

# JOHN C. MAXWELL

*New York Times* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

## 21 LAWS OF LEADERSHIP — IN THE — BIBLE

LEARNING *to* LEAD *from the*  
MEN *and* WOMEN *of* SCRIPTURE

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LEADERSHIP  
IN THE  
BIBLE

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MEN *and* WOMEN *of* SCRIPTURE

JOHN C.  
MAXWELL



THOMAS NELSON  
*Since 1798*

*21 Laws of Leadership in the Bible*

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# INTRODUCTION

Early in my career when I first began teaching people in church about leadership, they were often surprised. I was clearly young and inexperienced, yet the ideas I was able to convey seemed to be beyond what I should know. Later when I started writing about leadership, people gravitated to the message. And when I started writing and speaking to a more general audience, people often asked, “Where in the world did you learn all this?”

I was happy to let them in on a secret: everything I know about leadership I learned from the Bible.

Not only is the Bible the greatest book ever written, it is the greatest leadership book ever written. Everything you could ever want to learn about leadership—vision, purpose, thinking strategy, communication, attitude, encouragement, mentoring, follow-through—is all there. You just need to be open to what God wants to teach you. As it says in Isaiah 55:11,

*My word that goes out from my mouth:  
It will not return to me empty,  
but will accomplish what I desire  
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

God’s word always fulfills his purpose. If you have felt a stirring to become a better leader or if someone has tapped your shoulder and asked you to lead, God will help you.

I am excited for you as you begin this journey of leadership development through the Word of God. I’ve chosen to organize this book around the 21 Laws of Leadership. You may be familiar with my book *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You*. If you are, the laws will be very familiar to you. If not, don’t worry. I have included a brief excerpt from the book in each lesson to explain the law. But I’ve kept the focus of this workbook on Scripture. Each lesson contains three carefully selected biblical case studies—some positive, some negative—that reveal and illustrate the law. After you read each of these passages from the Bible, you will answer study questions that will prompt you to really dig into the Scripture and learn about leadership from it.

But this workbook isn't designed to be merely a theoretical exercise. It's meant to help you become a better leader. So following the passages and study questions, you will be directed to reflect on how you can apply the leadership lessons to your own life. You will also develop a specific action item to help you follow through and improve your leadership.

You can easily go through this workbook on your own and improve your leadership ability. But I want to encourage you to do this with a group. There's nothing like learning with other like-minded people who desire to grow and develop their leadership skills. To help you with this process, I've included group discussion questions at the end of each lesson.

My recommendation is that you gather a group of people to engage in the process together. Before you meet, each of you should complete the Study Questions, Leadership Insight and Reflection, and Taking Action sections on your own for that lesson. Then gather together as a group and answer the discussion questions. I believe you'll find you learn better and enjoy it more in a group.

May God bless you as you enjoy this journey.

## LESSON 1

## THE LAW OF THE LID

Leadership Ability Determines  
a Person's Level of Effectiveness

## DEFINITION OF THE LAW

Success is within the reach of just about everyone. While not every person can receive a 10 rating (on a success scale of 1 to 10), most people are capable of achieving some level of success or effectiveness in their lives. However, everyone eventually confronts a natural “lid” on their effectiveness, and that lid is leadership ability. The reality is that the level of your overall effectiveness can never rise higher than the level of your leadership ability. The higher the leadership ability, the greater the potential. The lower the leadership ability, the lower the impact.

Your leadership ability—for better or for worse—always affects your effectiveness and the potential impact of your organization. That’s because as an individual, you can only succeed so much. There are just so many hours in a day for one person to work. Only when you partner with others and increase your effectiveness as a team can you move your personal success level past that lid.

Let’s say your level of success is a 6 out of 10. That’s pretty good. But like most people, you’d like to grow and raise that level. You have two choices: You could focus all your energy on increasing your personal effectiveness. You could work even harder and longer. And with all of that dedication, you might grow some. But eventually you would fill all of your time and exhaust yourself. A more

efficient and fulfilling use of your time and energy would be to focus on growing as a leader.

