A Leader’s Wisdom

Summary and Goal
Despite God’s deliverance and provision, the people of God continued to struggle with turning from their fears to trusting in God. As a result, they repeatedly grumbled to Moses and God. In this session, we will see that they not only had issues with their leader and their God, they also disputed with one another. Up to this point in their journey, Moses had been the sole judge for all of the people. But when Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, met with Moses, he gave the overwhelmed leader some much-needed wisdom and proved himself to be a wise leader in blessing the people of God.

Session Outline
1. Wise leaders rejoice with others (Ex. 18:7-12).
2. Wise leaders challenge others (Ex. 18:13-18).
3. Wise leaders share burdens with others (Ex. 18:24-27).

Session in a Sentence
God provides wise leaders for His people to help complete the mission God has given.

Christ Connection
Moses needed others to help him complete the task of preserving the unity of God’s people and teaching them God’s laws. God has provided us the church body, with Christ as the head, to work together to fulfill our task of sharing the gospel with the world and bringing others into His body.

Missional Application
Because God has established us as a people and gives us wisdom, we provide godly counsel to others and follow the godly counsel given to us so that we may be more effective in proclaiming God’s kingdom to the world.
**Group Time**

**Introduction**

**SAY:** Throughout history, we have seen great leaders—men and women who have risen to the occasion and led their people through the best of times and the worst of times, people of courage and conviction who have done what needed to be done, even if it came at great cost.

**INTERACT:** Ask the group the opening questions on page 84 in the DDG.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the paragraph in the DDG (p. 84) to describe Moses as a great leader who still needed help to manage the load of leadership placed upon him. Then connect Moses’ need for help with our own need, which the Lord provides.

As we read through the Scriptures, we encounter some great leaders. One of the most well-known is Moses, perhaps the biggest star of the Jewish world. He gave God’s people direction and led them out of Egypt, and He served as God’s mouthpiece, telling the people what God had told him. But the task was not easy. The people struggled to trust God, and they grumbled against God, against Moses, and against one another. As problems arose among the people, Moses tried to carry the load of managing them by himself. But thankfully, God doesn’t want His people to bear their burdens alone.

- Many of us have found ourselves in similar situations. Whether it be at our work, in our homes, or in our local churches, it can be easy for those who have been called to lead to take on too much. If we aren’t careful, we can begin to feel like Moses, crushed by the weight of the responsibilities we bear. God’s desire is that none of us rely on our own strength, our own wisdom, our own leadership, no matter how great our qualities may be. Instead, God wants us to turn to Him and trust in the One who is perfectly strong, perfectly wise, and who perfectly leads.

**SUMMARIZE:** In this session, we will see that Moses had been the sole judge for all of the people of Israel. But when Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, met with him, he gave the overwhelmed leader some much-needed wisdom and proved himself to be a wise leader in blessing the people of God.

*For additional teaching options and other resources, please visit www.GospelProject.com/additional-resources.*
**Point 1: Wise leaders rejoice with others (Ex. 18:7-12).**

**SAY:** At some point in the exodus account, Moses had sent his wife, Zipporah, and their two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, to live with his father-in-law, Jethro. But when Jethro heard what God had done for Moses and the people of Israel, he set out to meet Moses in the wilderness to reunite the family.

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read Exodus 18:7-9 (DDG p. 85).

7 So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, bowed down, and then kissed him. They asked each other how they had been and went into the tent. 8 Moses recounted to his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel’s sake, all the hardships that confronted them on the way, and how the LORD rescued them. 9 Jethro rejoiced over all the good things the LORD had done for Israel when he rescued them from the power of the Egyptians.

**EXPLAIN:** Compare Jethro’s wise response to God’s actions with the Israelites’ response using the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 85). Then address the reason for our propensity to complain instead of rejoice in God’s power on display.

Notice how Jethro responded to what Moses told him: he rejoiced. God’s works are a blessing not only to those who experience them firsthand but also to all who hear of them, even if they are separated by distance, time, or both. Jethro was able to see what the people of Israel had missed. They were the ones who had actually lived through the story Moses told; they were the ones who had witnessed what God had done. But for all they had seen, they still didn’t marvel at God’s power in the way that Jethro did from just hearing of God’s mighty works. The Israelites were too busy complaining.

