



LEAD: Week 1

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LEAD

Week 1: Traits of a Good Leader

Bible: Hebrews 4:14-16

Bottom Line: A good leader puts the team first, demonstrates humility, and is a person of integrity.

LESSON OBJECTIVE

Many areas of our society is lacking good, godly leadership. This lesson identifies traits of good leaders, and encourages students to look for these traits in the leaders they follow, as well as to seek to develop these traits in themselves.

OPENING GAME: FOLLOW THE LEADER

This activity works best for groups of about seven to ten students, so if necessary, break your larger group into smaller groups of this number.

The object of this game is for one student to identify the leader of the group.

Have students sit in a circle as a group on the floor, all facing the middle.

Choose one student from the group and have them leave the room momentarily.

While they are gone, choose someone in the circle to be the “leader.”

Before the one student comes back to the group, have the leader start doing some sort of rhythmic hand motions (clapping, slapping their knees, snapping, etc.).

The rest will follow the leader and do what they do.

When the one student comes back to the circle, they are to stand in the middle and try to identify the leader.

The leader needs to change their hand motions regularly, and the rest of the group follows.

The leader needs to do so subtly to avoid being discovered.

The guesser gets three chances to guess the leader.

If they do, choose a new guesser and then a new leader for another round.

If they don't guess correctly, make the leader the new guesser.

You can play as many rounds as you like.

TRANSITION

Playing that game was a lot of fun, but it also goes along with what we will be learning about over the next four weeks: leadership.

Looking back on playing the game, what made someone a good leader?"

Listen for responses. If students mention anything insightful, elaborate on that point a little.

This game might not have been the best activity for developing leadership, but at least we had some fun.

Now, let's focus our attention on what it takes to be a real leader.

TEACH

Our world is basically made up of three groups of people: leaders, followers, and bystanders.

Leaders are out in front, inspiring and leading people into new endeavors and opportunities.

They are visionaries who know how to motivate others to accomplish great things.

Followers see the charisma and vision of the leaders, and are willing to get on board with the new challenge in front of them.

And then there are the bystanders.

They're not out there leading others to do great things...or even mediocre things.

And they aren't catching the vision of others and following those leaders to do great things.

Bystanders are just there on the sidelines, often offering little more than a sarcastic or cynical remark about what others are doing.

Which category do you find yourself in most often?

Are you out on the frontlines, leading others to do great things in your school, church, or community?

Are you a follower, inspired by the leadership of others to do great things?

Or are you a bystander, just waiting around to see what might happen?

One problem we have in our world today is that more and more people are becoming bystanders rather than leaders, or even followers.

Many people would rather just sit back and let others do the hard work instead of stepping out of their comfort zone and doing the work themselves.

And part of that problem is that some people want to be leaders, but they don't know how or they don't have any good examples to follow.

If this sounds like you, then you are in luck my friends.

Over the next four weeks, we are going to be learning about what it means to be a good leader; a leader that inspires and motivates others to join them in accomplishing great things.

This week, we will be talking about what traits are necessary to be a good leader.

We will spend some time brainstorming ideas ourselves, and then looking at two books that say a great deal about leadership: the Bible (you've probably heard of it), and *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu (you probably haven't heard of it).

Next week, we will comb through the pages of the Bible to find examples of great leaders of God's people.

We will look to them for inspiration and motivation to develop our own leadership skills.

During our third week, we will look at some modern examples of great leaders—leaders who had a profound impact on the world around them.

And in our final week, we will discover some very simple and practical ways that you all can develop your own abilities to be a leader in your own community.

So, let's tackle this week's topic—what it takes to be a good leader.

In a few minutes, we are going to look at what the experts say about the traits of a good leader, but let's first find out what you all think it takes to be a good leader.

In just a minute, I want you all to get into groups of no more than four or five and work together to create a list of the five most important traits, or characteristics, of a good leader.

Write your answers on the paper being given to you.

Have a youth leader or student volunteer pass out paper and pens to the group.

And I want your lists to not only be the top five traits, but I want you to rank those traits in order of importance.

Ready, Go!

[Give students about 5 to 7 minutes to create their lists. Then call on a member of each group to read their list. Write down the words or phrases they read to the group, putting an X or check mark next to traits that are repeated. Take a few minutes to talk about the common traits that are named by more than one group. Also talk about any outliers that don't seem to fit with other traits that are mentioned.]

You all came up with some great ideas, and you'll find that some of your ideas are the same ones we will be talking about today.

We are going to be pulling from two texts as we talk about what traits make a good leader.

The first one—the one you know—is the Bible.

As you know, the Bible was written by a wide variety of authors during a long span of time, for a variety of different purposes.

And yet, it contains one central message: God loves us and will stop at nothing to have a relationship with us, and how we ought to live in response to God's love.

The second book we will pull from is called *The Art of War*, and it was written by a Chinese military strategist named Sun Tzu who lived during biblical times (the 6th century BCE).

This book reads much like the book of Proverbs in that it contains a lot of short, very wise statements.

Even though the subject of the book is how to be successful on the battlefield, much of its wisdom can be applied in a general sense to all leaders.

Now it may seem strange to you that we are using the words of an ancient Chinese philosopher in a Christian youth group, but God's truth is often echoed in other sources.

And sometimes hearing the words and ideas of those who may not be Christians can give us a better understanding—or at least a different understanding—of God's truths.

