**Read These Bible Passages:**

Judges 11:1-13

Judges 11:29-39; 12:7

**Focus on This Theme:**

 Today we will examine the story of a mighty warrior, named Jephthah (11:1), who was shown to us as an example of *a leader in the making*! We will dissect his ultimate calling and put under a microscope the qualities that make him a notable leader. In this lesson, be prepared to review four characteristics of a great leader by using Jephthah as our main illustration. Carefully hold up these four attributes for your class to identify with and help them to see their own gifts that make them a natural born leader in whatever God has called them to do, whether you are called to lead an army into war, or a troop of three year olds in a Sunday School class. You could be a leader on Wall Street or leading a mission in the Congo. No matter where you are or how you serve, each one of us possesses qualities that distinguish us as a leader, and this class is designed to help you connect to that reality.

**INTRODUCTION:**

 Come, let us join hands as we embark on the fourth stop of our tour through the book of Judges. Allow me to be your tour guide, as I point out historical monuments that your eyes will be tempted to gaze upon. We will bring the writing of Judges to life as we conduct a careful, archeological dig through the actual words that came from the warm and satisfying breath of God. Often times, at the command of opening your bible to the text of Judges, people already are thinking of an exit strategy from the class. Yet bear with me because this manuscript is more than just about a couple of Judge’s who ruled over God’s people. This novel is dripping wet with juicy stories that would put current Reality TV to shame. During your six-week tour through Judges, be prepared to come face to face with dramatic scenes of idol worship, murder (9:5), jealousy and greed (11:2), seduction (14:16, 16:5), prostitution (16:1), and sacrificing your only daughter as a burnt offering to the LORD (11:39). As if that was not enough drama, you will also learn about a Levite (decedent of Moses and Aaron, the High Priest) who threw his wife out and left her on the front porch to satisfy a group of hungry rapist, who instead were demanding to have him for the night (19:1-30). Oh yes, you heard me right! Just wait until you hear the rest of this story, you will not believe your God-given ears. Nor will you believe that this horrific story is placed right-smack-dab-in-the-middle of this ancient letter, which has a reputation of being boring.

 Arthur E. Cundall speaks perfectly to the description of this book called Judges. Allow his words to draw you in, just as a fisherman draws in his catch.

 “There is much in Judges to sadden the heart of the reader; perhaps no book in the Bible witnesses so clearly to our human frailty. But there are also unmistakable signs of the divine compassion and longsuffering...As the lives of these lesser-saviours are considered, there may be a realization of the need in modern times of a greater Saviour, of unblemished life, who is able to effect a perfect deliverance, not only in time but for eternity.”

**ILLUSTRATION:**

 In the late 1800’s, leprosy was a plague that people feared. It was thought to be highly contagious, but later was found that 95 percent of human beings are immune to it. Leprosy was also thought to be incurable. Out of the terror it might spread the Hawaiian legislature passed, and King Kamehameha V approved, the “Act to Help Prevent the Spread of Leprosy.” This law quarantined the lepers of Hawaii and caused them to be moved to settlement colonies. Ponder the lonely cries of healthy family members that were forced to ship their spouses, children, parents, and loved ones off to this sequestered island; essentially just to die and be rid of.

 In 1873 we are introduced to Father Damien as a mighty warrior, an exceptional leader of his time. Father Damien came to the understanding that not only did this leper colony have zero help with basic needs, but more importantly they were not being reached with the gospel. His heart ached for them, so this leader set out with one purpose in mind. He would risk his own life, for the life of these lost, rejected and diseased people. For eleven years he preached the Good News to this camp but with little success, very few came to know and believe in Jesus. His brother pleaded with him to come home and forget about this hard-hearted group. In response to his brother, Father Damien wrote:

 “I make myself a leper with the lepers to gain all to Jesus Christ.”

After writing this response and eleven years of tenacity and steadfast faith with the lepers, Father Damien contracted the disease. This leader became a leper! Over the next five years before he died, the whole leper community came to a personal relationship with Christ. It was only when Father Damien became like one of them, that the community could receive in faith what he was telling them about God.

Father Damien was an extraordinary leader, who left behind a legacy that still continues to invite people to rise up and take their position as leader. Rise up Church!

