

JOHN C.
MAXWELL

New York Times BESTSELLING AUTHOR

21 QUALITIES OF
LEADERS
— IN THE —
BIBLE

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP
TRAITS INSPIRED *by the*
MEN *and* WOMEN *of* SCRIPTURE

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by the MEN and WOMEN of SCRIPTURE

JOHN C.
MAXWELL



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

21 Qualities of Leaders in the Bible

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Published in association with Yates & Yates, www.yates2.com.

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ISBN 978-0-310-08628-4

First Printing February 2019 / Printed in the United States of America

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to say thank you to Charlie Wetzel and the rest of the team who assisted me with the formation and publication of this book. And to the people in my organizations who support it. You all add incredible value to me, which allows me to add value to others. Together, we're making a difference!

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. By my late twenties, I sensed God wanted me to teach about leadership for the rest of my life. It was my calling and my passion.

As I started writing and speaking on leadership to a more general audience, people would ask, “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. The focus of this workbook is on the qualities that every person needs to develop to become a better leader. I’ve based this study on my book *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader: Becoming the Person Others Will Want to Follow*. Each lesson begins with a definition of the quality, but the main focus is on how that quality impacts the leadership of people in the Bible. Each lesson contains three carefully selected biblical case studies—some positive, some negative—that reveal and illustrate the quality. 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 meant to be a theoretical study. It's meant to help you *become* a better leader—the kind of person others want to follow. So every section contains leadership insight and reflection questions as well as a prompt for taking action so that you can develop the leadership quality in your life.

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. Plus, I've included one additional set of questions the group can answer after you've completed all twenty-one lessons.

My recommendation is that you gather a group of people to engage in the process together. Before you meet, everyone should complete the lesson. Then gather together as a group and answer the discussion questions. I believe you'll find you learn better and enjoy it more when you can discuss what you've learned and hold one another accountable to grow.

May God bless you as you enjoy this journey.

LESSON 1

CHARACTER

Be a Piece of the Rock

THE QUALITY DEFINED

Leaders cannot rise above the limitations of their character. That's because followers do not trust leaders whose character they know to be flawed, and they will not continue following those leaders.

Your character determines who you are. Who you are determines what you see. What you see determines what you do. That's why you can never separate a leader's character from his actions. If a leader's actions and intentions are continually working against each other, then you can examine the individual's character to find out why.

How a leader deals with the circumstances of life tells you a lot about his character. Crisis doesn't necessarily make character, but it certainly does reveal it. Adversity is a crossroads which makes a person choose one of two paths: character or compromise. Every time he chooses character, he becomes stronger, even if that choice brings negative consequences. The development of character is at the heart of our development, not just as leaders, but as human beings.

There are a lot of things in life that we have no control over. But we do choose our character. In fact, we create it every time we make choices—to cop out or dig out of a hard situation, to bend the truth or stand under the weight of it, to take the easy money or pay the price. As you live your life and make choices today, you are continuing to create your character.

CASE STUDIES

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

1 David Makes a Choice Based on His Values

1 Samuel 24:1–22

¹ After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, “David is in the Desert of En Gedi.” ² So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Craggs of the Wild Goats.

³ He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave.

⁴ The men said, “This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.’” Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul’s robe.

⁵ Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. ⁶ He said to his men, “The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD’s anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the LORD.” ⁷ With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

⁸ Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, “My lord the king!” When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. ⁹ He said to Saul, “Why do you listen when men say, ‘David is bent on harming you’?” ¹⁰ This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, ‘I will not lay my hand on my lord, because he is the LORD’s anointed.’ ¹¹ See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. See that there is nothing in my hand to indicate that I am guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. ¹² May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch

you.¹³ As the old saying goes, ‘From evildoers come evil deeds,’ so my hand will not touch you.

¹⁴ “Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Who are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea? ¹⁵ May the LORD be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand.”

¹⁶ When David finished saying this, Saul asked, “Is that your voice, David my son?” And he wept aloud. ¹⁷ “You are more righteous than I,” he said. “You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. ¹⁸ You have just now told me about the good you did to me; the LORD delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me. ¹⁹ When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the LORD reward you well for the way you treated me today. ²⁰ I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. ²¹ Now swear to me by the LORD that you will not kill off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father’s family.”

