

Follow the Leader

by Carol Duerksen

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Blindfolds for each student
- 2 Newsprint and marker or chalk board
- 3 Bible for each student
- 4 Copies of the articles "The Day God Slapped Me in the But" and "Leadership Stinks" for each student.
- 5 Bible commentaries on Moses.

FOCUS

Begin the session with a game of Follow the Leader. Divide into small groups and have students take turns being the leader so that everyone has the chance to be the leader.

Play a second round of Follow the Leader, but this time everyone except the leader wears a blindfold. Students can touch the shoulder of the person in front of them to maintain contact with the leader. Repeat this so that everyone has a chance to be a leader.

Talk about the experience. What did students like and dislike about being leaders? Followers? Blindfolded? Did the leaders play tricks on them when they were blindfolded? Did they trust the leaders? Why or why not?

CONNECT WITH THE BIBLE

Ask students to name leaders in the Bible, and make a list on the newsprint. Beside each leader, write what made them a good leader, as well as weaknesses they had as a leader. Were the leaders trustworthy? Continue with this list until students can't think of any more Biblical leaders.

Read the article "The Day God Slapped Me in the But" but **do not read the postscript at this time.**

Divide into small groups and give each group a Bible commentary. Ask them to look up Moses, read about him, and be prepared to share with the rest of the group. Things for students to look for would include what challenges Moses faced as a leader, whether his followers trusted him, what made him a good leader, what challenges he faced, his weaknesses, what surprised them about Moses.

REFLECT

Read the postscript of “The Day God Slapped Me in the But.” Re-read this sentence and ask students what they think it means: “*Moses figured out that when God tells you to lead, he’s also telling you to follow.*”

Read the article “Leadership Stinks.”

Invite students to reflect on who they are following and who they need to follow in their lives. What are their “issues” with following? Are they following parents? Peers? God? Coaches? Youth leaders?

RESPOND

Invite students to choose one of the Biblical leaders from the newsprint that they admire and would like to emulate. Explain that even if they don’t see themselves as leaders, they can see characteristics in the Biblical leaders that would be good to model their lives after. Invite them to share their thoughts with the group.

Close with a time of prayer.

“THE DAY GOD SLAPPED ME IN THE BUT”

By Leola Floren Gee

Know what terrifies me? Not snakes. Not spiders. Not heights. Not tight spaces. Not wild beasts, lightning, or final exams.

What terrifies me is *public speaking*. I read that it’s the number one fear people have, and I believe it. In fact, I’ve lived it.

When I was in high school, I couldn’t think of anything worse than standing at the podium in front of a classroom, trying to deliver a speech. My hands shook. My voice trembled. My cheeks turned bright pink. My tongue morphed into a big, fat, soggy wad of cotton. My skin oozed sweat. Some jerk in the back row yelled, “Hey, look at the pit stains!” and I felt like an idiot.

Talk in front of a group? I’d rather smear myself with garbage and wrestle a goat.

That said, maybe you can understand my lack of enthusiasm when God told me to march up to the king of Egypt and tell him I intended to take his slaves on a field trip.

He’s Pharaoh, I thought to myself. I grew up in the palace, and I’ve seen what he does to people who deliver bad news. *No way.*

Did I really say, “No way,” to God? I was sure he would understand. After all, he could see I wasn’t the

guy for the job.

But ... but ... but. But maybe I'm getting ahead of myself. First, there was the burning bush.

Wait. Maybe I should backtrack just a little bit further. Like to when I was three months old, floating down the Nile in a laundry basket.

Seems that the Hebrew slaves were multiplying so quickly, Pharaoh was afraid we might pose a threat, so he ordered the baby boys tossed into the Nile. I suppose you could say Mom technically followed the rules, because into the Nile I went. Before she let me go, however, she bundled me into a basket that she had smeared with tar so it wouldn't sink. My sister, Miriam, kept an eye on me as I bobbed along in the reeds. Who should appear and find me adorable—no surprise there—but Pharaoh's sister? She adopted me as her own, and I grew up as a prince of Egypt.

