

Leadership In The Most Unlikely Places

Franklin Church of Christ
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Bible Class

Introduction:

These are the words Ruth spoke to Naomi:

"Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me." **Ruth 1:16-17**

This notable statement from a Moabite woman is one that is revered the world over because it expresses remarkable loyalty. In this lesson we will particularly look at women who were leaders. Why do you think Ruth wanted to follow Naomi?

Discussion:

I. Leadership In The Most Unlikely Places?

A. **The Story of Lourie Suits.** She was loved by everyone at the Emerson Avenue church in Indianapolis. Our family first met Sister Suits in the fall of 1969 when she was about 75 years old. She had been blind since age 13 when an unfortunate incident took her sight away. As she aged, Lourie was confined to a wheelchair by an illness that consumed her body. She had been recently diagnosed with cancer. Her chemotherapy caused her to sleep about 18 hours a day. In the spring of 1970 the Emerson Avenue church had a gospel meeting with James Cope. Though it was very difficult, Lourie attended every night of the gospel meeting.

We might think someone in such a condition could not be a leader. How wrong we would be! Sister Suits was looked up to – respected – by every member of the congregation. Both young and old would go to her for advice. Preachers and elders sought her counsel. She was respected because of her love, kindness, wisdom and example of graceful aging. Sister Suits held no formal position of leadership in the church but was a leader, nonetheless. In spite of her poor health and need for special care, she had the respect of everyone in the Emerson Avenue church. She was a woman of influence. That made her a leader.

B. Can you give two examples of women in your acquaintance who have such respect as leaders?

1. _____

2. _____

C. What qualities do you find in those women?

D. Returning to the story of Ruth and Naomi, can you find anything in Naomi that would have caused Ruth to have respect for her? Read **Ruth 1:8-15**.

E. **Find Out What It Means To Me.** Write a short statement about what causes you personally to have respect for other people. What qualities in them engender respect?

II. Qualities That Engender Respect ... And Those That Don't

A. **Contrasting Cases.** One of the great female leaders of all time is Deborah, a judge in Israel. She was used by God to help save the Israelites from the army of King Jabin of Hazor. She stands out in stark contrast to some of the other judges in Israel. Not all of the judges had her capability, character and care. A prime example is seen in the sons of Samuel: Joel and Abijah. Like Deborah, they were made judges over Israel – they had positions of leadership – but the similarity ends there.

Read Judges 4:1-9 and see the opening of the story of Deborah. Read 1 Samuel 8:1-5 for the story of Joel and Abijah. Note the following contrasts in these judges. It is obvious why one was a respected leader.

DEBORAH

Judges 4

1. Served others (vv. 4-5)
2. Possessed wisdom (vv. 4-5)
3. Confidence of the people (vv. 4-5)
4. Possessed integrity (vv. 4-5)
5. Held firm convictions (v. 6)
6. Reminded others of duty (v. 6)
7. Contributed to others' success (vv. 6-9)
8. Exceeded expectations (v. 9)
9. Gave credit to others (v. 9)
10. Gave credit to God for victory (v. 9)

10 Leadership Scoreboard

JOEL and ABIJAH

1 Samuel 8

- Served themselves (v. 3)
- Lacked wisdom (v. 3)
- No confidence from the people (vv. 3-5)
- Lacked integrity (v. 3)
- Had no convictions (v. 3)
- Cared nothing for duty (v. 3)
- Contributed to others' failure (v. 3)
- Failed expectations (v. 5)
- Did nothing to have credit for (vv. 3-5)
- Brought shame upon Israel (vv. 3-5)

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B. **Is it hard to understand?** It is clear from this stark contrast why Deborah commanded such respect. Some folks might regard her as an unlikely leader, but when you see these qualities in her, it is not difficult to figure out why she was a leader and why Joel and Abijah were not!

1. What do we learn about the value of "positional leadership" from these two cases?

2. Which of Deborah's qualities were also seen in the story of Lourie Suits? (Place check marks on the list above.) Do you need to improve in any of these qualities? If so, which?

C. **What about Barak?**

1. Even though Barak was a leader in Israel, he chose to follow Deborah's leadership. In fact, he would not go without her. Is there anything in particular that we can learn from this?

Conclusion:

Leadership in the Kingdom of God is one of the great needs today. Many churches don't have elders. Some churches that used to have elders no longer have elders, and that's tragic. And some churches simply have no prospects of elders.

When we think of leaders, typically that's the first thing we think of in the church – elders, deacons, and maybe preachers. But leadership is something far, far larger than that. A person can be a leader in the Kingdom of God without being a preacher, a deacon, or an elder.

You may not hold a formal position of leadership in the local church, but you can be a leader nonetheless. Anyone with the ability to influence others for good can provide leadership in the Kingdom of God.