

MOSES

A Man of Selfless Dedication

STUDY FOURTEEN

Why Leaders Crack Up

Exodus 18

It's not a sign of spirituality to work all day, seven days a week, and never take a vacation. You'll crack up!

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WE admire people who get things done. With unique talent and hard work, they produce impressive results, which attracts notice. Eventually, they rise to higher levels of leadership. More authority. More responsibility. Greater demands. Just to keep up, they start working longer hours and sacrificing time with their families. Wide is the scope of their influence. Heavy is the burden they carry . . . and it never lightens.

What drives these high achievers? If you could climb inside of their minds, you might hear messages like these:

Everything depends on me.

If I don't do it, it won't get done.

If I want something done right, I must do it myself.

It's easier to do it myself than find someone to do it for me.

I'm embarrassed to ask someone for help.

I must never admit that I can't get it all done.

I just need to work harder, and everything will be fine.

These thoughts are like a plague on the soul, and they will lead people to a breakdown unless a friend with a caring heart comes along and challenges them.



Why Leaders Crack Up

Exodus 18

Moses carried a heavy burden. He was prophet and judge as well as Israel's national leader, and it was too much responsibility for one person to carry. It was wearing him out and causing problems among the people he was called to lead. Moses, the deliverer of Israel, needed to be delivered himself.

Like us sometimes, Moses had chained himself to an impossible standard, and he needed to be cut loose by a wise person who knew what to say and when to say it. Let's find out who came to Moses' aid, how he helped Moses, and how we can avoid one of the most common pitfalls of leadership.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The authors of Scripture spoke “the Spirit’s words to explain spiritual truths” (1 Corinthians 2:13). Invite the Holy Spirit to reveal from Scripture His spiritual truths to you as you study.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

So much had happened since Moses last saw his family. We spotted them previously when they were traveling with Moses from Midian to Egypt, and, you recall, there was an incident involving circumcision (*Exodus 4:24–26*). In the events since then—the ten plagues, the first Passover, the exodus, crossing the Red Sea, manna in the wilderness, water from the rock—Zipporah or Moses' sons were never mentioned. Now, we're told why:

Earlier, Moses had sent his wife, Zipporah, and his two sons back to Jethro, who had taken them in. (Exodus 18:2)

They were living in Midian. The grapevine between Egypt and Midian had been buzzing with news, though, so Moses' family had heard about the exodus. What did Jethro decide to do when Moses arrived near the mountain of God, according to *18:1–6*?

Why Leaders Crack Up

Exodus 18

On your Bible maps or the online map, “[Exodus from Egypt](#),” at [insight.org](#), locate the approximate place where Moses and the people were camping.

Moses had returned with God’s people not far from where God first appeared to him. How encouraging it must have been for Moses to reunite with his family here. Not only did they bring Moses a welcome breeze of support after weeks of criticism, but also Jethro blessed his son-in-law with some wise counsel when Moses needed it most.



Observation: A Timely Visit from a Respected Mentor

In *observation*, it’s helpful to put yourself into the scene.¹ The text focuses on Moses meeting Jethro. Perhaps it was customary for leaders of the family to meet first, and then Moses could reunite with Zipporah and his sons. Imagine being there when Moses saw his family again. What emotions filled the air? What expressions would you see on their faces? Read the passage with an “insider” perspective as you reflect on the characters and events.

Catching Up with Family—Exodus 18:7–12

Forty years earlier, Jethro took Moses in when he was a failure and a fugitive. Moses was closer to Jethro than to his own father. What happened when the two men met in [Exodus 18:7–9](#)? What do you think it meant for Moses to talk to Jethro about the great things God had done through him?

What central theme in Exodus did Jethro declare in [18:10–12](#)? What did Jethro do to honor the Lord and to link arms with the leaders of the new nation?

Why Leaders Crack Up

Exodus 18

Moses at Work—Exodus 18:13–16

Time with his family filled up Moses' empty soul, but the next day's duties drained the overworked leader again. What did Jethro observe Moses doing from dawn into the night, according to *Exodus 18:13–14*? What two key questions did Jethro ask?

What answer did Moses give in *18:15–16*? Why do you think Moses assumed only he could do this job?

It takes courage to counsel strong leaders. If you're a leader, you're wise to be open to their counsel. You don't have all the answers. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Wise Counsel—Exodus 18:16–23

This wise old leader was able to bring some much-needed objectivity to the situation and tell it like it was. What did he say to Moses in *Exodus 18:17–18*?

