

How Do You Recognize a Future Leader? #1

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Joshua

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Well, whatever happens this week and next week is not exactly what I had planned to have happen, as funny as that may sound to your ears to hear. I had intended to leave behind the book of Joshua which we have studied for the past three weeks and I really wanted to move into the book of Judges but I just couldn't let myself do that. There were things that I still wanted to share with you from the book of Joshua, things that have been on my heart for literally 25 years or more and I've never had an opportunity to say them and tonight is a night where I have opportunity to do that. It didn't make any sense to move on from Joshua when we were right there and I knew that there were things that needed to be said and so that's just a little bit of a window into the inner conflict that your pastor sometimes feels when he's trying to move on and to keep things moving in the teaching of God's word. There is always a little bit of a tension that you feel about not wanting to skip over important details with giving a sense of continued motion as we move along and that's part of the opportunity and challenge of what we do when we teach the Bible.

For those of you that are visiting, we're very glad to have you with us and let me just kind of give you a little sense of orientation as to how we got here tonight. For the past few months, we've been taking a survey look at the opening books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Joshua. We finished Joshua and we've seen that in these opening books we see God putting himself on display and revealing to us things that happened since the beginning of time. God created the world. God called Abraham out of paganism and said, "Through you I am going to make this great nation and I'm going to bless all the peoples of the earth through your descendants," and Genesis shows how that unfolded through Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. You move into Exodus and the people have multiplied and God gives birth to a nation by delivering them from slavery in Egypt. In Leviticus, he establishes a means to approach him through a system of sacrifice. But in Numbers, we find that the people failed; they rebelled against the God that had delivered them from slavery in Egypt and a whole generation of them perished in the wilderness as punishment for their sin and rebellion against God. In Deuteronomy, Moses, their leader, is about to step off the stage after 40 years of death and destruction and he gives them a final word and then the mantle is passed to Joshua to lead the people into the land that God promised to give to them. That's just a real sweep of those opening books of the Bible and Joshua takes the people into the Promised Land

and experiences victory in the military conquest of the nations that were driven out so that Israel would have their home in which to live.

Now, that would naturally lead into the book of Judges except for one thing: there is a final matter that I want you to glean from Joshua, one which, as I said, I nearly filed away and just put away and said, "I'm not going to spend time on it." But I felt such an inner constraint that I had to say these things and as I started to get into them, I realized, "Okay, there are things for this week and for next week as well." It wasn't a surprise at that, I just, I don't know, I hesitated to spend the time on it, I guess. But as I thought about it, I realized that there are some very instructive things for us as individuals and also as a church. If you spend time to reflect on the life of Joshua, you find many important principles about the nature of spiritual leadership embedded in his life. And as you study the life of Joshua and you look even superficially at how God prepared him for the conquest and the victories that he experienced in the book of Joshua, you realize that you see things modeled in seed form that are found elsewhere in the Bible and which are still very much alive and active today. As we study the life of Joshua, we see a pattern which men and women alike can aim their character after. You see principles of character and of valor that need to be considered and, I guess here's the thing: if we had just parachuted into the book of Joshua without studying the first five books of the Bible and we just started with Joshua 1:1 and saw that, you could understand what the book said but there is a sense in which you would miss the whole genius of Joshua's life. If you've ever read any biographies at all, any biographies that are worth the money that you pay for them, the biography won't simply start and talk about the great events that the man accomplished or the high points of his life, it starts further back. It starts further back and some will go into generations before the man was born if that information is available and then it will walk through his parents and his childhood and the formative events of his young life so that you have a context to understand how it was he came to accomplish what it was that made him famous or worthy of study.

Well, it's the same way with Joshua. As we kind of pivot into what we're going to talk about tonight, here's how we want to approach it: what clues did we have before Joshua entered into the Promised Land, what clues were there in his life that he would be successful at what God had called him to do? Is there anything in Scripture that would show the preparation that led up to his success? Let's approach it from a different angle. Let's talk about it from the perspective of today. Very practical questions and very central questions as we think about the future of our church. For those of you that are visiting, our church is about three years old. We're still very much in our infancy and still very much developing what we will become in future years. Well, one of the things that we think about and talk about as elders and one of the things that we think about as we project the long-term future of our church is this: what kinds of questions should we be asking as men start to come up through the ranks? What is it that we would look for to say, "Here is a man who could be trusted with the mantle of spiritual leadership over the flock of God?"