When you raise your leadership ability—even without increasing your success dedication at all—you increase your success potential by a great deal. When you raise that lid, your influence will grow as a result. More people will want to follow you and work with you to achieve a goal. And more people dedicated to the vision means more time and energy devoted to its success. The more people you lead, and the more positive influence you have on them, the more you will achieve.

Leadership ability is also the lid on organizational effectiveness. If an organization's leadership is strong, its lid is high. But if it's not, then the organization is limited. That's why in times of trouble, organizations naturally look for new leadership. When the country is experiencing hard times, it elects a new president. When a company is losing money, it hires a new CEO. When a church is floundering, it searches for a new senior pastor. When a sports team keeps losing, it looks for a new head coach.

The more you want to achieve, the more you need leadership. The greater the impact you want to make, the greater your influence needs to be. Whatever you will accomplish is restricted by your ability to lead others. Grow as a leader, and you will multiply your—and your organization's—success. Leadership ability determines a person's level of effectiveness. That's the Law of the Lid.

## CASE STUDIES

Read these case studies from the Bible and answer the study questions that follow.

### 1 Aaron and Moses

Exodus 32:1–25

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<sup>1</sup> *When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."*

<sup>2</sup> Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.” <sup>3</sup> So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. <sup>4</sup> He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, “These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”

<sup>5</sup> When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, “Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD.” <sup>6</sup> So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

<sup>7</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. <sup>8</sup> They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, ‘These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’

<sup>9</sup> “I have seen these people,” the LORD said to Moses, “and they are a stiff-necked people. <sup>10</sup> Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.”

<sup>11</sup> But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. “LORD,” he said, “why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? <sup>12</sup> Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. <sup>13</sup> Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.’” <sup>14</sup> Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

<sup>15</sup> Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. <sup>16</sup> The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

<sup>17</sup> When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, “There is the sound of war in the camp.”

<sup>18</sup> *Moses replied:*

*“It is not the sound of victory,  
it is not the sound of defeat;  
it is the sound of singing that I hear.”*

<sup>19</sup> *When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. <sup>20</sup> And he took the calf the people had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.*

<sup>21</sup> *He said to Aaron, “What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?”*

<sup>22</sup> *“Do not be angry, my lord,” Aaron answered. “You know how prone these people are to evil. <sup>23</sup> They said to me, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.’ <sup>24</sup> So I told them, ‘Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.’ Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”*

<sup>25</sup> *Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies.*

## Study Questions

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1. At the beginning of this story, who had greater influence on the other: Aaron or the people? Explain.

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2. What does this say about Aaron's leadership? How did he handle his responsibilities? For what purpose did he use his influence?

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3. How did Moses influence God in this passage? What did he say, and what was the outcome?

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4. Describe Moses's responsibilities as a leader related to:

God \_\_\_\_\_  
 Aaron \_\_\_\_\_  
 Joshua \_\_\_\_\_  
 The People \_\_\_\_\_

For what purpose did he use his influence? How successful was he? What was the outcome?

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## 2 David and Saul

1 Samuel 17:32–52

<sup>32</sup> David said to Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him."



<sup>33</sup> Saul replied, “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth.”

<sup>34</sup> But David said to Saul, “Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, <sup>35</sup> I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. <sup>36</sup> Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. <sup>37</sup> The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Saul said to David, “Go, and the LORD be with you.”

<sup>38</sup> Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. <sup>39</sup> David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them.

“I cannot go in these,” he said to Saul, “because I am not used to them.” So he took them off. <sup>40</sup> Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd’s bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. <sup>42</sup> He looked David over and saw that he was little more than a boy, glowing with health and handsome, and he despised him. <sup>43</sup> He said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. <sup>44</sup> “Come here,” he said, “and I’ll give you flesh to the birds and the wild animals!”

<sup>45</sup> David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. <sup>46</sup> This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel.

<sup>47</sup> All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.”

<sup>48</sup> As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. <sup>49</sup> Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground.