- The reason we are like the Israelites in our propensity to complain is because we share the same core problem: sin. We complain because it is our nature to do so.
- We cannot miss that Moses did not give in to this sinful inclination. Yes, he told Jethro of the hardships they had experienced, but it was not with a spirit of complaining but to show God’s faithfulness and goodness through them. Moses refused to follow in the way of the people he led. He did not complain to Jethro about what it was like to lead such a stubborn, ungrateful people. To Moses, the story that deserved to be told centered on God and His faithfulness rather than the Israelites and their faithlessness.

**INTERACT:** Ask the group the following question.

What does complaining say about our hearts? (we are self-focused and self-centered; we do not trust the sovereign and good God who works all things together for our good; we believe our plans and expectations are higher and wiser than God’s)
10 “Blessed be the LORD,” Jethro exclaimed, “who rescued you from the power of Egypt and from the power of Pharaoh. He has rescued the people from under the power of Egypt! 11 Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because he did wonders when the Egyptians acted arrogantly against Israel.”

12 Then Jethro, Moses’s father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses’s father-in-law in God’s presence.

EXPLAIN: Reference the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 85) to show that one of the distinguishing marks of a wise, godly person is his or her ability to rejoice in what God has done, even when He has done it for others.

Jethro didn’t try to poke holes in Moses’ story. What Moses told him was astonishing. It would have been hard for anyone who was not there to believe, but Jethro didn’t give in to cynicism or competition. Rather, he was compelled to worship God for being greater than all other gods—his main takeaway from Moses’ story. When we come together with other believers and begin to share all that God has done in our lives, we ought to be like Jethro and Moses—joyful and filled with worship.

• If we want to be godly and wise men and women, wise leaders in whatever context God has placed us, we need to recognize the ways God has moved in our lives and ministries. But we should do so without missing what God is doing around us in the lives of others. This is what the body of Christ does. We are a people who work together to accomplish the ministry God has laid before us, always rejoicing at the marvelous things we see God do both in our lives and in the lives of others. As Paul put it so simply yet eloquently in 1 Thessalonians 5:16: “Rejoice always.”

INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

How does God receive honor when we rejoice at all that He is doing with others? (we are submitting ourselves to His good will when we rejoice in His works in others’ lives; we are obeying Him by considering others above ourselves; we join our voices with other believers in praising God for His power and glory)
**Point 2: Wise leaders challenge others (Ex. 18:13-18).**


13 The next day Moses sat down to judge the people, and they stood around Moses from morning until evening. 14 When Moses’s father-in-law saw everything he was doing for them he asked, “What is this thing you’re doing for the people? Why are you alone sitting as judge, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?” 15 Moses replied to his father-in-law, “Because the people come to me to inquire of God. 16 Whenever they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I make a decision between one man and another. I teach them God’s statutes and laws.” 17 “What you’re doing is not good,” Moses’s father-in-law said to him. 18 “You will certainly wear out both yourself and these people who are with you, because the task is too heavy for you. You can’t do it alone.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 86) to highlight the problem facing Moses. Then explain why confronting Moses was risky for Jethro.

Moses was acting as the single judge for all the people’s disputes, and what he was doing was good. But he was overwhelmed with the task, and the people waited for hours to be heard. There was a better way, and Jethro saw it: delegate the work. By distributing the workload, God’s people and Moses would be much better off. But Jethro had to take the risk and challenge Moses for the situation to improve.

- Jethro’s wisdom in confronting Moses was reasonable, but his counsel did not come without risk. Moses had been leading God’s people for some time. He was God’s appointed leader. And here was Jethro to give him some advice, to remind him that he was not superhuman, that he needed the help of others, that he was making a tactical mistake in his leadership. No doubt Moses was weary from hearing the complaints of others, but Jethro knew Moses needed to hear what he had to say, both for his own good and the good of God’s people. So he took the risk and counseled his son-in-law.

- There is a time and place for us to offer helpful advice when we see an area of weakness in someone else, just as there is a time and place for us to receive helpful advice when others see a weakness in us. This is the heart of the biblical imagery of iron sharpening iron: We have the ability to sharpen one another so we are more useful and efficient as tools in God’s hands (Prov. 27:17).

**Commentary:** Exodus 18 isn’t the only place in Scripture where we see a leader willing to challenge another leader. In Galatians 2, we see Paul confront Peter (also called Cephas) after Peter withdrew from fellowship with Gentile Christians because of the presence of Jewish Christians from Jerusalem. Paul’s decision to have a difficult conversation with Peter was necessary for his good and for the health of the early church. Amidst the growing tensions and frustrations between the Jewish and Gentile Christians, the church needed people like Paul who were willing to make sure that everyone was being treated fairly according to the gospel. If challenging Peter was necessary to preserve the unity of God’s people, then Paul was willing to do it.
INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

Why might it be difficult to confront and challenge others? (we are unsure that we have the right or the wisdom to do so; we may be struggling with sin; we don’t like to be confronted ourselves; we aren’t sure how our confrontation will be taken)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 86) to show that our goal in challenging others, even when they are not necessarily in sin, is for their good and the benefit of those around them.

