader helmet. He’s ambling around his house trying to use the force, or control objects with his mind and make them move. As you might expect, the suit lacks any power to make anything move; no appliance moves, not his toys, not even the family dog. And then his dad arrives home in a new car and the young boy bursts past his father into the driveway in a last desperate attempt to summon inner superpowers. As he tries to make something happen, suddenly as if by magic, the engine roars to life. That youngster, shocked at his newfound power, whips his head back to the window to see if mom and dad witnessed the moment. It’s then, that the father gives the mom a wink and reveals that his key has a remote start.

People laugh, and in a kid, this kind of naïveté is cute, but in an adult it can be disastrous. Few things are as dangerous as a spiritual leader who believes he should get credit for feats clearly accomplished by God. It’s true that Israel has been through some special things. Everyone can see that. Jethro hears that news. And you might be tempted to think Moses is amazing, but the key is that when Moses shares the story, who is the hero? It’s Yahweh! Moses has a sincere wonder for who God is. He’s worshipful in how he views life. It’s a wonder that’s not inward, but it’s upward. Or we could even say Godward. Look at how his wonder is displayed through both his focus and his impact. His focus is shown in verse 8. He praises the real hero.

***8*** *Then Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel’s sake, all the hardship that had come upon them in the way, and how the LORD had delivered them.*

So he and his father-in-law sit in the tent. Moses shares the story. He’s not bragging about himself. He’s worshiping God. It’s a Godward focus. But also, there’s a Godward impact as a result. The impact is upon Jethro. Jethro hears that message clearly.

***9*** *And Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the LORD had done to Israel, in that he had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians.* ***10*** *Jethro said, “Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians.* ***11*** *Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people.”*

He gets who is the hero. And so Jethro, as a result,

***12*** *And Jethro, Moses father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses’ father-in-law before God.*

They were worshiping in the best way they knew how at that point, with all the leaders before God. They realize that Yahweh is God. It’s a Godward impact upon Jethro and a Godward focus by Moses.

What’s amazing is that when Paul, later on in 1 Corinthians talks about all the miracles that happened in the wilderness, including what Moses might have shared there about the rock bringing forth water, Paul said the rock which Yahweh delivered Israel through, was Christ. So Moses and Jethro are there and they’re worshiping. Who are they worshiping? They’re worshiping Jesus, recognizing the second member of the Godhead and understanding who Yahweh is in just a small way that we start to understand more from where we sit. It’s a wonder and an awe.

Leaders are worshipful of God. It’s so easy to lose that sense of wonder and to actually even steal it for ourselves and take credit for what only God has done. Or we dwell on hardship and we lose that sense of awe. Instead of being worshipful, we’re just miserable. It’s always the fate of those deluded by a God-complex. When we put people or ourselves on a pedestal, there’s just disappointment. And instead of saying Jesus is awesome, we say, so-and-so is awesome, or this church is awesome.

It’s like John the Baptist’s disciples or like the Christian celebrity culture of Corinth. When we compete with Christ, we lose our wonder. This can happen where parents think that their well-behaving or Christian children are the result of their hard work, as if they accomplished this and they have the formula. And then we worship them and crave all the secrets of their success. Or business leaders or some other profession; we assume that the growth is their doing and we begin to worship people and are drawn after them. But true spiritual leaders are Godward in focus and impact. They are worshipful. They know that we are finite and God is not. They seek to decrease, that Jesus might increase.

**Lesson #3 Needful: The Reality of Disorder (13-16)**

This is why we have to have leaders. We have to learn to anticipate the reality of disorder.

In one country far from here, there was a hard-working businessman. Every month, he was forced to leave work and visit court because of a simple clerical error. His name had just been mis-recorded by one letter. And because of that and all the amount of issues before the court, it took nine years for it to be dismissed. Another man, filed charges a month after his brother disappeared, and was still waiting for the end of a murder case after 22 years. Of 36 witnesses, only 3 had been heard. Four died before even being presented. And unfortunately, this type of situation is not uncommon because at that time, in this country, there were only 13 judges for every 1,000,000 people. It’s one of the worst ratios in the world. It was so overwhelming, the amount of problems and just trying to deal with all of these situations, that there were 22,000,000 cases pending in the district courts. There were 4,500,000 waiting in the high courts. And in the Supreme Court, more than 60,000 waited. This was just a big mess.