For those of you that are younger and last week I spent a lot of time talking to the young people, the teenage and younger that come here on Tuesday night, and I was thinking

about you during this time as well. Those of you that sit toward the back with each other, I'm glad that you're here week by week. What is it that you could be aiming your life at so that you don't simply squander your life with the things of this world? How is it that you could aim your life? What kind of character traits should you be thinking about? And what could you be doing to move in a direction so that your life would actually matter for Christ? All of these principles answer these different kinds of questions at which you could look at it and so I intend this to be constructive. I intend it to be encouraging. And I think that it gives you discernment. As we go through this this week and next week, we're going to have a lot of perspective on what we see going on in the Christian world around us at the same time. It's going to take us at least two weeks, tonight and next week, but this will lay a foundation for the life of our church and anyone who wants their life to count for Christ.

Having said that, one last preliminary little matter here: for those of you that have been with our church for a while, I am presupposing an awful lot of material. I am presupposing the teaching that we've already done on elder leadership from Titus 1. If you want to explore this more, those would be good messages to follow up on. We're presupposing a certain level of doctrinal integrity and development in men as we consider these things. We're presupposing a lot that we've taught about the nature of the church. But we're going to approach it from this perspective, here's how I want to approach it here tonight: I want us to think corporately, not so much individually, although you can take this and apply it individually to your life and it's not just the young men that are back there that are in their teens, we have young men in their 20s who are coming up and manifesting spiritual aspirations. Well, what is it that we can look for to say, "Here's a man that's on the right track"? How is it that you as a young man can look at your life and evaluate your things and say, "Here's what I need to aim my life after over the next coming years." These things are very deep and very profound.

So what we're going to do this evening is we're going to start with three distinct questions that will help us answer this question and the question is this: how do you recognize a future leader? How do you recognize a future leader especially in the church? These questions that we're going to ask, they supplement each other. The presence of one trait does not excuse the absence of another. These are character traits that you see in a combination of a man whose life bears evidence of the work of God and that he's being shaped for a future leader so it's not that you can have one and ignore the other two as if they didn't matter; strength in one doesn't excuse weakness in another. There should be a balance of character and a balance of life experience that you start to see unfold in a man that God has his hand on; a man that God is preparing for future leadership. What we want to be able to do as a congregation is to recognize these traits and encourage men that are like this and men who want to become like this, to encourage them and to help them and to pray for them so that they could excel in the future leadership roles that God would have for them down the line. This is the future lifeblood. This is the pipeline of the church and this is what will feed us in the days to come with future leaders of men who desire to be like this and actually aim their life to be like it. I view this as very, very fundamental. I have taught a lot on leadership over the years and these are things that I should have gotten to a lot sooner than I did before tonight.

So let's just ask three questions from the life of Joshua and approach it in that way. First question that you ask is and, remember, I'll say it one last time: remember that we're presupposing elder qualifications. We're presupposing the principles of doctrinal preparation. We're presupposing all of that and looking to how a man lives his life with the understanding that these are the elder qualifications that are revealed in the New Testament. So a lot of presupposition going into this. We're not starting here, we're building on things we've taught in the past. First question, are you ready? Number 1: do you see ability? Do you see ability? Collectively as the body of Christ, do you see ability being displayed in this man's life? And we're going to look at this from the life of Joshua, as I said. The first time that you see Joshua mentioned in Scripture is found in Exodus 17 and I would invite you to turn there. I remember decades ago when I was reading through Scripture almost for the first time and you know that there's a book of Joshua ahead, book #6 in the canonical order, but you start to see Joshua mentioned early in the Bible and it's just very fascinating to see and it's not by accident that that happens. It's not incidental.

In Exodus 17, the first reference that you see to Joshua is found beginning in verse 9. Moses is the appointed leader. They have come out of Egypt. They have crossed the Red Sea and now there are battles that are starting to take place as Israel begins to establish themselves. Exodus 17:1, I'm reading tonight out of a slightly different version, reading out of the original NASB rather than the update that we normally use so if you see some difference with your Bible, that's probably why. But Exodus 17, actually, we're going to begin in verse 8. Exodus 17:8, "Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. So Moses said to Joshua, 'Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.' Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill." Stop right there. Moses appointed Joshua and commissioned him to raise up troops and to lead them into battle against this king that was opposed to Israel and wanted to fight against them.

Now, as you read on in verse 11, you see that Joshua won his victory by the intercession of Moses and by the power of God. Look at verse 11. This is a fairly well known time event in Scripture. "So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword." Joshua, as this text teaches us, Joshua prevailed by the power of God as Moses interceded for them. His hands lifted up in a symbol of intercession, a symbol of dependence upon God and so he wearies as you would weary if you were holding your hands up for an extended period of time but these men come and they support his arms and the intercession is sustained. So as that intercession is taking place, Joshua is victorious but note this: that victory was not independent of the skill, the human skill and the human ability that Joshua brought to the table in order to organize troops and to lead them into battle. God was blessing the human ability of Joshua and brought about victory for the nation through the intercession of Moses and poured that out on the ability that Joshua had previously established.