Everything went along pretty smoothly until I bopped a guy on the head with a rock because I spotted him beating a Hebrew slave. It was a spur of the moment kind of thing, but there aren't any defense lawyers in Pharaoh's court, and I landed a death sentence.

I figured it was as good a time as any to leave town, so I split and started over in a new community. Eventually I married and began a family. It was great to start over, even though my job of watching sheep for my father-in-law was a bit of a step down socially from my life of leisure at the palace. Sheep are okay. They don't care whether you're a great conversationalist, as long as you don't march them over a cliff. Still, the boredom can get to you. In fact, one day I thought I might have gone over the edge.

Picture this: The sun beat down on my head as the sheep grazed, the ants scurried at my feet, a raven soared overhead, and suddenly I was startled to see a clump of shrubbery blazing like a bonfire, yet not burning up. Naturally, I went in for a closer look.

"Moses, Moses!" came a voice from the bush.

I mumbled a greeting. I mean, it's the polite thing to do.

The voice told me to take off my shoes because I was standing on holy ground, and then it went on to say, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

I fell to my face, as terrified as I've ever been in my life. You can run from Pharaoh, but you can't escape God.

That day God told me he planned to deliver the Hebrews out of slavery, and it was my job to go to Pharaoh and clue him in on the deal.

Whoa. Slow down. *Reconsider.*

God and I had a long conversation. Granted, he did most of the talking. He told me that he had heard the prayers of my fellow Hebrews, and he was going to rescue them from Egypt and bring them to a wonderful land. First on the agenda: I was to go to Pharaoh and lead the people away.

What if the Hebrews didn't cooperate? What if Pharaoh said no? What about supplies for the journey? What if nobody believed me?

Surprisingly, God had an answer for every one of my concerns. Finally, I said, “Please, Lord, I’ve never been a good speaker. I don’t think fast on my feet.”

God pointed out that he had made my mouth, and he was capable of teaching me what to say.

But ... but ... but. “But Lord,” I reasoned. “Isn’t there someone else who would be better qualified for the job?”

You know how it is when you whine and moan and beg your parents for something, and all of a sudden you realize you went just one whine too far? Yeah.

Surprisingly, God didn’t snap his fingers and ignite me along with the bush. Instead, he told me he would send my brother Aaron along to help out.

Awesome! Aaron could talk his way out of anything.

This was gonna be a piece of cake.

Then I took a look at the map. How, I wondered, were we going to get all those folks across the Red Sea?

But ... I caught myself. My guess? God had a plan.

POSTSCRIPT

God had a plan, all right. Moses was going to wear out a few pairs of sandals before the Promised Land came into view, and even more before the Hebrews took possession of all that God had told them to look forward to.

Along the way, Moses’ mouth and his attitude got him into trouble on a number of occasions. He had a knack for annoying the Lord, because when God told him to do something, it seems as if the first word that popped into Moses’ head was, “But ...”

Eventually, though, Moses figured out that when God tells you to lead, he’s also telling you to follow. God sees down the road ... and across the Red Sea ... and over the mountains ... and through the desert ... and he has a map, better than Triple A’s, that will get you to your destination as you follow his instructions.

Despite a few detours, one of which lasted 40 years, Moses followed the Lord, and when he died, his own followers cried for 30 days. Here’s what the book of Deuteronomy says: “Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land” (Deuteronomy 34:10-11 *NIV*).

If you want to lead like Moses, first learn to follow. No *ifs*, *ands*, or *buts*.

“LEADERSHIP STINKS—WHEN LEARNING HOW TO FOLLOW SAVED ME”

A true story by Beth Wendling

“It’s your fault, Beth.”

Those words echoed in my mind as we stumbled around in the black darkness of the forest. The moon and stars gave a smattering of light as we did our best to put up tents and find our sleeping bags. We were exhausted from hiking all day. The last scrap of granola was devoured hours ago, and most of our canteens were dry. But the real kick in the pants? We were lost. And it really was my fault.

