

## 1

# Joshua: A Leader for the People

## AT A GLANCE

### Gathering

1. Welcome.
2. Read  
*Josh. 1:1–11, 16–17.*

### Exploring

3. Explore Joshua's preparation for leadership.
4. What makes a leader?
5. Leading and following.

### Responding

6. Courage and steadfastness today.
7. Close with prayer.

## RESOURCES NEEDED

- Bibles
- Student's Books
- Newsprint and markers
- Pictures of world, national, or local leaders
- Index cards, felt-tipped pens
- Masking tape

## BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

*Joshua 1*

### A VERSE TO REMEMBER

"I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

—*Joshua 1:9*

## TEACHING POINTS

This session invites learners to:

1. Identify characteristics of Joshua's leadership.
2. Explore God's directions and promises to Joshua.
3. Reflect on God's call to leaders and followers today.



## PREPARING TO LEAD

The books Joshua through 2 Kings give a theological account of Israel's history from the conquest of Canaan in the mid-thirteenth century B.C. to the end of the Davidic monarchy in the sixth century B.C. The author of Joshua does not present an objective account of history. The book has a decidedly theological slant: Israel's God is actively involved in human history and can be trusted.

Joshua begins as the Israelites are poised to enter the Promised Land. They have spent forty years wandering in the wilderness, grumbling and testing Moses' leadership at every point. But while previous accounts of the Israelites' failure to keep covenant with their God abound, the book of Joshua marks a high point in the people's willingness to

follow God and the leadership of the one appointed by God. Joshua understands that the gift of a covenantal relationship with God demands Israel's obedience; Joshua's leadership is marked, with few exceptions (*Josh. 7:1–10*), by faithful action in response to God's decrees. The tension between gift and obedience is very stark in Joshua. If you follow God, you live. If you don't, you die.

Although the events described in Joshua are set in the mid-thirteenth century B.C., the book of Joshua was probably completed after the destruction of the Temple in the sixth century B.C. The sixth-century readers would have heard the story of Joshua through their own despair and loss of identity that the early Hebrews had known so well. How would this story speak to them? What could they learn about God's call and their obedience from hearing the story of Joshua's leadership and the people's obedience?

The emphasis of this session is on leadership. Joshua is described as a military leader (*6:1–21; 8:1–23*), a negotiator (*9:1–27*), and a just leader (*chs. 13–22*), who distributes the land with concern for the good of the Israelites. However, the book of Joshua makes clear that following God is at the central core of his life. The first speaker in *Josh. 1* is God, and God's words give us assurance that this God is trustworthy, actively involved in our lives, and present with us in whatever we face. Joshua's leadership has its genesis in God's intentions, and he follows God with strength and courage because those intentions bring life to God's people.



## SUGGESTED READING

1. Read *Josh. 1–12* to get a sense of Joshua's role in this period of Israel's history.
2. Read about Joshua in a Bible dictionary or commentary.



## LEADING THE SESSION

### Gathering

1. Welcome. Before participants arrive, display on a wall pictures of well-known national, world, and local leaders, both past and current. Have an easel with newsprint nearby and, as students arrive, ask them to use markers to write a word or phrase on the newsprint that comes to mind when they think of the leadership of those shown in the display of pictures. This activity is intended to offer your group a time to recognize and name different aspects of leadership. Open with a prayer, asking God to guide your group's study through the session.

*Option:* If you have available space, consider leaving the newsprint sheet in place and adding to it during Sessions 2, 3, and 4. See More Ideas in Sessions 2, 3, and 4.

2. Read *Josh. 1:1–11, 16–17*. The group can read this silently, or you or a volunteer can read the passage aloud. Prior to the reading, ask the group to look and listen for certain key words and phrases that describe Joshua's leadership qualities. (Be prepared to read the passage more than once.) After the reading, ask participants to describe the character of Joshua's leadership as reflected in the following verses: *1:1, 1:5, 1:6, 1:7, and 1:8*. *Hint:* Look for mention in these verses of the following: acknowledgment of God's past faithfulness, trust in God for the unknown future, understanding God's law, and human obedience and discipline. What role do these play in the exercise of Joshua's leadership?  
*Option:* Select questions from the Student's Book to discuss.

### Exploring

3. Explore Joshua's preparation for leadership. Ask members to read the following passages for clues to Joshua's experiences that prepared him for leadership: *Ex. 17:9–14; 24:12–13; 33:8–10; Num. 11:27–29; and Deut. 31:7*. Participants may work individually, or you can gather them into small groups. After sufficient time, invite group members to share their findings.

4. What makes a leader? Distribute several index cards and felt-tipped pens to participants. Ask them to write on each card one characteristic or expectation of those called to leadership in the Christian community. After sufficient time has passed, invite the group members to share their responses by posting their index cards with masking tape to the newsprint used during step 1. Ask:
  - Do you detect any connection between these characteristics and expectations of Christian leaders and Joshua's leadership attributes reflected in *Josh. 1:1–11, 16–17*?
  - What do you expect from your Christian leaders?
  - What expectations would a Christian leader have of you?
  - Are there differences that should be acknowledged between civic and religious leaders? Why or why not?
  
5. Leading and following. The Bible is full of stories of people that God has provided to lead God's people. In every story of a leader, there are people who choose to follow or ignore that leading. Ask:
  - What in *Josh. 1:1–11, 16–17* would encourage the Israelites to follow Joshua's leadership?
  - What leads them to recognize him as a leader?
  - In your experience, who has most closely emulated Joshua's leadership qualities?
  - Were you called to follow that person?

### **Responding**

6. Courage and steadfastness today. God works in human history and uses the events of history to accomplish God's purposes. God demanded strength and courage of Joshua, but the way in which that strength and courage was exemplified might result in entirely different actions in our time and place. Ask:
  - What situations facing the church and world today call for courage and steadfastness?

- What actions would result in faithful response to these situations?
7. Close with prayer. Pray for leadership in our nation and churches.  
*Option:* Ask for a volunteer to research Gideon (*Judg. 6—8*) and to present his or her findings to the group during step 6 in the next session.



## MORE IDEAS

1. **Job interview for Joshua.** Gather the participants into two groups. Ask one group to write a professional résumé for Joshua, listing past accomplishments, personal qualifications, and desired salary. Then ask for a volunteer to portray “Joshua” in the job interview. Invite the second group to imagine that they are an interview committee. Ask them to formulate questions for the interview as they prepare to interview “Joshua” for a career in leadership (such as, pastor, CEO, or athletic coach at the local school). After sufficient time, welcome “Joshua” to the interview and proceed. Following the interview, ask the group to evaluate Joshua’s suitability for the job.
2. **Joshua bumper stickers.** Provide bumper sticker-size strips of paper and felt-tipped markers. Invite participants to create slogans based on Joshua’s leadership and write these on the strips of paper. Invite members to share their creations. This is a helpful way to summarize what the participants have learned.