So picture the significance of this, if you will: there was a battle to be fought and out of the hundreds of thousands of people that came out of Egypt, something in Joshua's life had distinguished him so Moses put his finger on him, as it were, and said, "You're the man." There is an ability. There was demonstrated character and ability that Joshua had manifested that positioned him for the blessing of God. So that's more than 40 years before they actually entered into the Promised Land but here's what I want you to see: we read about Joshua in the book of Joshua and we see these victories that he wins and it all seems so magnificent and it is. It's so glorious and he's so strong in battle. Here's the thing, beloved: that didn't just happen. He didn't simply meander through life and suddenly wake up at 90 years old and he was equipped to do it. He had manifested ability all the way along and had been faithful in the duties and responsibilities given to him so that it was evident that he was prepared and capable of taking responsibility for leadership when the time came. When Joshua led the people into the Promised Land, he did so having first proven his ability as a younger man. Very critical.

So we ask the question when we contemplate, you know, over time. I'm not talking about tonight. Over time as we look forward in the life of our church and we say, "Who are the leaders going to be that come up?" Well, we ask ourselves, "Who has manifested proven ability in some sphere that would show that they have an ability that would carry over in the leadership of God's people?" It's not haphazard. It's not a popularity contest. It's not even a matter of who generates success in an earthly way. We're looking for someone, a future leader. You can recognize a future leader because there is something in their life that exhibits an ability to use the talent and the means that are at their disposal in order to achieve something worthwhile. Let me say that again. That was a mouthful, wasn't it? We seek something in their lives that exhibits, something in their past, something in their present, that exhibits an ability to use the talent and means at their disposal to achieve something worthwhile. Joshua proved that he could lead troops into battle and win. Now, jump ahead 50 years and you're in the nation of Israel and you're saying, "Okay, Joshua is going to lead us. What do I think about this? Oh, he's done it before. He can do it again." So you look for proven ability.

Now, this is something that is illustrated multiple times throughout Scripture and I want to show you a few things like this because...you know, look, I want to be as candid as I possibly can with you tonight. I've been around church leadership in other places for quite a long time and I've seen men who did well and I've seen men who flamed out and failed miserably and I've seen men promoted that I thought never should have been in the position and I've seen men promoted who had earned the right to be there. So there are a lot of past observations that feeds into this and I want this to become part of the life of our church, that we take leadership seriously and we think rightly about it and we think about it not simply in terms – oh, please listen to me – the mere fact that a man has a seminary degree tells you nothing about whether he's a leader or not. It tells you nothing about whether he is prepared to lead people spiritually and to lead an organization. It tells you nothing about that whatsoever. It may be an indicator but a seminary degree by itself does not qualify anyone to say, "I'm a leader." There has to be other things in place that would show that that was true.

Look, I'm just going to be really candid with you tonight. I'm going to lay things out that I probably have no business laying out for you. I'm aware of the fact that most of you are younger than I am and that's okay but I'm mindful of the fact that the day may come when somehow I'm not here and you're going to have to decide and recognize who is it that will be our leader going forward. Now, you're going to have elders in place who will carry the burden of making that decision but in terms of the questions that you ask, in terms of recognizing a man who is someone that you should follow, you need to know the questions to ask and not simply make assumptions based on what the world considers to be qualifications for leadership, especially within the church. A seminary degree is a fine thing; I have one or two. That's great but that doesn't make a man a leader. So you can't simply stop at that question and say, "Oh, he has a Master of Divinity degree from a good school, then let's make him our pastor." That's jumping to conclusions that are not warranted.

You need to ask other questions and, beloved, listen to me: you have to be willing collectively as a body and as elders, Dan and Dane, you have got to be willing to ask hard questions and questions that are going to make the candidate uncomfortable and make him squirm. But we must ask these questions about men who would be elders, men who would be future leaders. We have to ask questions like this because the people of Christ, the church of Christ, the people for whom Christ died, the people of God are too precious to take chances with. As part of our mutual love for one another, as part of our care for one another, we ask these kinds of questions and we don't rest until we get satisfactory answers that would say to us, "Okay, we have a reason to believe going forward that this man will lead us in the proper way." This is how we protect ourselves. This is how we establish our future going forward and one of the questions that you ask is: do you see proven ability in this man's life? Well, there you go.