In offering advice, Jethro first reminded Moses of his calling. What priorities did Jethro list in *18:19–20*?

Why Leaders Crack Up

Exodus 18

Second, Jethro made his recommendation. What out-of-the-box solution did Jethro suggest in *Exodus 18:21–23*?

At times, a visitor on the scene has a lot more objectivity than the person who's been on the job for twenty years. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Change in Method—Exodus 18:24–27

Moses listened to wisdom and made what changes in *Exodus 18:24–27*? What character qualities did Moses exhibit with his openness to change?

What happens when people work too many hours, too many days per week? Their gifts begin to suffer. Their priorities shift. They lose direction, and they can lose control of their family. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Leadership Principles for Everyone

Moses could have pulled out a dozen reasons Jethro's advice wouldn't work. As God's chosen leader, only Moses could do the job right. No one else was qualified. He could carry the load if he just worked harder. On and on the list could have gone, but the real reason many leaders resist change is pride. They don't want to let go of their authority.

Why are some leaders threatened by delegating responsibilities?

Why Leaders Crack Up

Exodus 18

Moses, however, saw the greater good. He set aside his pride and relinquished some duties for the sake of his calling and the health of the nation.

Not only was Jethro's advice wise but also his *approach*. Review the following elements of the account. And then, write down a timeless principle that Jethro modeled.

1. Jethro had a long-standing and close relationship with Moses (*Exodus 18:7*).

Principle on building trust: _____

2. Jethro listened to Moses before giving advice (*18:8–12*).

Principle on listening well: _____

3. Jethro observed Moses and the situation and then asked probing questions (*18:13–14*).

Principle on asking questions: _____

4. Jethro looked at the problem objectively, spoke honestly, offered a workable plan, and listed the benefits (*18:17–23*).

Principle on giving advice: _____

Because Jethro's approach was wise and effective, Moses listened. He let go of some duties and devoted himself to the priorities of his calling (*18:24–27*).



Correlation: Discipleship and Delegation

Jesus trained His disciples through delegation. First, He showed the disciples what to do. What were Jesus' ministry duties in *Matthew 9:35–36*?

Why Leaders Crack Up

Exodus 18

Then Jesus gave His disciples a challenge. What did He call them to do in [Matthew 9:37–38](#)?

And then, He sent them out to minister on their own. How did He commission them and encourage them in [10:1, 5–8](#)?

When the disciples returned from their tour of ministry, they “joyfully reported” to Jesus the amazing works they performed in His name (Luke 10:17). As hard as it might be to let go of our duties, delegating allows others to experience the Lord’s joy. In addition, as Jethro told Moses, letting others “help you carry the load, [makes] the task easier for you” (Exodus 18:22).



Application: Leadership Principles for Today

Even a great leader like Moses admitted his problem and welcomed advice. This chapter in Moses’ life contains several valuable guidelines for everyone, regardless of your role.

First, *in every responsibility, two factors are present—the essential and the additional*. The core responsibilities for Moses were representing the people before God, teaching His decrees, and showing the Israelites “how to conduct their lives” (Exodus 18:20). What are your core responsibilities at your workplace? In your home? At church?

Why Leaders Crack Up

Exodus 18

Second, *as the workload increases, wise leaders restrain their involvement and involve others more.* Are you overburdened by additional duties that aren't essential? If so, which ones can you give up or give away?

Third, *God's leaders are not exempt from the penalties of breaking life's natural laws.* Our bodies need rest, and our souls need refreshment. If we go without rest or refreshment for too long, we'll burn out. Have you been pressing your limits? If so, what might need to change in your routine?

Fourth, *efficiency is increased not only by what is accomplished but also by what is relinquished.* When demands rise, we can be more efficient by letting go of responsibilities rather than taking on more. By doing less, you accomplish more! How can you apply this principle in one area of responsibility?

Finally, *when a "Jethro" shows up bearing gifts of wisdom, don't turn a deaf ear.* Listen to the older, wiser people in your life. The Lord may be sending them to you with a message of hope to deliver you from bondage.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, this has been a message I needed to hear. Help me focus on the core responsibilities You have entrusted to me and to let go of the rest. Guard me from the false belief that everything depends on me. Everything depends on You, Lord! Help me to rest in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2024–2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1975, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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