This is the reality of disorder in the world in which we live. There are just lots of problems. And we realize this is why we need leaders to help sort through some of these messes. We see the disorder in verses 13-16, and there are a few challenges in particular that we can anticipate from people in life. And the first is just continual problems. We can just anticipate that life will be messy. And you see it displayed there in verse 13.

***13*** *The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening.*

There are continual problems; morning until evening. I remember as a young man reading this passage and thinking “All day? How many problems could there be? How many problems could people possibly have?” And then I became a dad. And you start to realize whether you’re in leadership as a parent or as a principal or as a pastor or the police, or as a president, it takes less than like one hour on the job to realize there are lots of problems. Leaders are well-acquainted with the reality of disorder. And you realize that everything is working against you. It doesn’t matter if it’s the laundry or the dishes or the siblings in the relationship or the car or the house or the job. It’s just disorder; everything is breaking all the time. Things break, but what’s worse is that relationships break. And those are the hard ones. They can exhaust even the best of leaders. There are continual problems. Life is messy. We anticipate the reality of disorder.

Not only is life messy with continual problems, but they’re met with feeble solutions. Trying to bring order out of chaos is just overwhelming. We do the best we can, but sometimes, we just have feeble solutions we settle for that are not entirely productive. They’re just what we tried initially.

***14*** *When Moses’ father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, “What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?”*

He’s like, “This is not a long–term solution. All of this stuff is on your shoulders?” It’s the reality of disorder. There’s just an overwhelming amount of problems and there’s no time to innovate for structure. It’s just a feeble solution. And Moses explains why. It’s because the people need help learning what God wants. There’s spiritual confusion. It’s an illiteracy here that we can understand. The people don’t know what God wants.

***15*** *And Moses said to his father-in-law, “Because the people come to me to inquire of God;* ***16*** *when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make them know the statutes of God and his laws.”*

“People don’t know, so I’m trying to help.” Israel had come from a pagan nation with pagan practices. They had a long way to go before they understood how to form a nation modeled after the righteousness of Yahweh. So they needed help. Someone once said, it took months to get Israel out of Egypt, but it would take decades to get the Egypt out of Israel. And truly, it was even longer. And besides that, they were former slaves. They had just received freedom. They had been denied justice for so long that they seek it desperately, now. But they don’t know what it looks like. There is spiritual confusion. There are feeble solutions and continual problems. This is the reality of disorder. It’s why leaders are needful.

It’s one of the first things we see defined in the New Testament once God has decided to build His church. He gives leaders. They are the gift to the church; leaders to help as shepherds. And the need is laid out for the church to be led and fed. Isaiah says we are all like sheep who have gone astray. We’re spiritually confused. We’re stumbling. And Jesus saw the crowds like sheep without a shepherd. We need more though than just shepherds in general.

We need the Good Shepherd who is truly the leader of the church. And this Good Shepherd laid down His life for us. He is one who went silently, like a sheep Himself, to the slaughter, to suffer judgment for our sins on the cross in our place. This is our leader, who led through service and sacrifice. His sheep know His voice and they know His words and they listen. But because of Jesus, we have something Moses only dreamed about. You see, after Jesus rose again from His resurrection, the people might have clung to Him as “Here’s our leader for the church.” And yet, he said “The best way for Me to lead is to go be with the Father.” Why is that? It was gain because when Jesus went to be with the Father, He sent the Holy Spirit to be amongst His people, to teach them from His Word, guiding them into truth so that the apostles could lay the foundation and we’d have the holy Word of God that would be sufficient. The Holy Spirit helps us to understand and to follow Jesus’ lead. And not only that, Jesus is now interceding for us before the Father. What a gift! And yet, He still says leaders are needful to help in this process. It’s how He works.

We can overlook the challenges of disorder, and we can start to doubt the need for leadership, but that would be naïve. We need to remember how many problems need to be addressed, how many feeble solutions need to be improved, how much spiritual confusion needs to be dispelled. This is just a reality. Leaders are finite, but they are needful. And that brings us to how leaders think.