So let's illustrate this, okay, biblically speaking. Turn over to the book of Acts 7. Moses, even before Joshua was on the scene, Moses manifested ability before he began to lead the people of Israel. Look at Acts 7, beginning in verse 22. I just want you to see a little bit here. It's just so vital to have discernment. It's so vital for us as a body to be able to ask the right questions so that we get to the right answers and it's not about a sheepskin hanging on somebody's office someplace. Acts 7:22, this is Stephen speaking immediately before his martyrdom and he gives a sweeping review of the history of Israel before they begin to stone him. I just want to highlight something for you that in Acts 7:22, he's referring to Moses and he says, "Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds. But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit the brethren, the sons of Israel." So Moses, whose life breaks up in kind of these forty-year blocks of time: he spends 40 years preparing and 40 years in the wilderness and then 40 years leading Israel. In those early 40 years of his life, Scripture says that he was educated in all the ways of the Egyptians and manifested himself as a man of power and deeds. So when God called him, he wasn't calling some simpleton out of the dunce corner of the school room, he was calling a man who had proven ability at a very high level before God ever established him in his

leadership role of the people of Israel. So Moses was proven before he entered into his leadership role.

Now, by the way just to be clear, I'm here until I die. Okay? I don't want anybody to get uncomfortable and say, "Why is he talking about this? You know, is he going to be here next week?" That's not the point. It's just that I don't know the future and so I've got to save these things while I can but I'm not going anywhere. You're stuck with me for better or for worse.

Now, so that's Moses. David and what you see as you look through this, the ability comes out in different places. David won battles before he charged Goliath with a slingshot. Turn over to 1 Samuel 17. We're just picking some people at random here. 1 Samuel 17, tucked in between the book of Judges and Ruth and 2 Samuel. 1 Samuel 17. You remember the story of how David slew Goliath with a slingshot but before he entered into that battle, there had been preparation that took place in his life that had nothing to do with engaging a Philistine in battle but there were other things that were going on in his life that prepared him for the moment that God had appointed for him. 1 Samuel 17:31, "When the words which David spoke were heard, they told them to Saul, and he sent for him. David said to Saul," remember, Israel was frightened because Goliath was so big and they were all afraid to go out and fight him themselves. "David said to Saul, 'Let no man's heart fail on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.' Then Saul said to David, 'You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth while he has been a warrior from his youth.'" Look at what David says. He says, "But David said to Saul, 'Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God.'" He had manifested ability to fight, to manifest courage and skill to kill an opponent bigger and stronger than he was physically speaking. It was proven. It was established. He didn't go out after having played a bunch of 1000 year BC video games and then he just picked up a slingshot and got lucky with it. He had developed skill as a shepherd out in the fields with the flock by himself, being faithful to duty and showing courage to protect the flock that was entrusted to him.

So when it came time to fight Goliath, David says, "I've been here before. I recognize this terrain. Big guy? I step up trusting God and use my skill and I will kill him. This uncircumcised Philistine who mocks the people of God, God will enable me to use this skill that I previously developed in order to give a victory over this man."

Look at verse 37, "And David said, 'The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.' And Saul said to David, 'Go, and may the LORD be with you.'" You know what happens. I don't even need to read the text. Moses, ability in the learning of the Egyptians. David, skill in fighting while he was a shepherd.

Let's look at a New Testament example from a different realm. Turn to the book of Philippians 2:19. It's all about proving yourself, establishing something with your life that says you have the ability to do things. Philippians 2:19, between Ephesians and Colossians. Philippians 2:19, this is the Apostle Paul. Whole different realm. I'm trying to give you different realms so that you get a sense of what I'm talking about. Philippians 2:19, Paul says, "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly," this is a pastoral setting, "so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father." Before he ever sent Timothy as his representative to the church at Philippi, there was a prior experience with Timothy where Timothy served Paul faithfully and manifested his own independent sense of love and care for the flock of God, proven over time, proven in service to Paul, showing that he had a spiritual ability to minister to the people of God in such a way that Paul could be confident and know the outcome when he sent him before Timothy ever arrived. Proven ability. Proven faithfulness. Proven courage. Proven character. All established beforehand.

If you think about it, we won't turn to this passage, Mark 6:3, even our Lord Jesus before he entered into his public ministry at the age of 30, had manifested patient, quiet faithfulness and skill as a carpenter. He had manifested ability in another realm before he embarked on his public ministry. Before Joshua led the people of Israel, before he led them as a nation, he had manifested ability in a smaller realm beforehand. The same thing with Moses. The same thing with David. The same thing with Timothy. And the Lord leads us by example as he always does. So when we consider people for future leadership in whatever role that's going to be, the greater the responsibility that that person aspires after, the more closely we ask ourselves, "Where has he shown ability in the past?" If he has shown ability and the capability to bring about good results with what's given to him, then you have a greater sense that, "Okay, this is somebody that we can have confidence in as he enters into leadership."