Jethro’s challenge to Moses wasn’t meant to discourage him but to equip him to be the leader the Israelites needed. Sometimes, when we’re in the middle of a season filled with great responsibility, the pressure and stress keep us from realizing that we need help. Instead of reaching out to others to lighten our load, we go into survival mode and attempt to tackle every task by ourselves. Moses had unknowingly set himself and his people up for failure in this way, and Jethro’s gentle suggestion to delegate his responsibilities benefited not only Moses but also the people who depended on him.

INSTRUCT: Ask group members to read silently the “Voices from Church History” quote in their DDG (p. 86) and to reflect on the wisdom and advice they have either given or received to see if it has been true and right. After a moment or two, allow group members an opportunity to share their thoughts and reflections, but don’t press for any response. Then offer a brief prayer thanking God for His wisdom and truth freely given to us.

Voices from Church History

“God spoke to Moses, did he not? Yet Moses very prudently and humbly yielded to the advice of his father-in-law, foreigner though he was, with regard to governing and directing such a mighty nation. For he realized that from whatever intellect right counsel proceeded, it should be attributed not to him who conceived it but to the One who is the Truth, the immutable God.”

—Augustine (354-430)
Point 3: Wise leaders share burdens with others (Ex. 18:24-27).

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Exodus 18:24-27 (DDG p. 87).

24 Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. 25 So Moses chose able men from all Israel and made them leaders over the people as commanders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. 26 They judged the people at all times; they would bring the hard cases to Moses, but they would judge every minor case themselves.

27 Moses let his father-in-law go, and he journeyed to his own land.

EXPLAIN the steps Moses took, as Jethro had advised him.

- Moses chose a group of men who feared God, were trustworthy, and who hated bribes—people of character, not of status (v. 21).
- He instructed them about the law and taught them what they were to do in their new role (v. 20).
- These men were appointed as judges over different groups of people, bringing only the more difficult cases to Moses. In this way, Moses was able to endure and the people went home satisfied (v. 23).

Commentary: Moses should have realized his need for sharing his leadership burden before he met Jethro. In Exodus 17, we read of the Israelites battling against the armies of Amalek. From an overlook position, while Moses’ arms were raised, the Israelites prevailed, but when his arms fell, the Amalekites began to win the battle. Because Moses’ arms were weary, Aaron and Hur held them up, and the Israelites conquered their foe. Moses should have learned this lesson, but he couldn’t on his own. He needed someone else, Jethro, to help him see it.

SAY: Jethro’s plan likely sounds familiar and logical to us because many governments today operate in a similar way. Governing an entire nation of people is too great a task for one man or woman, no matter how qualified.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 87) to show how Jethro’s principle of leadership informs our churches—God’s design is for His people to rely on one another.

Jethro’s principle of leadership impacts more than just national governments; it informs leadership in a more important arena: our churches. The ministry of the gospel is an enormous task of eternal importance. This is why God designed the church to function following a Jethro-like model. We share the burdens of ministry with each other as we each work together to build up the body, preserving the unity of the church and glorifying God as people see us work together in unity, humility, and love.
**INSTRUCT:** Ask group members to take a moment and record in their DDG (p. 87) ways they believe God has gifted them to be part of the local church and ways they need others in the church.

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**FILL IN THE BLANKS:** Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 87).

**Body of Christ:** The picture of the church as the body of Christ shows us the **interconnectedness** of individual Christians, with each member dependent upon one another for **growth** and **sanctification**.

**Essential Doctrine “Body of Christ”:** The New Testament describes the church as the body of Christ. The church lives and operates as Christ’s representative here on earth, with Christ as its head (Col. 1:18). This means that the church is an extension of Christ’s ministry, carrying out His work by fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). In addition, the picture of the church as the body of Christ shows us the **interconnectedness** of individual Christians, with each member dependent upon one another for **growth** and **sanctification** (1 Cor. 12).

**EXPLAIN:** Using the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 87), emphasize that while we rely on one another in the church, God’s design is for His people to rely chiefly on Christ.

