



By Example He Leads: Follow the Lamb!

Isaiah 53:1-6

Background for the Leader

Chapter 53 of the Book of Isaiah is part of what is known as Second Isaiah. It is commonly believed by Biblical scholars to have been written during and/or shortly after the exile of the Israelites in Babylon in the sixth century B.C. Second Isaiah deals with several themes: the existence of one true God, the God of Israel; the promise that in God's time the Israelites would be released to return to their promised homeland through the intervention of the Persian King Cyrus; and the anticipation of the Servant of the Lord. Isaiah 53:1-6 is a portion of one of the Servant Songs that describe and extol the one who will deliver the people from their bondage to sin. This servant who will bear the sins of the world is pictured as righteous, yet humble and rejected. Like a lamb, He is to be led to the slaughter, yet silently and not crying out in protest. In the Servant Songs, the prophet reveals God's plan for our salvation. Whereas the Temple ritual required the blood of a sacrificial lamb to atone for human sins, the Suffering Servant will offer eternal life, through his own death, for all of the sheep who "have gone astray." The prophecy of Second Isaiah foretold through these songs contains profound theology. They depict the Servant of the Lord becoming the sacrificial lamb at the altar, and the shepherd whose life is given for his flock. In them, the savior is not prophesied as a militant leader in the image of the former judges and kings who will lead the remnant of Israel in defeating their enemies in battle, restoring their grandeur and status as a great nation. In stark contrast, He is to be unaccepted by many, and even despised. Yet He will be the means by which humanity's reconciliation with God will be possible.

It was the next few verses, Isaiah 53:7-8, that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading when Philip, an early deacon and apostle of the first century church, encountered him. Luke relates in *The Acts of the Apostles* that when the Ethiopian asked Philip to explain the scripture to him, Philip witnessed how Jesus of Nazareth had fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, and the Ethiopian became a convert to Christianity.

Prayer for the Leader: *Father, as I study your word in preparation and leadership of this lesson, I ask for the love, patience, wisdom, and humility that Jesus displayed as the perfect example of a true servant of God. Guide my thoughts, words, and actions as I try to be an example to others. Amen.*

A Note to the Leader

Prepare for this lesson in advance by previewing all of the given activities and gathering the materials needed for those that you choose to use in accordance with the interests and study needs of your group and the amount of time scheduled for the lesson.

1. Activity One requires Bibles or copies of the scripture for the lesson for distribution to all of those present.
2. Activity Two will require paper and pencils or pens for the recorders in two small groups to use.
3. Activity Three necessitates an index card or slip of paper and a pen or pencil for each

- person.
4. Readers should be appointed for Activity Four and given copies of their assigned lines.

Leading the Bible Study

Activity One: Lesson Scripture (20 minutes)

Distribute Bibles or copies of the passage for this lesson and direct participants to their self-selected places of formational study. (*Note: see the Bible study entitled “By Our Fruits We Are Known” for a description of the formation approach*). Allow approximately 10–15 minutes for private meditation, then reassemble the group for volunteer sharing of their thoughts.

Activity Two: Follow the Lamb! (15 minutes)

Instruct those present to consider the information from the lesson scripture as well as what they know about the life of Jesus from the New Testament in completing this activity. Divide them into two small groups. One group will brainstorm about the words of Jesus while the other will consider his deeds. Ask each group to list five of the most important items (words or deeds) that gave us examples to follow – By example He leads: Follow the Lamb! In reporting to the whole group, brief reasons should be given of why each item was selected, in terms of the example for us to follow. (*Some suggested items: **Words** – The Lord’s Prayer/it taught us how to pray; the Sermon on the Mount/basic qualities of those who follow Jesus; the Great Commission/spreading of the gospel; the two great commandments/loving God and your neighbor; the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane/ask that God’s will, not ours, be done; the parable of the Good Samaritan/loving your enemies; the parable of the Prodigal Son/rejoice when the lost are saved. **Deeds** – his death on the cross/the ultimate sacrifice for others; the blessing of the children/they are to be cherished; the feeding of the five thousand/faith in what God can do; his temptation by Satan/determination to please God can defeat Satan; his training of the twelve disciples/through them Jesus taught us how to carry on his work on earth; his forgiveness of the sins of followers/we must forgive others if we are to be forgiven; his miracles of healing/God cares about our welfare and wants us to be whole.*)