One final thing about this point, about this question: do you see ability? You examine a life and there is just so much to be said here. A man who aspires after leadership in the church understands and welcomes the fact that his aspirations call for the scrutiny of the people of God on his life. He doesn't resent being subject to evaluation this way because if he has identified with the interests of Christ and he understands the supreme value of the people of God and how easy it is for people to be deceived and for deceivers, deceiving men to come and be wolves in sheep's clothing, then the man who aspires after leadership says, "I don't mind the questions at all. Of course. I would expect you to question my life, to examine me to see if I measure up because I understand that this isn't about me. This is about the sheep for whom Christ died," and that's too important to treat lightly.

Having said all of these things and as you look at these examples and consider what we've talked about with Moses and David and Timothy, you have to look past externals. The experience, the ability that has been manifested in a man's life may not be directly

related to what he is now going to take the step to accomplish. You wouldn't think that being a shepherd would prepare you for battle with a Philistine, but it did. You wouldn't think that Egyptian learning would qualify you to lead the Hebrews, but with Moses it did. So you just have to think and ask questions and look for that defining characteristic of a man's life that says he has shown the ability to do things and succeed at them. Pastoral ministry is not the option of last resort for men that have failed at everything else in their lives, right? That wouldn't even make any sense. Why would you put a proven loser in front of the people of God? If the past is a prediction of future outcome, then a guy who has squandered opportunity and failed at everything that he has done, I have no one in mind as I say this, I'm just talking in principles, a proven loser is not qualified to be a proven leader. It seems so obvious, doesn't it?

So let's bring this back to the present and just make a little point of application. You young men, you younger boys still in your teenage years, still under the authority of your parents roofs, do you aspire to serve Christ in your life? Do you aspire after leading the people of God? Well, let me help you understand where that starts: it starts today in your present responsibilities. What you do is that you look at the present responsibilities of what you have to do today and tomorrow and what it is that your teachers or your parents or other people in authority over you have laid out for you to do and you understand that your responsibility if you would actually not squander your life but actually use it in the service of Christ, you say, "My job right now is to manifest skill in what I have in front of me to do even if it doesn't seem to be directly related to anything spiritual." Your job is to take ability and take your responsibilities seriously and do them well and step-by-step, week-by-week, month-by-month, year-by-year, cultivate patterns of ability in your life that would give people a reason to trust you with something bigger when the time comes. You see, Martyn Lloyd Jones said one time that, in a statement that shocked people, he said he wouldn't cross the street to hear himself preach and I understand why he said that. I feel that way about my own preaching.

I realize, young men, when I speak to you that I speak with a lot of force and passion that might come across as intimidating. Understand that that's not my point. I speak with passion because these things are so vitally important and I speak to you urgently because I want you to succeed. I want your life to matter for Christ and I know how tempted you are to waste your opportunities day-by-day and to waste hours of time doing things that don't amount to anything. And here's the thing: there is an ever growing vacuum of leadership in the church and in our society at large and while we could cry rivers of tears about how bad it is and we don't have the greatness of the generation that won World War II for us anymore and that's true, we don't, what you need to understand as a young person is that this vacuum of leadership that is all about us is your opportunity to stand up and to stand out and to have a life that matters but you're not going to do that if you're squandering your time as a youth and you're cultivating patterns of laziness and indolence that can only set you on the wrong course going forward and join forces with the mediocrity that is all around you. You have to step out of that and say, "I am going to be different. And whether or not God gives me leadership in days to come, at least I'm going to be a man who takes whatever skill God has given to me and I'm going to cultivate it

and I'm going to use it and I'm going to be faithful and just maybe God will see fit to use me in the future even though right now my realm is very narrow."

You see, you have to develop these life convictions before you get to college. You have to develop them now while you can. It's not too early for you to set in your mind, "I'm going to aim my life to matter for the people of God and for the Christ of my salvation." And don't even worry about, "Well, I don't see how this relates to spiritual leadership." That doesn't even matter. It's irrelevant. Just be faithful. Just cultivate ability and let the Lord take care of where that leads you in the future. But if you squander opportunity and you squander your ability and you don't care about being faithful, trust me, no one of any consequence is ever going to ask you to lead anything. So take the opportunity now, I'm begging you as your pastor. I'm begging you for your own good. I'm begging you for the people of God. We're going to need leaders here. Step up and be one, would you? It's all I can do to not call you out by name but just assume I'm talking about you if this connects with you at all.

