

Joshua, An Example Of Leadership

Introduction. It is accurate to say that statements made by a man give us considerable insight into the character of that man. Patrick Henry said, “Give me liberty or give me death.” Nathan Hale said, “I regret that I have but one life to give for my country.” John Kennedy said, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” Martin Luther King said, “I have a dream.”

Joshua was one of the best-known leaders in the Old Testament, and he made a impressive statement near the end of his life that still resonates today: “... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:14-15). Like these other men, this statement tells us a lot about the character of Joshua as a father and as a leader of the nation of Israel.

To be an elder, a man is evaluated by characteristics of his family (1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 1:6). The qualities that are required to be a good father are the same as those required to be a good elder, and we can see in Joshua 24:15 what it takes to be a good leader.

I. A Good Elder Must Be Concerned With Spiritual Dangers

- A. Joshua was concerned about spiritual danger, not primarily economic or physical danger. While those last two dangers are formidable, fathers today need to be concerned with the spiritual dangers that face their household.
- B. Elders must not be so concerned that the building may burn down, or the parking lot is not big enough or needs maintenance, or that the electricity may go off during a meeting. These items should not be neglected, but that is why God appointed deacons (Acts 6:2).
- C. A genuine leader’s primary concern is for spiritual danger that threatens the flock (Ezekiel 3:17; Hebrews 13:17; Titus 1:9). He looks out for this because he has fought this battle himself. J. M. Nouwen said, “The great illusion of leadership is to think that man can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there.” As far as Joshua’s warning was concerned, the Israelites did fall away (Judges 2:6-12), so these words of warning were necessary and appropriate.

II. A Good Elder Must Have The Courage To Think Independently

- A. Joshua’s courage to think for himself can be seen from an early period in Israel’s history (Numbers 13-14). The father of every family needs to be the kind of man who can think for himself — sometimes he will have to think independently of his wife and his children. Furthermore, Joshua acknowledged the right of others to think for themselves.
- B. Elders are under tremendous pressure, just like everybody else, from the world. They also, like others, face pressure from their family, and even from preachers and other churches. In light of all these, they have to bear up under this weight and put their faith in the power of the gospel (Joshua 1:7-8; 2 Chronicles 32:7-8; Ephesians 6:11; Philippians 4:1).
- C. John McCain said, “Courage is like a muscle. The more we exercise it, the stronger it gets. I sometimes worry that our collective courage is growing weaker from disuse. We don’t demand it from our leaders, and our leaders don’t demand

it from us. The courage deficit is both our problem and our fault. As a result, too many leaders in the public and private sectors lack the courage necessary to honor their obligations to others and to uphold the essential values of leadership.”

III. A Good Elder Must Have The Character To Stand By Himself

- A. Joshua had the character to act alone, regardless of what others did. This is different than the previous point because some think for themselves but do not have the character to act alone if needed. This is the next logical step.
- B. Any elder who is not willing to compromise on a matter of judgment is unfit to be an elder because he is self-willed (Titus 1:7). But when it comes to a matter of right — a principle of truth — an elder must understand that the only authority he has comes from God and he has no right to compromise (Matthew 8:8-9; Colossians 3:17; 1 Peter 4:11; cp. Galatians 2:1-5).
- C. They have to study and reason the scriptures for themselves (2 Timothy 2:15). They cannot help others in their fight with the devil without first having overcome him themselves. They need to be familiar wielding the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are stiffened.

IV. A Good Elder Must Be Committed To Influencing Others

- A. Some psychologists and teachers are telling us that we should not try to influence our families, but just leave them to their own decisions. The irony in this is that these are the very people who are trying to do what they do not want us to do. Joshua used his influence to see to it that his children and grandchildren were on God’s side. A father understands that a child left to himself, without godly influences, will bring shame on his family (Proverbs 29:15). The majority of the kings of Israel illustrated this unfortunate principle.
- B. All the qualifications of character speak to the power of influence an elder wields (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-8). Elders are leaders, and need to be in the forefront of every activity of the church — spiritual and physical (Ephesians 4:11-16). Because elders do not take part, some teaching efforts fail, and the church is left in a weakened state with a murky outlook for the future.

V. A Good Elder Must Have The Confidence To Speak For Others

- A. Joshua had intuition, closeness, and confidence that his children would be submissive and cooperative in his efforts to lead them. He knew his family and could make a statement that beautifully summarized their future faithfulness.
- B. Confidence and optimism in people can be a fantastic motivator to faithfulness. Paul had such confidence in Timothy (Philippians 2:19-22) and Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25-30), which you know would have spurred them on to greater levels of service.
- C. For an elder to make this statement, he must have knowledge about the flock he shepherds (1 Peter 5:2). This takes really getting to know people, not just greeting them at the door. Elders have to be involved in their lives. This will produce unity and harmony in the body of Christ (cp. Philippians 4:2-3).

Conclusion. Geese are very impressive. Winging their way to a warmer climate, their flight pattern and in-flight habits are extraordinary for several reasons. First, those in front rotate their leadership. When one lead goose gets tired, it changes places with one in the wing of the V-formation and another flies point. Second, by flying as they do, the members of the flock create an upward air current for one another. Each flap of the wings literally creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in a V-formation, the whole flock gets 71 percent greater flying range than if each goose flew on its own. Third, when one goose gets sick or wounded, two fall out of formation with it and follow it down to help and protect it. They stay with the struggler until it is able to fly again. Fourth, the geese in the rear of the formation are the ones who do the honking. This is their way of announcing that they are following and that all is well. The repeated honks encourage those in front to stay at it.

One lesson about geese stands out above all others: it is their natural instinct to work together. A congregation that works together under a leadership that follows great biblical examples can accomplish what Christ has given them to do.