*<sup>50</sup> So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.*

*<sup>51</sup> David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine's sword and drew it from the sheath. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword.*

*When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran.*

*<sup>52</sup> Then the men of Israel and Judah surged forward with a shout and pursued the Philistines to the entrance of Gath and to the gates of Ekron. Their dead were strewn along the Shaaraim road to Gath and Ekron.*

## Study Questions

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1. Goliath taunted King Saul and the Israelites for forty days, and yet no champion went out to face him during that time. What does that say about Saul's leadership?

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2. What gave David the courage to face the Philistine champion? How did that make him different from Saul?

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3. How did David influence the two armies? How did they respond? What might have happened if David had not taken action?

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4. What does this story say about the connection between action and influence?

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### 3 Rehoboam and the People

1 Kings 12:1–20

<sup>1</sup> Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone there to make him king. <sup>2</sup> When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard this (he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), he returned from Egypt. <sup>3</sup> So they sent for Jeroboam, and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him: <sup>4</sup> “Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you.”

<sup>5</sup> Rehoboam answered, “Go away for three days and then come back to me.” So the people went away.

<sup>6</sup> Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime. “How would you advise me to answer these people?” he asked.

<sup>7</sup> They replied, “If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants.”

<sup>8</sup> But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him. <sup>9</sup> He asked them, “What is your advice? How should we answer these people who say to me, ‘Lighten the yoke your father put on us’?”

<sup>10</sup> The young men who had grown up with him replied, “These people have said to you, ‘Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter.’ Now tell them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist.

<sup>11</sup> My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.’”

<sup>12</sup> Three days later Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam, as the king had said, “Come back to me in three days.” <sup>13</sup> The king answered the people harshly. Rejecting the advice given him by the elders, <sup>14</sup> he followed the advice of the young men and said, “My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.” <sup>15</sup> So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the LORD, to fulfill the word the LORD had spoken to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite.

<sup>16</sup> When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king:

“What share do we have in David,  
what part in Jesse’s son?  
To your tents, Israel!  
Look after your own house, David!”

So the Israelites went home. <sup>17</sup> But as for the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah, Rehoboam still ruled over them.

<sup>18</sup> King Rehoboam sent out Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor, but all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam, however, managed to get into his chariot and escape to Jerusalem. <sup>19</sup> So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

<sup>20</sup> When all the Israelites heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David.

## Study Questions

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1. What was Rehoboam’s motivation for leadership? What were the motivations of the two groups who advised him?

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2. What was Rehoboam relying upon for his leadership to work? How effective was it?

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3. What might have happened if Rehoboam had listened to the elders? How might the history of Israel have been different as a result?

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4. David and Rehoboam were both young when they got their chance to lead in these passages. How were they similar? How were they different?

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## LEADERSHIP INSIGHT AND REFLECTION

On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high), what leadership ratings would you give Aaron, Moses, David, Saul, and Rehoboam based on these passages? State the reason for your rating.

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By observing their leadership, what can you learn about your own leadership ability? How are your leadership limitations likely to affect your ability to accomplish your goals in life?

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## TAKING ACTION

Keeping in mind that leadership ability determines a person's level of effectiveness, what can you do *immediately* to start becoming a better leader? Determine whether it is (check one) ...

- ☐ An attitude change
- ☐ A bad habit that needs to be broken
- ☐ A good habit that needs to be established
- ☐ An action to be taken with a person or people

What will you do?

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When will you do it?

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the past, how important was leadership to you personally? Has it been something you thought much about? Did you study it?
2. How important do you think it will be to you now? Explain.
3. Of the leaders you studied in the three Bible passages, who do you identify with the most? Why?
4. Who do you admire most? Why?
5. If you had to give yourself an overall leadership score from 1 (I can't lead anyone) to 10 (I could lead anyone, anywhere, on any level), what score would you give yourself? Why?
6. What was your greatest takeaway about leadership in this lesson?
7. What action do you believe God is asking you to take in your leadership as a result? When and how will you do it?