The day had started out better than expected. All of us were on a trip called High Road, an Outward Bound Wilderness type experience for incoming freshmen at Wheaton College. Our group of 10 was made up of eight female students and our guides, Chris and Barb.

We had a daily routine of hiking (15 miles a day was “normal”), canoeing, portaging (a fancy way of saying we had to carry those canoes), and basically surviving. **Survival.** Rough translation: no phones, no makeup, no curling irons, no watches, no toilet paper, no kidding. (If you must know, we made creative use of leaves.) Barb and Chris had one job: whip us into shape and teach us everything they knew.

And, these drill sergeants knew a lot. How to blaze a trail. How to turn a chunk of wood into a spoon. How to tell time by reading the horizon. How to dig a latrine. After filling our brains with this wilderness survival stuff and building our endurance, they turned the leadership of our team over to us. Weeks ago we were pansies. Now, we were warriors.

Each day we had a map and a destination. Reach the destination and we’d be rewarded with food and a fresh water source, usually a stream or lake. Last night our team dined on spaghetti and Bisquick roasted on a stick. Yummy. Granted, it was no Applebee’s, but after a hard day of hiking, it tasted great.

Lauren had been our leader that day. And she was tough. From the crack of dawn (“All right, you slackers, let’s make tracks!”) through afternoon hiking (“Dude, our blisters have blisters! Slow down.”), she wouldn’t budge. Lauren had a goal: get to our destination before sunset. Chris and Barb must have been proud.

Although we made it, blistering feet and all, a few of us began whispering behind her back. “Who does she think she is?” “Yeah, talk about buying into all this survival-of-the-fittest junk.” “I’m sick of doing this the hard way. We don’t need to follow their orders. Right, Beth?”

No, I didn’t think we did.

And, since my turn to lead was coming up next, I made a decision to do things QUITE differently. Forget all this get-up-with-the-chickens garbage. Forget hiking all day like we were pack mules. No, I had no intention of following what Chris and Barb taught us.

Big mistake. Big.

It's what led our group to be fumbling around in the darkness 24 hours later. Without food. Without water. Without a clue where we were.

So, what happened?

Like I said, the day started out better than I expected. Although I had awakened before dawn, I turned over in my sleeping bag and caught a few extra z's. Everybody could use more sleep, I figured. Chris and Barb looked frustrated when we finally got around to packing up, eating some granola, and filling our canteens for the day ... but I didn't care. The rest of the crew enjoyed my relaxed approach. "Hey, I like it when Beth's in charge." "Yeah, we're having fun NOW." Lauren just rolled her eyes as my teammates made their points and reminded us we were behind schedule.

Schedule ... phooey.

I huddled up the gang and told them what I had in mind. "Okay, today we're doing things a little differently. I've found a shortcut ... and get this, ladies. It runs through a national park. Yep, civilization. And, they probably have a bathroom, which means we can clean up." Since we hadn't had a shower in 10 days, this last tidbit of news thrilled them.

My friends went bananas. Most clapped, a few high-fived, and one did the Macarena. Everyone seemed excited, except the wilderness geeks, Chris and Barb, and their newest convert, Lauren. They'd taught us to never take a shortcut, because you might have to backtrack. I didn't care. I knew better.

And, for a while at least, it sure looked like I was right.

We made it to the national park in a few hours, and our trail led us through a camping area that had playground equipment, drinking fountains, and bathrooms. Never mind that the bathrooms hadn't been cleaned for 20 years and were out of toilet paper and soap. It beat a shovel and some leaves. It was Disney World to us. Outside, children were laughing, playing on swing sets. The smell of grilling burgers wafted through the air, and "Sweet Home Alabama" played on a car radio. I smiled as my teammates soaked in the blessings of my leadership.