**Lesson #4 Plural: The Necessity of Structure (17-21a, 22-23)**

Leaders are plural. There’s a distribution of the job that needs to be done. Spiritual leadership is not a one-man job; it’s plural.

Maybe on a Saturday morning you’ve been outside where there are kids in those multi-colored uniforms taking the soccer field. They’re barely able to waddle, some of them, but they’re meandering around. There are anxious parents on the sidelines who are far more worried about the scores than the children are. Maybe you’ve participated in one of those games or at least watched where there’s a certain player who is a few years older and some inches taller than the rest. They realize the other kids haven’t caught on and they begin to win on their own. And despite all the plays and the practices that the coach has given them, they decide that they have one strategy: dribble to the goal and shoot. And pretty soon, the game is not 11 on 11; it’s 11 versus 1. And the child is just ignoring all the cries for passes and they just try to do it themselves. And sometimes the rest of the team is just sitting and watching. Or even worse, the game devolves so that it’s not just 1 on 11, but it’s 1 on 21. This is what the NBA calls “hero ball,” where one person abandons any strategy of team and relies completely on themselves to carry the squad to victory. It’s not so much a strategy as it is the abandonment of a game planfor the sake of a game person. It’s that kind of neglect of structure that hurts the group.

It’s a self-reliance that’s not hard to identify, but it’s far more common in life amongst spiritual leaders than we might think. The amount of problems and the amount of disorder and challenges that we face just start to press us into action. And then we get in trusted positions or even have a specific gifting and we just start to lose view of reality and we think we have to complete the tasks. Leaders who refuse to delegate and to bring others into the responsibility because they believe they can do everything best, are walking in foolishness. And this is convicting.

It happens not just for spiritual leaders in the church, but at every level. Whether you’re at home as a parent and you just feel overworked and there are opportunities to lay some structure and bring others into the work, but we just do it because we can do it best for ourselves. And we do it at work where people fail to delegate. We just get into that mindset where we have to complete it. Leadership, especially spiritual leadership, is plural. There’s a necessity for structure so that others can join in what God has given. The problems are always more than one or even a few can complete. So we have to advocate for structure. And that’s what Jethro does in verses 17-21, and his logic unfolds. He gives four reasons why structure is necessary. First, there is a danger to beware, and that danger is burnout.

***17*** *Moses’ father-in-law said to him, “What you are doing is not good.* ***18*** *You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone.*

Jethro can just smell the smoke of burnout. “It’s not sustainable. This is too heavy. You’re going to wear yourself out, Moses.” And not only him, but the people, too. They’re waiting in line day after day for resolution. One commentary reminded me of that saying, “Justice delayed is justice denied.” Everyone is just exhausted and frustrated. There has to be a better way. Moses knows people need help. He’s trying to help, but there’s a necessity of structure that needs to come in. So Jethro is going to help him out because there is a danger to avoid here of burnout.

But there’s also a duty to protect in verse 19-20. Jethro has some advice. He offers it with humility and respect for God, even. He wants to help Moses protect key duties of what you might say are prayer and teaching. It’s what spiritual leaders do, whether it’s in the home or in the church. People who are leading need to talk with God about people and they need to talk with people about God. It’s prayer and teaching.

***19*** *Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God,* ***20*** *and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do.*

It’s this duty to protect of prayer and teaching. Just like the apostolic leaders in the book of Acts who determined it’s not right to neglect these duties of prayer and teaching. And so they devise a structure and set aside men to clear the plate of general tasks and to deal with those important things, so that they can serve in the duty to which they have been called. That’s what Jethro is talking about here. It’s a duty to protect teaching and prayer.

And so third, he suggests Moses create some structure here. We’ll call this a delegation to leverage. It’s just being able to give tasks to other people to do. It’s going to help him succeed in a much more healthy way. So Jethro defines a few conditions by which Moses can begin to leverage this structure to get others involved. There are a few conditions. Here are four: ability, accountability, authority, and clarity. Let’s look at them in turn. First, ability. He needs to identify men skilled for the job.