We are to carry one another’s burdens as we help to lead the people of God into greater love of Christ and hatred of sin (Gal. 6:2). But as good as the gift of the church is in this regard, God has also given us Christ, the head of the church. We are to cast all of our burdens for salvation and sanctification on Him who has the wisdom and power to bear them for us perfectly (Ps. 55:22; Matt. 11:28-30; 1 Pet. 5:6-7). May we humbly submit ourselves to our Lord, the One who leads us, equips us, and enables us to help one another carry out the mission we have received as followers of Christ.
My Mission

EXPLAIN: Moses, like all of us at times, needed a wake-up call. He needed Jethro to rejoice with him and to encourage him. But he also needed Jethro to point out an area of weakness so he could improve in his leadership. Moses was not a perfect leader, even after heeding Jethro’s counsel, and neither are we. Jesus, however, serving as the head of the church, offers the example of perfect leadership for all of us. Moses led imperfectly, as we do, but Christ leads with perfect wisdom. As God’s leaders today, we should learn from Moses, a great leader, while keeping our eyes fixed upon Christ, the perfect leader.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 88), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because God has established us as a people and gives us wisdom, we provide godly counsel to others and follow the godly counsel given to us so that we may be more effective in proclaiming God’s kingdom to the world.

- What burdens will you cast upon Christ, believing that He will carry them for you with wisdom and power?
- What burdens can your group bear with one another?
- How will you share the wisdom God has given you to help others and point them to Jesus, who bears all of our burdens through faith?

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, we praise You for Your infinite wisdom. We thank You for the wisdom You have provided Your people in Your Word and through godly leaders. Help us to reflect Your character by living in wisdom and obedience as we seek to share one another’s burdens within the body of Christ. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 89-91), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 92) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 89-91) will help group members get into God’s Word and study it for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 92) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 89-91) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 5 as a part of point 3 in the session: We are not independent but dependent on Christ and His church. Christ’s strength is manifested in our weakness, His glory in our humility and neediness, His love in His faithful provision.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- Day 1: “We cannot hear the gospel preached too much; we need it to seep down from our minds into our hearts daily.”
- Day 4: “We confront a person for one reason: to help him or her. In this way, our confrontation is a selfless act of love.”

Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member’s DDG (p. 92) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

- Encourage group members this week to affirm, exhort, and challenge one another in the faith.
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
Additional Commentary

**Point 1: Wise leaders rejoice with others (Ex. 18:7-12).**

“The references to rescue from the **power of Egypt** continue the use of ‘hand’ in Hebrew as a prominent means by which power is displayed. God had become known through his rescue of Israel from Egypt (6:7; 9:14; 14:18; 16:12). The breadth of the word translated **know** could mean that Jethro was previously unconvinced of the Lord’s superiority, or that he was simply declaring a new awareness from experience. Either way, he was convinced and glad to say so. Jethro’s response contrasts with that of Pharaoh and exemplifies how the Israelites and the readers of Exodus should respond to learning about who the Lord is from his actions.”

“Jethro is **delighted** with this testimony and responds by praising the Lord (18:9-10). This priest of Midian may have been a polytheist before (see 2:16), but now he declares that the Lord is greater than all gods in executing justice for the oppressed (18:11). Jethro then gives the Lord offerings and sacrifices of praise, and Aaron and the elders of Israel eat with him in the Lord’s presence (18:12). As Moses witnesses to God’s saving acts in Israel through him, Jethro comes to faith in the God of Israel. We too are called to witness to others about God’s saving work in our lives.”

**Point 2: Wise leaders challenge others (Ex. 18:13-18).**

“There may be over-doing even in well-doing, and therefore our zeal must always be governed by discretion, that our good may not be evil spoken of. Wisdom is profitable to direct, that we may neither content ourselves with less than our duty nor over-task ourselves with that which is beyond our strength … Great men should not only study to be useful themselves, but contrive how to make others useful, according to their capacity is.”

“Moses was not merely a judge. He was a prophet who conveyed God’s will when it was sought. The NIV translation, ‘the people come to me to seek God’s will’ can make it sound like Moses already knew God’s will, but this was not the case. A better translation would be ‘the people come to me to inquire of God,’ which connotes better Moses’ intermediary role. Through him the people asked God for answers to their disputes, and thus Moses asserted that he did not really judge on his own but ‘decides between the parties and informs them of God’s decrees and laws.’ In other words, the legal process involved the revelatory process in this case. That was almost certainly the reason Moses had felt obligated to do all the judging himself: the answers involved God’s own decisions, and Moses understood himself to be the sole conduit for those to the people.”
Point 3: Wise leaders share burdens with others (Ex. 18:24-27).

