

Song of Moses. God Guides. God Provides. God Satisfies. God Strengthens. God empowers.

Two important relationships unfold in this text. The first is what takes place between Moses and Jethro. The second is the relationship Moses has with the Israelites.

From this text, we could spend a good bit of time talking about mentorship. We could reflect on those in our life that have taught us important lessons or helped develop us into much of who we are today. Our mentors might be a mother or father, perhaps a mother or father-in-law, a grandparent, a sibling, a friend, a coach, teacher, or boss. All of us have learned from someone and we should remember those people in gratitude. When we have the opportunity, I encourage the practice of reaching out to those mentors and letting them know just how much they mean to you. Mentorship, like that experienced between Jethro and Moses, is very important, but it is not the main topic I want to address today.

What I would like to look more at today is the relationship Moses has with the Israelites. By doing so, some of Jethro’s mentorship to Moses will be revealed. From the example in this text, we will be able to consider what this means for us today.

Before I read the text, a quick note suggests that there are at least 600,000 men in the Israelite camp at this point in the wilderness journey. To be clear, this number is not believed to include any women and children.

### **Read Exodus 18:5-27**

So, there sits Moses pouring his heart into the work of the people and everyone else is simply sitting around waiting for Moses. That seems a bit odd doesn’t it? Would we even say that is wrong?

A couple assumptions can be made. The first is apparently it never occurred to Moses to ask even one of them to help him with this burdensome task. The second is apparently it never occurred to any of the Israelites to suggest that someone help Moses.

One commentator offers in reflection of these assumptions “Oftentimes, it would just never occur to us to do something another way, even if another way would be obviously better. We become culture-bound. We can't see. We do things simply because we've always done them this way. For us to change our tired old way of doing things, sometimes it takes a fresh pair of eyes.”

I think, after God called Moses and led him through all they had been through at this point in the journey, Moses was on cruise control and willing to do whatever it took, no matter what that meant for himself. I think Moses understood what he was doing to be a part of the responsibility from God to fulfill. Moses didn’t know a better way to do it. To see that what Moses was doing was wrong took a new set of eyes. It took a new perspective. Immediately, what Moses was doing strikes Jethro as odd, so Jethro, his father-in-law, served as a mentor to Moses. I can see it played out this way. Jethro goes to Moses and says “Hey, can I talk to

you a moment?” Moses stands and Jethro puts his arm around Moses’ shoulders and steers him to a place away from the others. Jethro says, “Do yourself a favor and look around you? What do you see?” He spoke the truth the way he saw it, “Why do you sit alone while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?... What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.”

What Jethro said to Moses resonated. Moses’ eyes were opened. Jethro, “You are right!” In that moment, Moses did not know the solution, but he became open to one. Moses became open to a better way of doing things, and not only for himself, but for the people. The benefit was not selfish or individual. With further guidance from Jethro, Moses was able to employ a new way of operating as the people of God.

For the Israelites at the time, what they had come to believe was that Moses was a prophet (meaning he proclaimed God’s word). Moses was also priest (meaning he cared for them). Moses was also king (meaning he was the leader). Moses embodied the role of each of these throughout their journey, but his presence with them would not be forever. The model of one person doing it all for all was not sustainable. The truth is the role of prophet, priest and king is rarely embodied in a single individual like Moses. There is only one other person who has been considered prophet, priest, and king all in one and that is Jesus Christ. The disciples too leaned heavily of Jesus while he was with them. I guess history really does repeat itself.

The gift of Moses for the Israelites, and Jesus for the Jews and Gentiles, was not meant to paralyze the people to do nothing. The actions and words and deeds of Moses and Jesus were meant by God to inspire others to follow and learn and then embody and teach others. The actions and words and deeds of Moses and Jesus were meant by God to be paid forward by the people of God. In this, the three roles of prophet, priest, and king are still there, but they are found in the body together.

What I believe Jethro calls Moses to lead the Israelites to believe and act is known as the priesthood of all believers.

*The “priesthood of all believers” is a phrase associated with Martin Luther in the sixteenth century and is often related to his concern that all Christians can act in “priestly” ways- by praying to God directly and not having to go through a church’s “priest”- and that all believers may teach the Christian faith to others on the basis of their own reading of the Scriptures. Linked with Luther’s view that we are justified by faith alone, the priesthood of all believers became a liberating feature of the Protestant Reformation. Presbyterian theology recognizes the truth of Luther’s perspectives. We go*

*on, however, to see also that the church itself as the covenant community of God is a “chosen race, a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9, Rev. 1:6, 5:10). We are made “priests” through Jesus Christ, who is the only true priest and who has called us into our ministries through the new covenant he has established. This means the church, you and me, has a calling, or vocation, to be “priests” in that we have a corporate responsibility and a privilege as God’s believing, covenant people. Our “priesthood” is to offer Jesus Christ to the world, offer ourselves as a “a living sacrifice”, and pray to God on behalf of our sisters and brothers in Christ as well as on behalf of the whole world. Individual congregations act as a microcosm of the whole church and carry out the mission and ministries of the church on behalf of God and God’s kingdom in the person of Jesus Christ. To participate in the church is to have a “priestly” ministry to others and for others. Those ordained by the church “as ministers of the Word” carry out certain ministerial functions. But all members of the covenant community in the church as the people of God have our ministries to carry out as well. We all share in the corporate “priesthood of all believers.” (McKim, Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers)*