***21*** *Moreover, look for able men from all the people…*

The justice is important, and so you need to be competent. You need to have the skills needed for this job. So leverage men who can meet the requirements; men with ability. But second, how do you leverage this delegation? You need to have accountability. Define the areas of responsibility, here.

***21****…and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens.*

Now tens was a normal military unit and it seems not like he’s giving the specific number requirements as much as a general structure or even a figure of speech explaining that there has to be some kind of groupings by which people are accountable. And it’s almost as if he’s defining a lower court with appellate judges and higher appellate courts, etc. He’s just helping him draw out the spheres of accountability. Third, they need authority. Moses needs to define and defend their freedom to work.

***22*** *And let them judge the people at all times.*

This lower court needs authority and freedom to make decisions and to be available, and provide daily access for lesser issues. They need authority and freedom, and they need to be empowered to do this. And fourth is clarity. So within that freedom, Moses has to define the limits they should respect.

***22*** *Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves.*

“They need to be able to identify what things they can handle and what things they should bring to you.” So maybe once a month, they bring the big messes to Moses as sort of a supreme court of last resort. That’s the delegation.

And if it’s not leveraged well, and we see this in life, it’s often because there are not people who have been found who are able, or they’re not held accountable, or given those areas of accountability. They’re not empowered. Or what they’re called to do is not clear. We see this happening and it just reminds us of the opportunity to leverage delegation. We see it here, and the need to understand that leadership is plural. There’s a spreading out of the responsibility that God would have.

There is a danger of burnout to beware, duties of teaching and prayer to protect, and a delegation to leverage. This is the structure and the reasons for it. And finally, there are some dividends to enjoy. These are the benefits Jethro offers. And there are again, four; relief, support, stamina and peace. First, he says “You’re going to experience some critical relief. Just enjoy not being crushed.”

***22*** *So it will be easier for you,*

And secondly, there will be support. He says, “You can enjoy not being alone.”

*and they will bear the burden with you.*

Praise God for people who bear the burden with us! Third is stamina. There will be a viable stamina. “You can enjoy being able to continue.”

***23*** *If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure,*

This is a hard work. And then fourth is peace. It’s social peace and order.

*and all this people also will go to their place in peace.”*

Relief, support, stamina and peace are four dividends enjoyed when delegation is leveraged by leaders with ability, accountability, authority and clarity, so that the duties of teaching and prayer are protected and the danger of burnout is avoided. All these are reasons to advocate for the necessity of structure, in which we see leadership is plural.

God built the idea of having all the people involved in the various levels and spaces that they need to, in the church. There’s even a specific structure in one particular area where there are elders or overseers devoted to preaching and to prayer, and then deacons and deaconesses meeting practical needs. There’s structure and plurality that flows according to God’s order. Now, structure brings challenges. And we can understand for Moses, it would have been hard to start to organize this. But it’s necessary and it’s worth it. We don’t want to overcomplicate things and we need God’s wisdom, but we understand that it is an important reality.

God designed the human body, which is a work of art, but it’s also an engineering

marvel. In the same way, Christ is the head, and in His body, the church, there is a diversity in the unity. There is order and complexity. There is beauty and structure. There is a breadth of gifts and important ways in which there is a plurality of leaders, and then even equipping for others to be able to continue to do ministry. We dare not begin to think we are indispensible or everything hangs on us. That forgets the way that the body works together, as if one part is more important than the other. No, there is a structure in which we work.

The nature of a pastor’s work in Ephesians 4 is to equip saints for the work of ministry. One pastor makes the point like this: When I became a pastor, I left the ministry. And what he’s saying is, “I stepped to a role of equipping so that others could do the ministry. I’m equipping others.” He offers a few pictures of what a church can be that I think are helpful, to an extent. The first he says is that churches can sometimes be like a cruise ship. One in which everyone comes to enjoy all the church offers and what the church provides for them. It’s an experience. The second is that of a battleship. That’s one in which everyone follows the orders of one leader and waits for the ship to kind of do this or do that. The last is an aircraft carrier. That’s one in which the ship serves as a launch pad for all the planes and pilots to go fight the war. There is a sense in which leaders equip others to do ministry.