“These verses set our principles of good leadership that we should follow in our churches and nations. First, it is wise to listen to the advice of experienced people (Ex. 18:14-17). Second, power should be shared and delegated so that workloads are manageable (Ex. 18:18,22). Third, people should be selected for jobs on the basis of their competencies and their character (Ex. 18:21). Fourth, organizational structures must be clear and well-defined. Fifth, job descriptions must be clear so that everyone knows what is their responsibility (Ex. 18:19-22).”

“These verses summarize the fulfillment of what was suggested, in typical repetitive command-fulfillment style. Although it is not stated overtly, it may be assumed that Moses learned from God that Jethro’s advice was either acceptable or even what God had intended all along and Moses had misunderstood. Thus already at Sinai/Horeb, three months after leaving Egypt, Israel had a hierarchical court system using chosen, not inherited, leaders as judges, with Moses as the supreme court.”

“Moses recognizes that his father-in-law is giving sound advice that will solve a serious problem, and so he puts it into practice (18:24-26). Then, again demonstrating his wisdom, Jethro fades into the background (18:27). Both these men demonstrate the humility that goes with true leadership. Moses did not seek to keep all the power himself, but was prepared to share it with others. He seems to have trusted his officials to carry out their duties, for we do not read of him micro-managing them or second-guessing their decisions. This, in itself, must have enabled him to spend more time with God, the source of wisdom and power to lead.”

References
The Books of Genesis and Exodus are meant to be read together, providing an important clue for our approach to the rest of Scripture. The story begins in Genesis and unfolds with breathtaking speed, but then the pace slows as the rest of the book tells us the story of four generations of the one family through which God promised to bring blessing to the world.

As Genesis winds down, we encounter Joseph, one of Abraham’s great grandsons, and see that God’s promises are not always easy for His people. But through Joseph’s difficulties, we encounter the vital concept of redemption. His life was one of setbacks, frustration, and disappointment. But all the while, we see that God was at work through Joseph’s adversity, not despite it. God brought about redemption for Joseph and his family: God is always bringing glory to Himself and good to His people through their hardships, even by overriding their sins.

Then as we move from Genesis to Exodus, we pass over nearly four hundred years to a time when God’s people are enslaved. The stage is set for an even greater display of God’s desire and ability to redeem His people. When they cry out to God for deliverance from their slavery in Egypt, He provides a rescuer in Moses to free His people and to provide for them.

God’s deliverance of Joseph and the nation of Israel were the early stages of a beautiful crescendo of God’s plan to redeem His people that culminated in Christ Jesus. In Him we have experienced redemption from the slavery of sin and death. As we study these sessions, let us pray that the Holy Spirit stirs our hearts anew so that we are captivated by the love, grace, and mercy of God made known to us in our redemption through Christ so we can share Him with others.
**Matt Chandler** (unit 4, sessions 4-6; unit 5, session 1) is a Lead Pastor at The Village Church, president of Acts 29, and author of several books, including *Take Heart: Christian Courage in the Age of Unbelief*. Matt and his wife, Lauren, have three children: Audrey, Reid, and Norah.

**Jennifer Grisham** (unit 6, sessions 1-2) serves as managing editor and administrator at Doxology & Theology. She’s a graduate of Baylor University and is currently pursuing a masters degree at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

**Andrew Hall** (unit 6, session 3) is the Lead Pastor of Community Bible Church, located in Ilderton, Ontario, Canada. He is a graduate from Southern Seminary. He and his wife, Melanie, have four children: Noelle, Ava, Calvin, and Brita.

**Pat Hood** (unit 5, sessions 2-3) is the Senior Pastor at LifePoint Church in Tennessee. He and his wife, Amy, have five children. Pat is the author of *The Sending Church*, which challenges every church to send and every Christian to live sent.

**Sung Jin Park** (Christmas session) and his wife, Alice, have three kids. He is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and earned a PhD from Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion.

**David Roark** (unit 4, sessions 4-6; unit 5, session 1) is the Communications and Resources Director at The Village Church and writes on faith and culture in notable publications. He and his wife, Taylor, have two daughters: Leigh and Lainey.

**Robert Smith Jr.** (unit 4, sessions 1-3), PhD, is the Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School. He is the author of *Doctrine That Dances* and *The Oasis of God*. He is married to Wanda Taylor-Smith (PhD), and they have four adult children with one in heaven.