**BIBLE PASSAGE #1**

**Judges 11:1-13**

 **11** Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior. His father was Gilead; his mother was a prostitute. 2Gilead’s wife also bore him sons, and when they were grown up, they drove Jephthah away. “You are not going to get any inheritance in our family,” they said, “because you are the son of another woman.” 3So Jephthah fled from his brothers and settled in the land of Tob, where a group of adventurers gathered around him and followed him.

4Some time later, when the Ammonites were fighting against Israel, 5the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. 6“Come,” they said, “be our commander, so we can fight the Ammonites.”

7Jephthah said to them, “Didn’t you hate me and drive me from my father’s house? Why do you come to me now, when you’re in trouble?”

8The elders of Gilead said to him, “Nevertheless, we are turning to you now; come with us to fight the Ammonites, and you will be head over all of us who live in Gilead.”

9Jephthah answered, “Suppose you take me back to fight the Ammonites and the Lord gives them to me—will I really be your head?”

10The elders of Gilead replied, “The Lord is our witness; we will certainly do as you say.” 11So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them. And he repeated all his words before the Lord in Mizpah.

12Then Jephthah sent messengers to the Ammonite king with the question: “What do you have against me that you have attacked my country?”

13The king of the Ammonites answered Jephthah’s messengers, “When Israel came up out of Egypt, they took away my land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, all the way to the Jordan. Now give it back peaceably.”

**COMMENTARY:**

 The man of the hour is Jephthah; the one whom God chose to lead Israel into victory. He is described to us as a Gileadite, a mighty man of valor, and the son of a harlot, who was unwanted. Pretty interesting combination, wouldn’t you say? It almost skips to the beat of what an oxymoron would sound like. Apparently, Jephthah’s father was of great importance because the town was named after his father, Gilead. We witness that while he was growing up he was continually poked and prodded by his half brothers. Eventually once Jephthah’s father had died; his siblings drove him away by shouting and reminding him that his mother was a prostitute, and they assumed his future inheritance in their hands. Yet little did these selfish brothers know the plans that God had for Jephthah, plans to prosper and not to harm him (Jeremiah 29:11). The inheritance God planned for Jephthah would supersede any earthly wealth.

In some ways Jephthah reminds us of Jesus: There was a shadow over his birth and he was rejected by his brethren. When they got into bondage they remembered him and called upon him as their savior. In agreeing to help the Gileadites, Jephthah also agreed to be their savior but insisted on being their lord as well. I personally love to hear a good story where the underdog makes an unforgettable comeback and steals the show! I can hear the wicked step brothers whispering amongst themselves about whom their new commander is and if this means Jephthah would now be privileged to their pot of gold.

Can you think of another story in the bible that sounds familiar to Jephthah’s? How could I not bring up the unforgettable tale of Joseph and his eleven brothers? Joseph was rejected by his selfish brothers, but later became their savior (Genesis 37-45).

While scripture exposes Jephthah and presents to us a raw and unscripted version of his biography, we also get to peek into the true life story of *a leader in the making*. Even though his testimony is rich with drama, my main goal for this lesson is to expose the leadership qualities that Jephthah exudes in the passages we will read today. The first half of Jephthah’s story revealed to us in Judges 11:1-13, teaches us about the first **two** (out of four)characteristics that make up a good Commander in Chief. Let’s focus our attention to peeling back the onion, one layer at a time, so that we may set our mind to what these qualities look like through pure example:

**FOUR QUALITIES OF A GREAT LEADER**:

1. **Pray and counsel with the Lord before taking action**: Allow me to redirect your eyes to a verse that, if not paying close attention, would easily seem to leap off the page and go into hiding for the rest of eternity.

See Judges 11:11- “And he (Jephthah) repeated all his words before the Lord in Mizpah (which is his home town).”

Scripture does not skip this key verse because it brings to hand an essential ingredient of an important recipe of a good leader. Jephthah had an overwhelming task in front of him. He had to defeat a mighty group of people called the Ammonites that had been a thorn in Israel’s side for a period of time. He was facing an obstacle that required devastating twenty towns of Ammonite residents. This was no simple task. Yet, we see before Jephthah makes any first moves that he goes to the Lord in prayer and counsels with God. Scripture is not clear but one of two things took place in this prayer. Jephthah either spoke this prayer out loud in front of all the Gileadites to set an example and lead by prayer, or he prayed in a private place to his Commander. Either action is acceptable and pleasing to the Lord and should be noted.