So do you see ability collectively as a church? That's what we ask ourselves. Secondly, I have 3 points and that first one took 45 minutes. Wow. Do the math on that. I've been waiting a long time to say these things, beloved. It's kind of like the pressure has built up and you turn the spigot on and it all just comes out because it just matters so much. Secondly: do you see loyalty? Do you see loyalty? Do you see ability? Second question that the life of Joshua points us to is: do you see loyalty? The next time that you see Joshua mentioned in Scripture after that passage in Exodus 17 comes 7 chapters later in Exodus 24 and I invite you to turn there with me. Exodus 24. There is a very important term used to describe Joshua that gives us a lot of the insight about the kind of man that he was. Exodus 24:12. God had given the law to Moses and he says to him now in Exodus 24:12, "Now the LORD said to Moses, 'Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction.' So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God." We think about Moses being a solitary figure before the Lord but repeatedly you see Joshua right there with him at the time that these major events are happening in the course of redemptive history. Joshua, his servant.

One more passage and then we'll talk about that word "servant" for a moment. Turn over to Exodus 33:11, "Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent." The servant of Moses. The servant of Moses. Now, there are different words for "servant" that are used in the Bible and sometimes you might think of a servant is simply someone who is just doing menial labor as if it was a housemaid or a butler. That's not the word that is used here to describe Joshua. This word used here is not a term in the original language referring to menial labor rather, watch this, it refers to someone who gives personal service to an important person. He gives personal service to an important person. It's a higher position and a closer relationship than what you might suspect if you're just looking at the English word "servant." This is the word "servant" that is used to describe Joseph's service to Potiphar in Egypt when he was over all of Potiphar's house. This is the word "servant" that is used

to describe Elisha's relationship to Elijah later on in the Old Testament. Scripture describes Joshua as that kind of servant of Moses, a personal assistant, a close relationship, and Joshua was in that position for over 40 years.

Look at Joshua 1:1, "It came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, 'Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross the Jordan and go into the land.'" Early on in the career of Moses prior to the 40 years of wandering that is described in the book of Numbers, Joshua is found as this kind of personal servant to Moses. Fast-forward through all of the years of wilderness wandering, 40 years of them, and at the very end of Moses's life and at the start of Joshua's entrance into greater public service, he is described as this servant. Now, think about what that means. Joshua did not arise to authority in the book of Joshua after having sat on the sidelines just biding the time for his opportunity to come. There was a great leader, Moses, and Joshua was there beside him throughout all of that time and for all of those decades, being a servant to what Moses needed, following Moses's instructions and supporting Moses's leadership. That's very, very instructive for us. Joshua through all of those decades was serving alongside Moses and contributed to the success of his leadership so that, I'm kind of coming back to the theme that you don't gamble with the future of God's people. You need to know what you're getting and so you ask the question: how do you recognize a future leader? Well, ask this question, ask whether his life somehow bears the mark of serving another leader. Is there a mark somewhere in his life that this man has worked under and knows how to support a man who is ahead of him in life. A leader must first learn how to follow or he will Lord it over the people under his charge. A leader must have first learned the humility of how to take instruction himself; of how to support decisions that he might personally disagree with. A leader needs to learn that quality if he is going to evoke that kind of response from the charge that is eventually given to him. Joshua spent 50 years, give or take, developing just precisely that trait and he was loyal to Moses throughout it all. We're not going to take the time to look at it but you can see at the end of Deuteronomy Moses affirming Joshua up before he dies and setting him off into his own future before Moses passes from the scene.

But it's more than just learning how to follow, beloved, and again, you young men and you young ladies, I don't mean to be exclusive here. It's more than simply learning how to follow. A man learns about leadership when he is alongside and interacting with other leaders. There is a personal element that goes in and there are conversations that take place privately and questions, "What were you thinking when you did this?" And "Why this way and not that way?" And the guy just imparts his understanding in the process of that relationship. That's what's supposed to happen. You see, I did a search on Amazon today and just for books, I just asked for books about leadership and there were over 129,000 hits on that simple search. There is no way that we need that many books on leadership. There is no way that those men aren't simply repeating each other and it's just very, very ironic to see some of the early hits being men that you have never heard of. Who are they leading to be writing about leadership, I'd like to know? There is money to be made on writing leadership, to actually lead is a different question.