Activity Three: By His Example (10 minutes)

In the honest attempt to follow the examples Jesus provided as the Servant of the Lord and the Good Shepherd, ask all those present, in careful consideration, to think of three things they should do this year as his more faithful followers. These may be acts of ministry to others, moves toward reconciliation with another person, increased giving to the church, an additional service for the church, a volunteer job in the community, etc. Allow 5-7 minutes for completion, then ask members to place their lists in a place at home where they can be reviewed often, and to pray frequently for guidance as they make these changes in their lives.

Activity Four: Servant Songs (15 minutes)

Share background information about the Servant Songs of Isaiah with the group, then present the following examples with the assigned readers.

Leader: The prophet-writer of Second Isaiah was very concerned about the reconciliation of God and God’s chosen people. He envisioned their ultimate deliverance through a

Servant of the Lord whom he portrayed as an individual, but one who might also be thought of in terms of the Israelite nation. What theologians have labeled the Servant Songs are found in Isaiah 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-11, and 52:13—53:12.

Reader 1: From the first song (NRSV): “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. . . . He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.”

Reader 2: From the second song (NRSV): “Listen to me. O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother’s womb he named me. . . . and he said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.’ But I said, ‘I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God.’”

Reader 1: Excerpts from the song in Isaiah 50 (NRSV): “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he awakens – awakens my ear to listen to those who are taught. . . . I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near.”

Reader 2: The final Servant Song includes the verses of our scripture for this lesson. These are some verses that precede that passage (NRSV): “See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. . . . so shall he startle many nations, kings shall shut their mouths because of him.” The verses following the ones we studied today that Philip explained to the Ethiopian are these: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before his shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people.”

Activity Five: Closing Prayer (1-2 minutes)

Most gracious, loving Father, although our disobedient and sinful human natures keep us from being the flawless example that Jesus was, give us the will and the strength to keep trying day after day to be more and more like Him in his obedience to you, his love of you and all people on earth, and in his words and deeds. Now hear our silent prayers for help in doing the things that we know will make us better Christians who follow the example of the Lamb. (PAUSE). Amen.

About the Writer

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BY EXAMPLE HE LEADS: FOLLOW THE LAMB!

Isaiah 53:1-6

When I was a young girl growing up, my friends and I would play a game called 'Follow the Leader'. It was fun and exciting to try and do everything exactly like our 'leader'.

As adults we often forget that we also have a Leader, the Lamb of God, who lived on earth and experienced life and death for us. This scripture says in verse 2 that He had no form nor comeliness (no royalty or kingly pomp). He was despised, rejected and forsaken by human beings; He knew pain, grief and sorrow. In other words, Jesus was human like us but yet He knew no sin. He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and the punishment that brings peace for us was upon Him. Therefore, Christ, in His boundless sympathy with us actually took our sins as His own and with the stripes made us whole. How can we, as Christians, read and study this passage and not follow the example of our Leader?

All of us sin and like sheep go astray from time to time. It is because of our human nature, that it is so very important to take time to read and study the Bible and seek forgiveness of our sins daily.

Where are you looking for your example? Are you looking backward at worldly things instead of upward to the Lamb for your leader? We should be as little children joyful and excited about following the example of the Lamb our Leader! Are you willing to accept the challenge as a follower of the Lamb today?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, thank you for providing us with your Son, our example. Help us to think, act and react as a follower of the Lamb today, doing whatever we can to serve others. Forgive us when we go astray. Through the Supreme Example, we know where we came from and where we are going, therefore, we have nothing to lose and everything to gain by following in the footsteps of the Lamb. Amen.

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