And we have to beware the caution of as leaders, whether we’re at school, or in the home, or at work or in the church, where we kind of get consumed with our own self-importance and think we’re the one accomplishing it all. Or as followers, where we sort of get passive and let leaders sort of take the brunt and forget that we’re being called to step in and pray for, support, and help leaders, and to help them protect the duties and priorities that God has called them to do. In every healthy country or home, there is some kind of structure. The form it takes is fluid, but the reality of it can’t be neglected. It’s important! And so we pray for leaders, advocate for structure, and recognize the need for leadership to be plural. And realize that serving God and others well means depending on God and others more. Leaders are finite.

**Lesson #5 Faithful: The Priority of Character (21b)**

This is how leaders are to be selected. They are to be faithful. And this is just highlighting the priority of character. It’s how leadership is defined and the criteria of character. They are faithful.

There was a frequent speaker at schools. He was well-regarded as a charismatic leader. He was elected to a 10-year term as judge to help settle cases. And in 2005 he was re-elected. His whole platform was built on a sense of justice and getting “tough on teen crime.” And he was tough! He sentenced thousands of students to detention centers for minor infractions; one so simple as a Facebook page mocking a local vice-principal. Teens were hauled into court, persuaded, some claim even coerced, to waive rights to legal counsel, and swiftly sentenced to months, at times, years of detention. And why is that? Apparently the judge secretly helped form a group of investors to build a private, for-profit detention facility. It was a center for which the builder paid the judge a finder’s fee of over $2 million. It wasn’t until 2007, when parents complained and there was an investigation, that they realized the ulterior motives. And the judge himself was sentenced to 28 years in prison.

No matter how charismatic or gifted a leader seems, the essential ingredient to true leadership will always be character. It’s what we need to keep in mind when we select leaders. We highlight character. Jethro identifies three qualities in particular. First is spiritual maturity. He says to look for

***21*** *men who fear God,*

Look for men who have a heart that lives as if God is real. It’s not a terror of God, but a reverence for God. It’s a respect for who He is and what He wants. That’s the kind of wisdom that they required, that Solomon, the great man of wisdom says is where knowledge begins. Men who fear God have spiritual maturity. The second character quality is proven reliability. Men

*who are trustworthy*

They have a heart that wants to do things right and wants to get things done. They’re trustworthy. They’re reliable. And then last is absolute integrity. He highlights a heart that refuses to do things wrong. Men who

*hate a bribe*

It’s reliability and integrity that flow out of a spiritual maturity. These are men who fear God, who are trustworthy, and hate a bribe. They are men who are faithful. And that should remind us of how the priority carries over in the New Testament, highlighting character with leaders. Yes, ability is a component, but the entirety of the emphasis is on character; on who they are. And that’s the priority we highlight. We highlight it not only in our leaders, but in our own selves and in our children. It’s more than the performance, but in who they are as a person, in their character.

On a human level, we take steps toward this, but on the divine level, we fall far short. Every single leader, we start to realize ways in which we lack maturity, ways in which we aren’t reliable, where we lack integrity. And so we seek and we strive after that. But at the end of the day, we do realize that there’s only one man who can truly judge rightly. There’s only one man who, though innocent, went on trial before the court of guilty men and was condemned. And He suffered the punishment of sinners, that they might be credited with His righteousness. He is the true leader of the church and He is faithful. Our whole trust is in Him. It’s the righteousness that He completed and that He offers that we’re called to walk in. It is Spirit-empowered character that comes from Him. And it’s very easy, like the nation with Saul in the Old Testament, where we highlight stature or charisma when we choose leaders. But God’s emphasis is character, faithfulness.

**Lesson #6 Teachable: The Ability to Hear (24-27)**

This is how leaders respond to counsel. It’s a final lesson just on the ability to hear. It’s a quality we all need to imitate. One thing healthy leaders never lose is the ability to hear. They’re teachable.

