

Moses the leader. Sunday 18 October 2026 Exodus 32:7-20 and Matthew 17:1-8

Would you just think for a few moments about the qualities of a good leader. Does a particular manager spring to mind? Maybe you have served on a committee led by an impressive chair.

I asked a few people what a great leader is like. Ambitious, determined, and tactical, said one, with a clear idea of the plan and how to achieve their goals. Inspiring, a motivational speaker, a person who can lead by example, and at the same time, look after the welfare of the team, said another. A coach, enabling others to develop their own skills and support the leader, said another. A person who spends time discussing with a mentor, said another.

Moses is considered the definitive leader in the Bible. He rescues the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, leads them to the edge of the promised land, shares God's plans with them and seals a major deal with God. However, we know that he is a murderer. He is accused of leading his team on a wild goose chase, into desperate hunger and thirst. They complain that they would have been better off staying in Egypt; they even choose to worship other gods; he orders plenty of killings, quite apart from battles with other tribes. Is Moses the consummate leader then? Let's consider a few events in his long and full life and see if they shed light on his gifts as a leader.

Advice from a mentor? Well, yes. In Exodus 18 he is exhausted by spending the whole day sorting out problems among the crowd. His father-in-law, Jethro, comes to visit and observes, 'find some reliable people and delegate'. It works!

Ready to share his leadership role and accept the help and support of others? In Exodus 17 the Amalekites attack. Moses entrusts Joshua to lead the army and takes his place on the top of the hill to command and hearten his troops, and to pray. He is accompanied by Aaron and Hur. As his strength begins to fail, his companions fetch a stone for him to sit on and hold up his arms to support and sustain him. Victory!

Another leadership quality? Certainly. A coach, too, encouraging members of his team to step up, take responsibility and share the load. Is he a responsible CEO? Does he consult with his chairman and also advocate for his people?

Indeed, Moses receives the ten commandments (and a whole lot more instructions and regulations as well). God warns him that the Israelites have made a golden calf to worship and threatens to destroy them all. Moses pleads with God on their behalf, and God is merciful. When he does get back down the mountain, Moses smashes the stone tablets in fury. He has tried so hard for his people, and they have abandoned God. He must feel so disappointed. How very human.

So would Alan Sugar take Moses on as an apprentice? Would Elon Musk want him on his team?

Well, hardly. Moses is not exactly leadership material when he spots the burning bush. He has murdered an Egyptian and fled for his life to Midian. He's been working as a herdsman and is settled there with a wife and family. No sign of ambition or determination, then, no goals beyond daily life. He is not a confident speaker, maybe he has a speech defect. He doesn't seem to have anyone working for him; being a herdsman seems to be a pretty solitary occupation. So no leadership experience. No drive, no noticeable self-confidence at all. Not a good candidate.

Yet, God wants him to take on a huge undertaking. Has God been training him all his life for this enormous task? Saved him from annihilation at the hands of Pharaoh; had him grow up in the Egyptian court so that he knows the etiquette, language and culture; nevertheless, let him understand his Hebrew heritage and instilled in him a keen sense of right and wrong? (Hence the murder of the Egyptian task master). Allowed him a time to build a family life so that he values the rewards of freedom and stability? Trained him in animal husbandry and basic farming ready for a long journey through the wilderness? And now called him, personally and directly, to work for God's plan. Moses, the humblest of all men, is the one chosen by God to lead the Israelites. He is reluctant to take on the role, but he is obedient to God's calling. Altogether, he does a pretty good job, doesn't he? Overcoming his speaking problems, caring for his people, encouraging and appointing helpers, coping with insurrection and hardship, getting his people to the place God has planned for them, and constantly consulting God for whatever he needs. A good, obedient, God-loving leader, inspired to greatness, not by his own endeavour but by the guidance and love of God. Ambitious after all, then, nurturing the ambition to serve God in all he does.

No wonder it is Moses who appears with Elijah, the great prophet, at the transfiguration. Two magnificent supporters and encouragers for Jesus as he prepares for the next part of his ministry.

Incidentally, do you think it is possible to be a successful leader in business *and* a good Christian in the 21st century? Have a look at the story of Catherine and Gary Grant, who set up the chain of toy shops called 'The Entertainer'. God has a plan for all of us to work towards his kingdom, although it might not quite be on the scale of Moses' task! So, if we should come across a burning bush, or feel a nudge, or dream a dream, well, let's fling off our shoes, listen to the message, and however inadequate, ill-prepared or inexperienced we feel, listen and respond, 'your will be done'. Trusting God carries with it all the training and experience we'll need to complete the task he has in mind for us.

Deuteronomy 30 says, love God and walk in his ways. Let's start with that and see where it leads us!

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