

## Healthy Leadership 2: Good Leadership Empowers

### Exodus 18

The Pathway to Healthy Leadership: Studies in Exodus on Moses as Leader

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Sunday, September 16, 2007

Worship at 9:15 and 11 a.m.

I join that prayer—in giving thanks to God for the wonderful, wonderful music leadership we have in this church, and for moments like that. Thanks be to God.

I have a couple of personal announcements that I would like to make in regard to our order of worship in the bulletin. You will note in there an ongoing presentation of the state of our budget and the gap that exists between our income and our expenses. We realize, as officers and leaders of the church, that there is a wide gap at this time of year. It is wider than is often the case. We do believe that God is leading us in the right direction with conserving on expenses and seeing some increases in giving. We would like you to pray with us and ask God how you might participate in closing that gap. Secondly, there is a wonderful opportunity coming up in October for our All-Church Retreat. I personally want to encourage you to consider participating in that event and listening to Rich Kannwischer. It's wonderful to have another German pastor in the Presbyterian church. Rich is one of the outstanding young pastors in our denomination, and you will thoroughly enjoy him. He is a person of wisdom, for his age, and knowledge of the presence of God in his life. He's a lot of fun. His topic is "Finding Joy." I encourage you to participate in that All-Church Retreat.

Let us pray together: All thanks to thee; we pray, God our Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, that you would give us a word today--your word spoken to us through your prophet Moses. Help us see what is not good in our lives, and show us your goodness--that we might be changed to the fullness of your likeness, mature in Jesus Christ, in whom we pray. Amen. You may have had an experience like this: I can remember my days at Disneyland, growing up, and also with my children. But what stands out in my mind are those long minutes—even sometimes hours—of waiting in line at the Matterhorn... waiting, winding in the heat, sweating, the kids complaining, the adults around me turning, from a sense of joy and excitement, to frowning and dismay. If you had been in line for 30 minutes, you get to that wonderful sign that says: "You may ride 45 minutes from here." You get closer to see that, in fact, there is only one team of employees who are getting people on the ride; and you can see that there is at least room for three or four teams. And you begin to wonder if the management of Disneyland has got their life in order. You see the same people over and over again as you wind back and forth. You wonder if it's worth it. Your kids are getting hungry; you're getting thirsty; you have those feelings and desires of wanting to leave. You stand in place and don't move sometimes for what seems to be minutes on end. Then, suddenly, as if God would intervene, the management brings on two more teams, and the line moves ahead much faster.

We, in life, often find ourselves in many places like that. But it seems as if there just isn't enough leadership or space for us to move ahead—to have the attention that we need to be successful in what we're doing. The most notable of that is being stuck in traffic in Washington, DC. Not too long ago, I was literally stopped in traffic and wondering what was going on up ahead. We were creeping along; we finally got to the place where the accident had happened and there was one lone officer trying to make sense out of a major mess. I was pleading to God, "Please send him more help, because we're stuck." Traffic is jammed because there is just not enough leadership.

Have you ever had someone, whom you respect, say to you, as they watch you parent, as they watch you lead, or as they watch you manage: "What you are doing is not good." I'm sure there are people in our lives who tell us all that the time; but we may not have the respect for them in order to listen to what they have to say. You are burning out yourself, you are burning out your children, and you are burning out your employees because you just don't have it well-organized.

This is the heart of Exodus, chapter 18. Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, has been seated and watching how Moses leads all day; and he comes up with a very brief, pointed statement: “Moses, what you are doing is not good.” Jethro, I believe, has an understanding, as the priest of Midian, for how God would have us lead in this world: that, in the call of God, leaders should not call all of the attention to themselves and be bottlenecks of how things are done; rather, leaders should empower others so that there are enough people to move things along.

Jethro, priest of Midian, we know, in one other section of Exodus, has this style of leadership. He does not have any sons; he has seven daughters. Moses first meets them at a well because the seven daughters are leading, feeding, and giving water to the flock. Jethro has learned to empower even his daughters to lead the family business.

My father had a family business, and four of us as his sons grew up in that family business. He taught us all patiently, with care and focus, not only how to work the business, how to handle the machinery, but also how to be successful at making the best possible productivity in parts. He invested a lot in us four sons with the hope that one of us someday would take over his business. None of the sons did. One is an entomologist, one is a physicist, one is a doctor, and one is a pastor. My father was not happy with how that turned out. When my sister, my oldest sister, would come into the business, my father would often say to her, “Now, Marcia, this place is not for you. You need to go home and be with your mom, and she’ll tell you what women do.” Now, in the irony of God, it is my sister and her husband who bought the business. My Dad was good at empowering us as sons, and not very good at empowering his daughters.