I have a call to serve. You have a call to serve. We have a call to serve God together. We are all ministers: Moms, Dads, Grandparents, Coaches, CEO, CFO, COO, Mechanic, Engineer, Manager, Sales Rep, Contractor, Doctor, Lawyer, Grocery Store Clerk, Politician... Paul declared, “whatever we say or do, let us say or do so in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Colossians 3:17)

We are all called, and it is the same Spirit that calls us, but we are not all called to same acts. I understand God’s call for me as a pastor to not only work for but to work with. There are some “for” responsibilities, like Moses, in which I am called to do: represent the people in the community to others, bring cases before God (Pray), teach statutes and instructions and make known the way we are to go and the things we are to do, look for others who are trustworthy and hate dishonest gain and encourage them to be officers. But... I am not called to do everything for everyone. When it comes down to the work of the church, I am called to work “with” you to accomplish all God is calling us to in this time and place.

I believe that a church or community that has one person doing it all while everyone else sits around watching is a dead church or community. God intended for the people of God, the children of God, to flourish and thrive. How does that happen? It happens when you, and you, and you, get in the game and help make it happen. It happens when you, and you, and you, step up and engage. It happens with you, and you, and you taking ownership of God’s call for your life and you decide to invest and give back to God by giving to the church of your time, talent, and treasure. This is not just something we are to talk about and think about it and get to later when it is convenient. Now is the time. The church needs you now!

Participating in the life and ministries of the church is our Christian responsibility and privilege!!!

We are a liturgical church... Liturgy is the coming together of work and people and means the work of the people.

Paul Stevens, in his book *The Other Six Days*, offers what he refers to as "Doing People Theology". Within this section of his book, he uses a play on Abraham Lincoln's famous words, "of the people, for the people, by the people."

*The term laity means the people of God and is used in scripture as a great honor denoting the enormous privilege and mission of the whole people of God. The term clergy means the appointed or endowed ones and is used in scripture not for the leaders of the people but the whole people. Stevens points out that the church does not 'have' a minister; it is ministry and the church does not 'have' a mission; it is mission. There is one people, one trinitarian people, one people that reflects the one God who is lover, beloved, and love itself, as Augustine once said, and one God who is sender, sent, and sending. A theology of the whole people of God must encompass not only the life of God's people gathered, but the church dispersed in the world, in marketplace, government, professional offices, schools, and homes.*

*A theology for the people of God communicates to the untrained in academic theology of how the great truths of the faith impinge on his or her life. It is the task of translating the word of god into situations where people live and work. The theology for the people of God is "the science of living blessedly forever." (William Perkins)*

*A theology by the people of God looks beyond academic theology. The task here is for us as ordinary people to exegete Scripture and exegete life together. To exegete means to expound or interpret. We are a people sent by God. God sent the Israelites into the wilderness after delivering them from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. As God sent them, they became the sent ones or apostles.*

What I believe Steven's means, along with the belief of the priesthood of all believers, is that the church as the body of Christ is essentially an illustration in word and deed of God's involvement in the world. You and me, together with all the others in God's church, are filled by God with the light and love and joy and peace and grace so that we can be instruments, prisms, and vessels revealing God to the rest of the world.

One author reflects on our call as the church in Ephesians 4 and I think it fits with what we encounter in the Exodus story:

Have you ever watched a pit crew in action at an auto race? I had the opportunity to be in the pit area during a race, and I was impressed.

In less time than it takes for most of us to put our seatbelt on and adjust the mirror, the crew had changed four tires, filled the gas tank, washed the windshield, given the driver a drink, and made vital adjustments to the car. It happens so quickly and efficiently because each crew member knows his job and does it right.

Speaking at a chapel service before the race, chaplain Max Helton said to the drivers and their crews, "Imagine all the people it takes to put on a race. What if they all wanted to drive? It would be chaos." It's the same with the crew. If everyone wanted to change tires and no one wanted to fill the gas tank, the car wouldn't have a very long ride.

Likewise, in the body of Christ we all have been equipped with different skills to do certain tasks (Eph. 4:7-16). We can't all be pastors or teachers. Some of us have to "change the tires" and "wash the windshield." And each job is as important as the other.

God builds God's church and makes it strong by using you and me; and if we all will do our part, the world Christ's love will see.

In our wilderness journey, our reflective hike in and toward hope, let us remember God delivers, God guides, God provides, God satisfies, God strengthens, and God empowers. Oh God, let it be so. May it be so... let all God's people say... Amen.