In this lesson, we are going to look at three traits of a good leader.

We will see what the Bible, and sometimes what Sun Tzu, has to say about those traits.

This will help prepare us for the future lessons as we learn more about what it means to be a leader.

The first trait of a good leader is **they put the good of the group or team ahead of themselves.**

I'm sure you've heard the phrase, "There is no 'I' in 'team.'"

This means that no one on the team—from the leader to the least of the followers—is in it for themselves.

The team must work together to accomplish their goals.

They cannot let their own egos or ambitions get in the way of that.

And this attitude must start with the leader of the team.

The leader must realize that each person on the team is of great value and an important contributor to the team.

Jesus not only taught this idea, for example in **John 10** where he describes himself as the "Good Shepherd," but He also lived this idea.

Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, not only led His disciples and followers, but He took care of them, even to the point of laying down His life for them.

Jesus provided the ultimate teaching and ultimate example for how to be a team-centered leader.

Sun Tzu recognized the importance of this when he said, "Treat your men as you would your own beloved sons. And they will follow you into the deepest valley."

When followers know that they are valued by their leader, not just for what they contribute to the team, but for who they are as individuals—they will be more loyal to the team and their leader.

It can be seen in businesses around the world—those who treat their employees with respect and dignity, and genuinely care for their employees, will get much more effort out of their teams.

The second trait is very similar to the first one—a **good leader is humble**.

A good leader does not seek the glory and applause for a job well-done.

A good leader publicly recognizes they could not have accomplished anything without the help of their team.

The professional basketball league (the NBA) and the professional hockey league (the NHL) have their seasons at about the same time of year, which means that their playoffs and championship series happen at roughly the same time.

Several years ago, each league's championship was named within just a couple days of each other.

After their respective teams won the championship, the captains of the winning basketball team and the winning hockey team each gave speeches at different press conferences.

Several sports commentators and newscasters picked up on something very interesting about the two captains' speeches.

It seemed that for every time the basketball team captain used the word "I" in his speech ("I got the ball," "I took charge," etc.), the hockey team captain used the word "we" ("we rose to the occasion," "we battled through difficulty," etc.).

The basketball team captain led his team to victory by taking charge of the game and making sure his team won.

On the other hand, the hockey team captain recognized that the victory was a team effort and humbly acknowledged that he couldn't win the game on his own.

Again, Jesus is the perfect example in both word and deed.

John 13 and the following chapters tell the story of the Last Supper.

During that time with His disciples, Jesus tells them that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for their friends.

Jesus also models this love and humility by getting down on his hands and knees and washing His disciples' feet—a rather disgusting job reserved for the lowliest of servants.

A third important trait of a leader is **integrity**.

A leader needs to be trustworthy and honest.

A leader needs to be a man or woman of character.

There will come a time (probably many times) when a leader needs to make a tough decision.

When that time comes, a leader's values come out loud and clear.

Will the leader do the right thing for the group or the cause?

Or will they do the easy thing that results in selfish gain or harm to the group?

It is in these situations where integrity is absolutely crucial.

The author of Hebrews says this about Jesus in chapter 4:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (emphasis added)

Jesus is the ultimate example of integrity.

He lived thirty-three years on this planet, and never once sinned.

Oh, He was tempted—as Hebrews tells us—but He never once gave in to that temptation.

There were plenty of occasions when Jesus could have taken the easy way out, like in the Garden of Gethsemane, but Jesus always did the right thing.

Jesus knows what it means to be tempted to do the easy thing instead of the right thing.

As Hebrews says, we have a sympathetic High Priest who enables us to go before God's throne.

Not only that, but Jesus provides us a perfect example of integrity.

We can study the life of Jesus to see how to lead with integrity.

Our friend, Sun Tzu, also recognized the importance of leaders being men and women of integrity.

He wrote, "He who advances without seeking fame; who retreats without escaping blame; He who's one aim is to protect his people and serve his lord; The man is a jewel in the Realm."

Sun Tzu is describing a leader who does the right thing because it's the right thing to do—a leader who doesn't seek fame and glory, and doesn't shift the blame away from themselves.

There are so many important traits of a good leader that we could probably spend several months talking about them all.

We could dig into the Bible to find these traits and to find examples of those who embody them.

We could dig into other texts, like *The Art of War* and others, to do the same.

But we will leave it with just these three today:

- A good leader puts the team first.
- A good leader is humble.
- And a good leader is a person of integrity.

Let's discuss these things some more in our small groups.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Of the three traits mentioned, which one do you think is most important to the success of the leader?
2. Who are some leaders (both Christians and non-Christians) you look up to? What traits do you most admire in them?
3. Who is someone in your life who puts the good of the group or team first? What can you learn from this person's example?
4. Who is someone in your life who is a humble leader? What can you learn from their example?
5. Who is someone in your life who models integrity? What can you learn from their example?
6. How can you exhibit these traits, even if you are not in a position of leadership?
7. What are some other important leadership traits not mentioned here?
8. Have you ever known a "bad" leader? What qualities did they possess that caused them to lead poorly?
9. What are some things you can do to ensure that you don't become a bad leader?
10. Do you think everyone is called to LEAD?

Close in prayer, asking God to help students to develop these traits in their own lives, as well as to recognize these traits in others.