

The Humble Young Leader: Four Qualities of Godly Men

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God created men to be strong and faithful leaders, especially in their families and churches. Becoming that kind of man does not simply happen, however; we need to train ourselves for godliness and Christlike leadership (1 Timothy 4:7–8).

To grow as men, we follow Jesus — the only sinless man, the God-man, who alone provides us righteousness and the perfect example of how to live. But we also follow the footsteps of those who followed or foreshadowed his (1 Corinthians 11:1). Joshua, though predating the incarnate Christ, can serve as one such example, especially for younger men.

Joshua teaches us that leading well starts with realizing that all you are, have, and accomplish depends on God’s gracious provision. Joshua knew this deeply, even in his younger years, as he served God and led the people into the promised land. I would like to highlight four traits from Joshua that men young and old need today: humble confidence, humble dependence, humble submission, and humble patience.

1. Humble Confidence

At key times in Israel’s history, even as a young man, Joshua stepped forward as a great example of humble confidence. One of the first times we meet Joshua, we see his faith in action, trusting God against the tide of popular opinion.

Joshua took part in a search party sent into Canaan to spy out the land God had promised. The spies returned with a dismal prediction about Israel’s ability to take on the “giants” in the land (Numbers 13–14). Joshua and Caleb were the only two (of twelve) who urged the people to take the land, because they believed God’s word (Numbers 14:7–10). They knew God’s track record and his power to keep his promises. Their confidence was not in themselves but in the God they served.

Here we see one quality that set Joshua and Caleb apart from the rest of the Israelites — they believed the promises of God. They were not intimidated by the size of the warriors or the strength of the cities. Rather, they knew their God and remembered how he had dealt with Egypt, then the most powerful nation on the earth. If God could take care of the mighty Egyptian army, he could certainly take care of the Canaanite tribes. God rewarded Joshua's and Caleb's faith by exempting them from the entire generation of Israelites who would perish in the wilderness (Numbers 14:29–30).

Humility and confidence might seem like opposites, but in Joshua and Caleb, we see they are two sides of the same heart. When we find our identity and security in God, we can rest in knowing that our frailty and sin no longer define us. We can walk in the strength that God supplies, even when we are rightly aware of how weak and sinful we are. In fact, God only chooses and empowers those who know how little we can do on our own.

2. Humble Dependence

Joshua could be considered one of the greatest military leaders in history. He led the armies of Israel to victory against far more powerful enemies. Without minimizing Joshua's gifts and abilities, he knew that God is the one who ultimately vanquishes his people's foes. He learned this early in his military career, as he led the people in battle against the Amalekites. Exodus 17 tells the story of God's provision:

Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword. (Exodus 17:11–13)

The outcome of the battle depended on something entirely outside of Joshua's control. Yes, he fought with great courage, but all the while, he realized that the battle belongs to the Lord. The same was true even when the victories were not as supernaturally obvious. God had promised to give the land of Canaan to his people, and Joshua's trust in God's power and faithfulness gave him the faith he needed to be the leader God called him to be.

Even when the challenges before us are not nearly as dramatic as Joshua's, the basis of our confidence is still the same faith — faith not in ourselves or even in the gifts and talents God has given us, but faith in the God who is the Creator, sustainer, and provider for every breath, heartbeat, and victory in life. Joshua's example reminds us that any skills, opportunities, accomplishments, or victories

come as gifts from our gracious Creator. He deserves all the credit for any good in our lives.

We can regularly remind ourselves of this by asking the apostle Paul's rhetorical question in 1 Corinthians 4:7: "What do you have that you did not receive?" Realizing that God is the source and end of all he gives us leads to humble confidence, and that confidence frees us to follow his will and be used as he sees fit.

3. Humble Submission

As a young man, Joshua learned to trust God's word, and it guided his life. He knew God's promises are trustworthy, so he followed his plan even when the challenges were great. God's word became the core of his confidence, as we see in God's exhortation to him before the people entered the land of Canaan:

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:8–9)

God calls Joshua to be strong and courageous based on his trust in God's word. A godly man's confidence, likewise, does not depend on his own abilities or the opinions of others to predict the outcome of circumstances; rather, it depends on what God says is true. When we submit to the authority of the word of God, we are trusting in the character of God. In our day, one's desires in the moment have become the primary guide for many, but men of God buck that trend and live rooted in the unchanging teaching of the Bible.

4. Humble Patience

The best leaders are men who have learned to follow well. They faithfully contribute to the objectives of a team, even if they do not have a title or position. Joshua's submission to God translated into his submission to the leader God placed over him.

Joshua served as Moses's assistant when he was a young man (Exodus 17:8–16). After being chosen, he filled that role with patience for forty years. We are told that when Moses would go into the camp, Joshua "would not depart from the tent" (Exodus 33:11). It must have been deeply challenging at times to serve the people in Moses's shadow, but we get no indication that Joshua was anything but a dutiful encouragement to Moses and an energetic partner in the mission.

His commitment to patiently serve shaped him into the man who could lead God's people into the promised land.

The lessons Joshua learned as a young man shaped him into an old man who could be trusted as a godly leader. And because of his leadership, "Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the Lord did for Israel" (Joshua 24:31).

Joshua's trust in God and his word formed him into a man of humble character. His confidence, dependence, submission, and patience offer powerful glimpses of Jesus, who perfectly lived out these qualities as our substitute and example. May God give many young men in the coming generation the ability to trust their God and lead with Christlike character.

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