**ILLUSTRATION**:

 In the book Decision Points by George W. Bush, he chronicles his moment by moment experiences beginning at 8:00 am on September 11, 2001. It is fascinating to capture the thoughts that enveloped this leader’s mind and would ultimately set the tone for the future of America. Flipping through the carefully edited pages, you come across a statement that is rarely discussed by politicians today. President Bush mentions that it was his faith and relationship with God that he leaned on, to get him through that time. Just like Jephthah, he also had a huge task ahead of him after September 11th and he got on his knees to pray and counsel with the Lord before taking action. How reassuring!

1. **Peacemaker**: Verse 12-28 was an attempt on Jephthah’s part to attempt peaceful negotiations with the Ammonites before declaring war. One sentence before, in verse 11, we watch Jephthah get on his knees and counsel with the Lord. Don’t miss the fact that as Jephthah gets off his knees and walks straight into verse 12, he is led by the Lord to try and make peace first. To give the Ammonites a second chance before wreaking havoc on their land and people. Whose personality does this remind you of? The Lord, of course! That is always His merciful way, even with His own rebellious people. Jephthah, as a leader, recognizes that war could result in hundreds of Jewish men being slaughtered. He was not a hothead; instead he was careful and considerate of what a war could result in. If Jephthah was led by his pride, then he would not have first counseled with the Lord and tried to make peace. He would have asserted himself, so he could ultimately be praised and honored by the people who once rejected him. He could have rushed in to satisfy the sensational appetite of having them worship him, for saving them from the wicked Ammonites.

**ILLUSTRATION:**

As my daughter approaches eleven years old, like any parent I continue to try hard and instill good, moral ethics into her being. I was beaming with pride the other month when she came home from elementary school and repeated a story from the school yard at recess. She hopped in our SUV from the carpool lane and immediately began to report of her good behavior.

Talking a mile a minute, she recalls her experience,

 “Today at recess my friends got mad at one of our other friends because she was saying things that annoyed them.”

“Uh-huh,” I said.

“They all decided that they were not going to talk to her anymore and begin to ignore her,” she paused.

“What did you do about that?” I questioned with hesitation.

With a smile on her face and a perfect clarity in her tone she began to reassure me. “Well, I went over to the girls and encouraged them to not ignore her. I asked how they would feel if someone did that to them?”

“What did they say?” I persisted.

“They all agreed it would not be nice. So I just asked them to forgive her and move on.”

As she finished her sentence I was overwhelmed with satisfaction. I recognized that my daughter had the qualities of being a peacemaker.

Who would not want to be around a peacemaker? They are delightful and we all want them in our lives. More importantly, we all need to try and be a peacemaker. Peacemakers are leaders!

**BIBLE PASSAGE #2**:

**Judges 11:29-39; 12:7**

 29Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites. 30And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord: “If you give the Ammonites into my hands, 31whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord’s, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering. ”

32Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the Lord gave them into his hands. 33He devastated twenty towns from Aroer to the vicinity of Minnith, as far as Abel Keramim. Thus Israel subdued Ammon.

34When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of tambourines! She was an only child. Except for her, he had neither son nor daughter. 35When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, “Oh no, my daughter! You have brought me down and I am devastated. I have made a vow to the Lord that I cannot break. ”

36“My father,” she replied, “you have given your word to the Lord. Do to me just as you promised, now that the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites. 37But grant me this one request,” she said. “Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry.”

38“You may go,” he said. And he let her go for two months. She and her friends went into the hills and wept because she would never marry. 39After the two months, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin.

**Chapter 12**:

7Jephthah led[[a](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=judges%2012:7&version=NIV#fen-NIV-6877a)] Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in a town in Gilead.

**COMMENTARY**:

 When I read this story, the devastation of Jephthah slaying his only daughter to death to fulfill a promise to the Lord, horrified me. I contemplated this theory for several days before coming to a conclusion by researching and bumping into some very helpful commentary, along the way.