A few weeks ago, Pastor Ritch preached on Deuteronomy 6. He was talking about parents and the importance of teaching children on the way or at bed or when you wake up. So, Janea and I, my wife, we were thinking, “How do we apply this?” We were having a conversation that Sunday and trying to talk about the gospel with our daughter. We were saying, “You know, we’re not perfect parents, but God is a perfect Father. None of us have been perfect children, but Jesus was the perfect son.” We’re trying to have this gospel conversation, and she hears that and then she goes, “Yeah, I know. But who was Jesus’ wife? How come He didn’t have a wife?” We’re thinking, “Oh, this is what we get for talking about God; a hard question.” So we were kind of looking at each other. We were stammering, “Well, Jesus had a mission. He was here for just a few years. He had to die for the sins of the world. He was perfect.” And she just kind of says, “I know who His wife is.” We’re thinking, “Oh no! What kind of heresy is going to…” And then she says, “Christians. Christians are his wife.” It doesn’t matter how many years of seminary training you’ve acquired or how long you’ve been at church. That is a much better answer. I said, “You know what, Jade? You’re right. Jesus has a bride, and that’s the church. He died for her and He’s getting her ready and there is a wedding feast and we’re all waiting for it. It’s going to be in heaven together. That’s exactly right!”

I thought it was a curve ball coming at me, but actually the Holy Spirit had just put a T-ball for a gospel conversation right there. Home run! So much so that Jade looked up at me kind of smiled and said, “Did I just teach *you*?” (Laughter!) Yes, you did. We’re never too old or too important to stop listening to Godly wisdom and truth no matter where it comes from…whether it’s from a six-year-old daughter or a gentile father-in-law. It is necessary that healthy leaders stay teachable and retain the ability to hear.

Moses didn’t have to listen here. I mean, this is his father-in-law, and he’s a Midianite, a priest. Moses spoke with God face to face! And yet, Moses realizes that God can grant wisdom however He wants. We see that after all that he’s done, all of the leadership seminars that he could put on, he is teachable.

***24*** *So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said.* ***25*** *Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens.* ***26*** *And they judged the people at all times. Any hard case they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves.* ***27*** *Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went away to his own country.*

In his age and experience, Moses still listens. There is a friendly parting in verse 27 where Jethro goes back to his own country and it seems that Moses’ family stays. There’s just a moment of humility. It’s a sweet family moment. We’re just reminded that all leaders are still in process. It doesn’t matter if you’re as gifted as much as Apollos and you have to learn from Priscilla and Aquilla. Or whether you’re as bold as Peter and you have to learn from Paul in Galatians. There’s never a time where we can lose the ability to hear.

**Proverbs 26:12** Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Everyone, no matter who the leader is, even Moses, we have to remember with Paul,

**1 Corinthians 4:7** What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

We always have more to learn. We should pray for our leaders to be teachable, and we seek to do that ourselves. It’s proof that leaders are finite. But praise God, at the end of the day, there is a perfect leader; one in whom we can place our hope. There is a leader that every human leader merely aims to be faithful as an under-shepherd with what they’ve been entrusted with by Him. He is the Chief Shepherd and he will appear. The episode here with Moses and Jethro reveals a need not only for leadership, but for Lordship. These people, including Moses, need help. They are about to receive the righteous law of God from this mountain and experience their need in ways deeper than they could possibly imagine. It’s a need that can only be met by a true leader far greater than Moses. Healthy spiritual leaders are important, but they’re not all-important. They’re finite. They have limits. And that’s why Psalm 146 says

**Psalm 146:3-5** Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God,

It was this text the hymn writer, Isaac Watts, had in mind when he wrote,

*Why should I make a man my trust?*

*Princes must die and turn to dust;*

*Their breath departs, their pomp, and power,*

*And thoughts, all vanish in an hour.*

*Happy the man whose hopes rely*

*On Isr'el's God; he made the sky,*

*And earth, and seas, with all their train,*

*And none shall find his promise vain.*

*His truth for ever stands secure;*

*He saves th' oppressed, he feeds the poor;*

*He sends the lab'ring conscience peace,*

*And grants the pris'ner sweet release.*

*The Lord hath eyes to give the blind;*

*The Lord supports the sinking mind;*

*He helps the stranger in distress,*

*The widow and the fatherless.*

Leaders are finite, but God is not. Blessed are those whose hope rests in Him!