So you young people that have a Christian dad, serve your dad. You talk to your dad, "What are you thinking about this, dad? Why are you doing it this way, dad?" Let the first Christian leader that God has put into your life be someone that you try to learn from, recognizing that you see his flaws up close and personal in a way that no one else does. Look past that. Respect the position that God has given that leader in your life and serve him. Be faithful to him. Be loyal to him because there is no integrity stepping into leadership, calling for loyalty and people to follow you as you follow Christ, there is no integrity to that if you haven't been willing to follow first yourself. There is just no way around these things.

Alexander White, who has written a very good volume on Bible characters, lived primarily in the 19th century and says this in writing about the life of Joshua. Listen to this carefully, quote, "When a young man has eyes to see and a heart to love and honor those good and gifted men he reads and hears about or still better, those who live near him, nothing could be a sounder sign or a surer promise of his own future character than that." You young people, think about who it is that you are attracted to. The friends that you are after. The friends that you want to be like. The adults that you respect and try to follow. Ask yourself whether you're being attracted to godly people or whether you're being attracted to sensual, ungodly people who have worldly interests at heart but not the things of Christ at the center of their heart. Examine who you are following and at the same time, understand that you have a responsibility even as a young person to cultivate affections for the things of God. While I've been talking primarily to the younger people, this is still true for us gray hairs as well. We never outgrow these principles of ability and loyalty and manifesting faithfulness to proven leaders of God.

Final point, point number 3: do you see courage? Do you see courage? Spiritual leadership will inevitably bring opposition and we need to know what a man does when the heat is on so that we can know when the inevitable opposition comes how is he going to respond. Will he respond in faithfulness to the word of God? Will he be true to Christ? Or will his knees buckle and will he retreat in the face of an onslaught of ungodly men? We need some kind of indication of that if we're going to put a man on the front lines of spiritual leadership. Joshua proved himself in just such an occasion. Look at Numbers 14, beginning in verse 5. You will remember, I believe, if you were here, that at the beginning of the book of Numbers, having come out of Egypt, it was time for them to go into the Promised Land, and Moses sent out a dozen spies into the land to spy it out, to check out the geography, and test the strength of those that they would go up in battle against and they already had the promise of God that they would succeed. There was no spiritual reason whatsoever for a man to come back in fear but that's exactly what 10 of the spies did and they said, "These guys are going to annihilate us. We can't go against them," and they melted the hearts of the people and everyone was afraid.

Look at Numbers now, with that little bit of background, Numbers 14:4, "The people said to one another, 'Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt.'" "We're going to die if we go forward and do what the Lord said so let's go back to Egypt," following the report of 10 of the 12 spies. Verse 5, "Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel. Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb

the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, 'The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us - a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.'"

So over against the majority report, over against a nation that disagreed with them, Joshua and Caleb stood up and said, "No. Let's be strong and courageous. Let's go forward trusting the Lord. Let's not turn back in fear and dishonor God that way." What was the response? It nearly cost them their neck. Verse 10, "But all the congregation said to stone them with stones." That's how intense the hostility was against them. That's how deep the opposition was to what they were saying and there is so much there that we should talk about. I'm focusing on the issue of character and the issue of courage, that these men knew God well enough and they didn't back down in the face of hostility and said, "No, I know God and this is what he wants and we are going to go forward in this direction. I don't care how many of you are opposed to me." That's courage and that was cultivated 40 years before he ever led the people of Israel into the Promised Land.

Look at verse 30. God judges the entire nation and tells them, to a man, that they will not enter into the Promised Land. Verse 28, I said verse 30, look at verse 28 and as it says in verse 26, "The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 'How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me. Tell them this, "As I live, just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you; your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me. Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you,"" here it is, here is our hero, ""except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun."" Their fidelity to God was rewarded. They escaped the judgment that 600,000 other men faced when they fell into the wilderness. When you include women and children, maybe 2 million. So great is the value that God places on this kind of courage. Joshua went into the Promise Land as the oldest man in the nation because all of his contemporaries and above perished for their unbelief. The point for tonight is: leaders stand on principle even when it is unpopular to do so. We could multiply biblical examples of this. Moses stood against Pharaoh. David slew Goliath. Paul opposed the Jews. Our Lord Jesus condemned the Pharisees and withstood Pilate without flinching. Courage in the face of danger.

Now, lest we set the example too high and too lofty and beyond the realm of our probable experience, let's realize that it's not always so dramatic. Some men prove their worth in simple self-sacrifice in their service to Christ. You see their courage, you see their self-denial shown in quieter ways but no less manifesting a courage and a valor of character that is worthy of respect and worthy of honor and which manifests the type of character trait which should be evident in a future leader of the people of God.