Jephthah proved through scripture that he understood the Old Testament writings. He was fully aware that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not allow human sacrifices, ever! He was familiar with the story of his ancestors, Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22) and the commandments in the law (Lev. 18:21, 20:1-5 and Deut. 12:31, 18:10). The only way he would have been able to sacrifice his daughter by death would be to perform this under a Levitical Priest at the tabernacle alter in Shiloh, where animals were sacrificed (Lev. 17:1-9). Under no circumstances would any priest allow this to take place, for it would be forbidden by God. Also take into consideration, a human is not pure of sin (innocent/without blemish) and for the shedding of blood to be pleasing to the Lord, it would have to be.

Do not allow your mind to begin assuming things. Nowhere in the above scripture does it say that Jephthah KILLED his only child. Something to consider is that Jephthah gave his daughter to the Lord to serve Him at the Tabernacle, like these other women in Ex. 38:8; 1 Sam 2:22. This is why she asked her father to go into the hills for two months with her friends to mourn that she will never marry and remain a virgin. I believe it was because of this great sacrifice that Jephthah was inducted into the ‘hall of faith’ in Hebrews 11:37.

 Before we conclude, let’s discuss the last two qualities Jephthah demonstrates in the above bible passages, that makes him a natural born leader. Ponder these characteristics and see where they fit in your own life!

1. **Honor your word and keep your promises**- At the climax of this story when Jephthah’s only child runs out to meet her father and he confesses with his mouth in verse 35 that “he has made a vow to the Lord that he cannot break.” I would be safe to say this is one of the best examples in the bible of honoring your word and keeping your promise. I could only imagine how many of us would be recanting that promise, probably about as quickly as a brass bullet fires out of a 45 caliber pistol. Proverbs 20:25 says “it is dangerous to make a rash promise to God before counting the cost.” Keeping oaths and promises are important; it builds trust and makes committed human relationships possible. The bible condemns making vows or taking oaths casually, giving your word while knowing that you will not keep it, or swearing falsely in God’s name.

**LIFE APPLICATION**:

 Are you known as a person who keeps their word? When you tell someone you will meet them for lunch at 11:00 but you show up at 11:10, that is not keeping your word. What about a person who accepts an invite to a gathering but does not show up? Do you always cancel at the last minute, after giving your word that you would do what you said you would? Consider the simple, everyday promises and ask yourself that question again…Are you known as a person who keeps their word?

1. **Finish the race**- The last time we hear Jephthah’s name is in Judges 12:7 when we are told that, “Jephthah led Israel for six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in a town in Gilead.” This verse might be as plain as a piece of dry, toasted bread with no butter. Yet for me, this insight brings great satisfaction to my heart. I love that Jephthah went out doing exactly what God called him to do and that is to lead! He is not a quitter, he is a fighter! He finished the race, he fought the good fight, even when the fight was tough. Paul, who was one of the greatest leaders of the New Testament, passionately wrote his famous last words to Timothy by scribing, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” The sense of joy and accomplishment that must have flowed through Paul’s hand and onto the scroll had to be overwhelming for him. Could you have imagined if Father Damien, from our previous illustration, decided to leave the leper colony when his brother asked him to quit and not finish the race? If he would have left, the whole community would never have accepted Christ as their savior!

To be an exceptional leader, you cannot quit! You have to push through the fear, anxiety, opposition, strife, backlash, and turmoil. “Rather as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships, and distress.” (2 Corinthians 6:4) Understand that going into it, you will meet face to face with these hardships, but you are not alone! You have the Lord with you, guiding you, and showing you. Besides, you can do ALL things through Christ who strengthens you (Philippians 4:13).

**CONCLUSION:**

 I looked up the true definition of the word LEADER and it said, “A person who leads.”

It is as simple as a four word statement. Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to pitch out to you the fact that you do not have to be the head of a nation, in order to be a leader. Nor do you have to be Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook. Keep in mind that my daughter at eleven years old chose to lead her classmates by encouraging them to do the right thing and by bringing peace. Every day you are faced with similar choices. You can choose to counsel with the Lord first, be a peacemaker, keep your promises, and finish the race. Or you could choose to sit out on the side line and watch other Christians step up to fulfill the name we are called in 2 Corinthians 5:20, **ambassador’s for Christ**!