After goofing off and filling our canteens, I told my friends it was time to head out. Only Chris, Barb, and Lauren looked unhappy as we headed off the beaten path. For hours, our crew hiked north. However, instead of complaints about blisters, we sang the Gilligan's Island theme song and talked about boys. *Wow, this leadership thing is a piece of cake*, I thought. Rules, schmules. I didn't need to follow all their baloney about keeping to the established trails when possible. With each step, I felt like I was the hip, happenin' leader who knew how to take care of ...

Rats.

In the midst of my self-lovefest, our gang hiked into a big, fat, stinkin' problem.

"Uh, what's this?"

In front of me, the woods had given way to a rocky cliff. Even with the right equipment, which we didn't have, there was no way across this bad boy. Double rats.

"Looks like the Grand Canyon." Lauren said with a smirk.

"Guys, this wasn't on the map." I countered, trying to defend my shortcut plan.

A few friends muttered. Most gave blank stares. I went from being way cool to way dumb at warp speed.

After a few lame suggestions of trying to go around the ravine, Chris spoke up. "The best option is to go back and take the trail we were supposed to follow." *Supposed to follow*. These words poked at my ego. If only I had stuck to the original plan instead of trying to impress my friends. If only ...

Going back was our only legitimate option, but it would take hours to get to the trail ... plus, hours more to our destination. We'd be lucky to get there by midnight.

"It's your fault, Beth."

Wow, how often would I hear that in the next eight hours? I heard it as we turned tail and began the quiet hike back. (No TV theme songs this time.) I heard it as the sun set and we ate the last of our granola. But, mostly, I heard it when Pamela fell in the dark over a tree limb.

"It's twisted." Chris reported to the rest of us as she looked at the wounded leg. "We'll have to camp here. She can't go any farther."

"But, we don't have any more food, and our water is almost gone," I said.

Lauren looked me in the eye and said, "That's why getting to the destination was a boatload more important than playing around in some park."

Leadership stinks.

I hated being responsible. "Well, it's not my fault we can't keep hiking." It felt slimy trying to put the blame on Pamela, but what choice did I have?

A rotten silence hung over our group as we pitched tents in the dark. "It's all your fault," the mantra of the day, kept eating its way into my thoughts. I was wrong. Period. There, I admitted it. I should have followed the leadership of Chris and Barb, should have listened and obeyed their instructions, should have stuck to the original plan. **Should have**. Too late now.

Or was it?

I gathered up my courage and approached Barb, who was drinking from her canteen. I was impressed that someone had the self-control to have something left. Mine ran out hours ago. "Barb, I'm sorry about today. I was wrong."

Her eyes softened as I admitted my failure.

"So, what do we do now?" I asked.

"Beth, that's up to you. You're still today's leader."

"If you were me, Barb, what would you do?" My question surprised her. I hadn't cared two hoots for her opinion earlier. Now I was desperate.

"Everyone will whine, but we can get by without food," she answered. "Our biggest concern is water. I doubt we're anywhere near a lake or stream. Why don't you have everyone set up the tarps and pray for rain?" I looked her in the eye. She wasn't kidding.

We'd been in the forest two weeks and, shoot, we'd barely seen clouds. She expected me to ask the group to set out tarps, hoping God would take pity on us? It sounded nuts. Why don't we ask God to broil some steaks while he's at it and bake us a cake?

"He's on our side, Beth. Think about it." Then, Barb did something really nice. She offered me her water.

After thinking about what she said, I decided to listen and follow her suggestion. We'd trust God to come through.

I'll never forget the looks I got when I gathered up the crew and told them to put out the tarps. They might have blown me off, except Lauren grabbed a load and started passing them out.

I'll never forget standing in a circle with my friends, shoulder to shoulder, as we begged God to help us.

Most of all, I'll never forget waking up a few hours later in a mud puddle as a stream of water cascaded into my tent. Whoooooey! God didn't just send rain—he soaked us!

I never led that group again. But, I think my last leadership decision that day was my best. I simply put my pride aside and chose to follow.