Look over at Philippians 2 again and I'm almost done here. I know, I know, famous last words. Philippians 2:25, Paul says, "I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus," here's our man of the hour, "I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier." Do you see the loyalty being manifested there in this side comment as Paul describes him? Epaphroditus was loyal and that's not even our point here at this passage but it's there, the package is there. Verse 25, "who is also your messenger and minister to my need; because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore," verse 28, "I have sent him all the more eagerly in order that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you." Now, watch this, "Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard." Why? "Because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me." Courage in the service of Christ, moving forward even though he was seemingly at death's door. He manifested courage in order to be faithful to Christ even when it was against his own self-interest.

So how do you recognize a future leader? We have just started tonight. We'll finish next week or the following week or the week after that. We'll finish in the future, just not tonight, let's put it that way. How do you recognize a future leader? Do you see ability? Do you see loyalty? Do you see courage? And here's the thing, beloved: whether it's in a spirit of self-sacrifice for the saints, a spirit of self-denial in the pursuit of truth or standing alone against the spirit of the age, you should see in a future leader a manifestation of courage that prefers fidelity to Christ over his earthly self-interest. You should see something in an aspiring leader, you should see something that tells you, "This man prefers Christ over himself. This man will stand for Christ even if a mob comes after him to silence him. This man will stand for Christ even if he is lying on his bed in deathly illness. This man will set aside the priorities of this world for the priorities of the kingdom."

You see, you need to see these things in advance. This is not on-the-job training that a man says, "I'll grow into it." You don't give a man the office of a leader in the church, you don't give away the position of an elder and say, "Well, I hope he grows into it." No, no, you install people as leaders who have already manifested the characteristics of leaders to begin with. That's what happened with Joshua. He manifested ability and courage and loyalty and a whole lot more that we'll see next week. This is how, you young men, this is how you get your start. You think on these traits, these character aspects and you embrace them and you say, "That's the kind of man I want to be."

Those of you that are further along in life, maybe you have squandered decades of opportunity, it's not too late for you to start. Had it laid out before you, you've got to break away from the inertia. If you been unfaithful, you've got to break away from that inertia of your prior unfaithfulness and say, "My time is even shorter. It's even more urgent for me to get serious about it now." The church of Christ needs men to rise up and lead. I'm wondering which of you are going to answer that call. Which of you are going

to say, "I want to be that way. I want to develop that. I want to cultivate that." And for us as a church, this is how we recognize the right men over time.

I pledge to you as your pastor that as long as I'm here as a pastor, any men that are put forward for leadership, particularly for the office of elder, you'll be able to see these qualities in them in one form or another. Flawed as they may be. Flawed as your existing 3 elders are. You'll see things that resemble these characteristics in future men that come for leadership. I pledge that to you tonight. And for those of you that don't aspire after leadership but you want to be faithful to Christ, pray for your leadership. Pray that God would raise up men like this. A church is only going to be as good as its leaders. If you have unfaithful men in leadership, you'll have an unfaithful church. If you have self-seeking, ambitious men in the church, you're going to have a selfish, fractious congregation. These things matter and this is what we all should aspire after in our own loyalty and discipleship to Christ. Thank you for your patience.

Let's bow in prayer.

Our Father, when we contemplate ability and courage and loyalty, ultimately the greatest example is our Lord Jesus Christ. It was courage and loyalty and fidelity to you that led him to abandon heaven for the sake of laying his life down for us. Lord Jesus, there was never a more courageous man than you. We're all cheap imitations at best but we aspire after what you modeled for us. We aspire after your selfless spirit of sacrifice. We aspire after the kind of loyalty that you first showed to us even in your faithfulness to be our Redeemer at the cross. Let us respond in a spirit that somehow approximates these lofty standards that are set forth before us in your word. We confess to you that we all fall short. We confess to you that we're not all that we should be. We confess to you that in our weakness that we can only ask who is adequate for these things. We ask for grace, Father, that would transcend our human abilities and our human experience so that we could somehow for the short, brief window of time that you have given us, honor your word and honor Christ and be servants through whom others would believe and rise to spiritual maturity as well. Make us into a church like that, O God, and if we're going to be a church like that, we need men and women like that as well. I thank you, Father, because I know that this room is populated right now with people who have those aspirations or they would never be here otherwise. I thank you that you have given us people that are like that and show these same desires. Now Lord, we humble ourselves before you and as with Isaiah we say, "But I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips but, Lord, here I am, send me." Father, here we are. Do with us as you will. Just let us be found faithful. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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