Today at NPC, we have committed ourselves to helping you be participants in the service of this church, and in the mission beyond the church. Today is our “Serve Sunday.” We want to help you engage in active ministry as partners alongside other leaders in this church, so that we, as a church, might lead together and pull together into meaningful service for the future of ourselves, our city, and our nation. We want all members and participants who are in worship to consider the possibility that God is calling you to serve in this church and beyond the church. We do not want a church where people simply show up on Sunday and go home. We want a church where people, who come to worship, are invited into growth patterns and serving as teams. We encourage you to consider engaging and taking responsibility to serve together.

Healthy leaders in the pattern of Jethro are willing to see God’s view of how people could be empowered in organizations and families. Jethro gives advice and counsel to his son-in-law Moses on how he should do better at leading the people. We see, in Moses, a willingness on the part of a leader—a son-in-law in this case—to learn and to listen. The question for us as leaders today is: Are we willing to learn, to listen, from those whom we respect, who give us advice and counsel about how to do work that is better—how to do that which is good in God’s eyes? In his book, *Good to Great*, which has received huge public acknowledgment, Jim Collins talks about the essence of what it takes to move a company from—not just being good—to being great. Great organizational leaders who are in place need to face the brutal facts about what is really going on with themselves, and with the organization. The leader cannot allow himself or herself to be the primary reality around which people gather. It is not about the leader; it is about the success of the organization. Leaders need to be open to the feedback and critique from careful and thoughtful people about what is good and what is not.

When Jethro says to Moses, “What you are doing is not good,” he is reflecting a deeply-connected theological statement about the nature of God—all the way back to Genesis, chapter 1: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and on the first day he said, “It is good.” A little bit later, in the sixth day, when God noticed that man was alone, he said, “That is not good to be alone; I will make a partner for him.” And God created a partnership between men and women, to have dominion over the world.

The very nature of God is that is good is to create partnership among human beings—both men and women—that they might have dominion over the world together, to rule together. It is the very nature of God to give away power, not without careful preparation and teaching however. That word “give” means that God wants us to be productive and prosperous, and this is the way to do it: Jethro understands the nature of God. It is the nature of God not to hold onto power as Pharaoh or the kings do, but to give away power, as we discussed last week. Even in the creation God shows this: “Let us make humanity in our

image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion, power over the earth. Be fruitful and multiply people... fill the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over it." God gives human beings power to lead, to manage, and to cultivate creation and all the organizational activity of humanity on Earth. But the fact of it is (as we Presbyterians would name it as 'sin' or 'depravity') we don't do that as well as we could. We sometimes want to rule without God's advice and counsel. Sometimes we want to be like God; and sometimes we'd just as soon that someone else take that job of being like God. Sometimes we want the fame and the name; but we will deflect the blame or the shame. We want to be in charge, but we don't want to take the feedback about what is good and what is not good. Moses learned how to rule in a pattern from the house of Pharaoh in which he grew up. My sense is that that impacted how he ruled Israel. It was his family of origin that taught him to be the center of all things and to have the people around him, from morning until night, until he got worn out and they got worn out—because kings like Pharaoh sat in the midst of the people, with high control. Jethro knows better.

When Moses says, "The people come to me to inquire of God; the people come to me to settle their disputes. I have to decide between who's right. I have to make known to them what God says," notice the emphasis on "me"... "me"... "I"... "I." Jethro sees that that is not good. It is about the success and health of the people; and for that to happen, the leader needs to become healthier. What you are doing is not good. You will burn yourself out, and you will burn these people out. You need to change.

In her novel called *Poison Wood Bible*, Barbara Kingsolver (I love that name "Kingsolver"! ) tells the story of Nathan Price, a World War II veteran who is bound and determined to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Scripture to the Belgian Congo. He has a militant commitment to the clarity of Scripture and the salvation of people through Jesus. Over her protests, he takes his wife and his four children to the Belgian Congo, where life is not good for them. They end up being victims of Nathan's failure to take a long, hard look at himself. Life gets worse and worse as he becomes more and more insular to the reality within himself, and misses what's going on around him. For example, he has learned the Belgian Congo language, but he has not learned the intonation of the words. So, in his American accent, when he speaks the intent that Jesus is 'gracious and precious,' the people hear that Jesus is 'poison wood.' He has no self-awareness about that, or willingness to listen. The point of her novel is that people who are insulated within themselves and are 'high control' do not listen to outside consultation and do not become self-aware—leading to the destruction of families, people, and organizations.