²² So David gave his oath to Saul. Then Saul returned home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

Study Questions

1. David refused to kill King Saul because he was the Lord's anointed. However, David had also been anointed by the prophet Samuel as Israel's future king (see 1 Samuel 16:13). Do you think David would have been within his rights to kill Saul and take his place? Explain.

[illegible]

2. If David had killed Saul, how might that have impacted David's future as a king? How does the way a leader gains his position impact the tone of his leadership?

3. David's men wanted him to kill Saul. Do you think David's decision not to strike down Saul frustrated his men or made them admire him? Explain.

4. Why do you think Saul asked David to swear not to kill his descendants rather than swearing not to kill him? What does his request tell you about the two men?

2 Daniel's Character Sets Him Apart

Daniel 6:3–26, 28

³ Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. ⁴ At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government

affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. ⁵ Finally these men said, “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.”

⁶ So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: “May King Darius live forever! ⁷ The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions’ den. ⁸ Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.” ⁹ So King Darius put the decree in writing.

¹⁰ Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. ¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. ¹² So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: “Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions’ den?”

The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”

¹³ Then they said to the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.” ¹⁴ When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

¹⁵ Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, “Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.”

¹⁶ So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!”

¹⁷ A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles,

so that Daniel's situation might not be changed.¹⁸ Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

¹⁹ At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den.

²⁰ When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?"

²¹ Daniel answered, "May the king live forever! ²² My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty."

²³ The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

²⁴ At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

²⁵ Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth:

"May you prosper greatly!

²⁶ "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel." . . .

²⁸ So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Study Questions

1. Why do you think the other officials decided to take action against Daniel? What was their motivation?

2. Daniel is described as being neither corrupt nor negligent. How well does the absence of these two traits describe good character? What additional traits would you add to that list?

3. Why do you think Daniel continued to pray to God three times a day after Darius signed the edict?

4. How do you think Darius would have responded if he had found Daniel dead the next morning? What, if anything, would have changed? List the things God achieved by saving Daniel.

3 Herod's Choices

Matthew 2:1–18

¹After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has

been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

¹⁷ *Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:*

¹⁸ *“A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”*

Study Questions

1. The passage says King Herod and all Jerusalem were disturbed by the magi's question regarding the birth of a king of the Jews. Why was Herod so disturbed? Why were the people of Jerusalem?

2. What do you think Herod would have done if the magi had returned to him and given him the information he requested?

3. What actions of Herod are indications of his character? List them. Beside each action, describe what aspect of his character it reveals.



LEADERSHIP INSIGHT AND REFLECTION

What were the motives of the various leaders in these passages?

David: _____
Saul: _____
Daniel: _____
Darius: _____
The Administrators and Satraps: _____
Herod: _____
The Magi: _____

How are motives and character connected? How do they interact with one another? Can a leader have bad motives but good character? Or good motives but bad character? Think about each of the following leadership combinations and describe what that type would do.

Bad Motives—Good Character

Bad Motives—Bad Character

Good Motives—Bad Character

Good Motives—Good Character

TAKING ACTION

Take some time to analyze your motivation for leading others. What would you say you are trying to accomplish as a leader?

Go back to the description of character in Daniel with any additional traits you named. Assess yourself in these areas:

Not Corrupt: _____

Not Negligent: _____

_____ :

_____ :

_____ :

_____ :

_____ :

_____ :

Where do you need to grow so that your character and motives are positive and strong?

What will you do to change?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. David is described as a man after God's own heart (see 1 Samuel 13:14). How much of that description do you think relates to David's character?

2. If you had been in David's situation, what would you have done?

- ☐ Strike down Saul yourself
- ☐ Allow your men to strike down Saul
- ☐ Confront Saul in the cave
- ☐ Cut Saul's robe and address Saul afterward (as David did)
- ☐ Cut Saul's robe but not speak to him
- ☐ Stay hidden entirely and wait for Saul to leave

Explain your answer.

3. In Daniel 6:14, we read that King Darius "was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him." What do you think that might have involved? Why didn't he just suspend the edict?

4. What do you think Daniel's mindset was when he was put into the lion's den? Do you think he expected to be saved or to die? Explain.

5. In two of the passages, God sent angels to intervene for his people. When you find yourself in a difficult situation, how does your character come into play? And what do you expect God to do on your behalf?

6. What was your greatest takeaway about character in leadership from 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?