Peter Gazarro in his book, *The Healthy Church*, takes up this theme. As a pastor of a large church in Queens, he says, "That's the way I was as a pastor, and I had to change." He almost destroyed his own family because he did too much in the church. It haunts me, at times, when my daughters still tell me, to this day: "Dad, you were so busy with the church that, in the midst of all of your work, there were many times we didn't see you for days. We missed you. Where were you?" Well, I'd often go back and recall that I had told them, "The church needs me. I have to deal with the problems at church. I have to build buildings, I have to lead the people, and there is a lot going on. I don't have time to be at home." How many of us, in the American culture, are so driven by our own agenda of what we think needs to happen, that we miss what should happen in the reality and essence of God? It is, in fact, the fruit of my wonderful wife, Vida, who guided and 'priest-ed' my two daughters to the places of strength in their lives, when I was absent. She has been their coach and mentor, empowering them, in faith, to be responsible adults—savvy about money, and wise about relationships. How many of us, as people in the marketplace, look back and say, "I wish I'd had more time with my kids."?

And that's what is going on in this text: Moses did not have time for his wife and children. Moses had to send them away because life was too intense in Israel and the wilderness. And can you blame him? But the father-in-law sees what's going on, brings the wife and children back, and says to Moses: "What you are doing is not good; it's not right, it's not helpful, it's not healthy." It's the desire of God that, not only organizations run together with the wonder, sense of beauty, and workability— but that homes exist simultaneously in peace. Shalom.

And so Jethro gives Moses the feedback to empower the people two ways: teach all the people that which is important for them to know; and teach them the ways and patterns of behavior that God would expect of them. Teach that to everybody. Empower all the people with the right teaching and the right discipleship; and then be careful how you pick leaders. Pick carefully leaders who will lead the people in

large groups, medium groups, and small groups; for it is how you pick the leaders and empower them that will determine how healthy the organization is.

And, so, leadership that is led by discipleship becomes important in the life of every organization. And what does Jethro say to Moses about the qualifications of a leader? It's surprisingly small. Is it how much they know? It isn't how much experience they have. It isn't how many times they have struggled in the wilderness—but these three characteristics which I think are very appropriate today: 1. Pick leaders who fear God— people of faith, faithful, who are trustworthy among the people. Whom do the people trust? How are the people willing to lay their lives into their hands? 2. Pick people who hate dishonest gain. They are unselfish; they are self-aware and are not controlling. 3. Ask: how do these leaders use power? That's the key to the selection and empowerment of leaders—people who will not misuse power.

We see the same thing in Acts, chapter 6. The apostles are preaching the Word of God and teaching the people. Underneath all of that wonderful ministry is a growing frustration among the Hellenist widows who are not being fed; they are starving to death because only the Hebrew widows are being taken care of. The brutal fact that they listen to is that the organization is not working. They call all of the people together and they listen to them. And they say to the people: you pick seven Greek leaders to help make sure that all of the people are fed, including the widows—equally. So we see, in that act of empowerment, that the apostles knew that they needed to increasingly equip people to do service in the church and in the organization. It wasn't long after that that one of those deacons, one of those servants of the table, becomes a great apostolic teacher and leader, by the name of Stephen—as the first martyr.

In our church today, we want to create hospitality teams who help people feel welcome, are given the right information, and the right refresh-ment when they come into this church on Sundays. We want people to experience the good of God in this place. So we will call people to share the responsibility in these teams for greeting... for information... and for refreshment. But let us not ever forget that it is not just about the church. It is about the church... the workplace... the government... the society... and particularly, the home. For, if things are well- organized in the wider structures, it is because things are well-organized, and at peace, at home.

I believe, in America today, that our homes are not at peace; and therefore our organizations, in the larger sense, will never be well-structured. It is the balance of home, and church, and work where the people of God find the goodness of God. And so today, I invite you to participate in what God is calling us as a church to become: people with balanced homes, people with a balanced church, and people who live in balance in government and work—wherever they serve and lead. This is the goodness of God. It is not good to lead alone. It is good to carefully bring other people into responsibility and power. Jesus Christ is the one who does this most clearly in the New Testament. He invites the disciples to follow him; he names them as apostles, and gives them power and authority. And they give away power and authority; and the widening, rippling effect of leadership is what transforms the world. They are moved from being a good discipleship group... to a great church. May the Lord Jesus Christ help us to become a great church, with peaceful homes. Amen.

Let us pray. Oh, Lord Jesus Christ, by your power, by your grace, by your kind and good presence, catch our imaginations and our hearts— that we might be trans-formed by the presence of your Holy Spirit, to live into the new life, the resurrected life of Christ: where God is good... the people are at peace... and our organizations are in good order. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.