

Tired of Turning to God?

Pray

As I come into Your presence, Lord, may I find Your strength made perfect in my weakness (see 2 Cor. 12:9).

Read

EXODUS 17:1-16

Meditate

CONSIDER • Does your faith grow tired? Ask God to renew you.

THINK FURTHER • There are signs that Moses is growing weary. First, the people try his patience when, yet again, they complain about the lack of water. As his reply to them suggests (2), why do they turn to him and not ask God directly themselves? They should know by now that it is God who provides, and that he only needs to be asked. Notice that Moses also turns to God himself, but this time he brings his own personal concerns rather than praying for water on behalf of others. He is getting desperate.

There is not only the problem of internal unrest within the camp, but also the external threat of the Amalekites. Moses is absolutely clear that this battle, like those concerning water and food, is a matter of faith and trust. Thus he takes up his position on the hill, standing with God's staff (9), to pray. Holding his hands in the air—as we have seen him do so many times earlier (9:29; 10:12; 14:16)—is a symbol of his appeal to God for help.

Even Moses grows tired in prayer. (Does that make you feel

better?) But he does not give up. Instead, he asks for help, and we are given the delightful image of two colleagues who stand on either side of him to prop up his hands, so that he can continue to pray (12). Here, "eagles' wings" (Isa. 40:31) take a more down-to-earth practical form: sometimes simply asking for help is the answer to spiritual renewal. You might like to pause and draw a picture of this—even a simple diagram with "stick people"—if it helps the message to sink in.

APPLICATION • How have you experienced the help of an "Aaron and Hur" in a time of weariness or stress? Is God asking you to "lift up the hand" of a spiritual leader, or a discouraged friend today? Your help in a task, a word of encouragement and a prayer can make an eternal difference.

Pray

Thank You, Lord, for the help and encouragement You have sent to me through friends. Help me today, by prayer and practical help, to do the same for another tired person.

Management Consultancy

Pray

Thank You for Your Word, Lord. May my heart be open to both direction and correction.

Read

EXODUS 18:1-27

Meditate

CONSIDER • Are you in the habit of giving advice, or receiving it?

THINK FURTHER • If “delegation” was a buzz word in the management theory of the 1980s, then “collaboration” performed the same role in the 1990s. Here we find the Old Testament offering the same wisdom. I wonder, how often does this management case study get the attention it deserves?

Here is a delightful account of “in-law” relations. Moses and Jethro each listen to the other: first, Moses recounts the glorious tales of God’s deliverance of the Israelites in Egypt and in the wilderness. Jethro rejoices. Then, having observed Moses at work, he offers some sage advice on leadership strategy. And Moses implements it. The message here is deceptively simple, but its implications are far-reaching. To begin with, it is hard to overestimate the historical and theological importance of Moses in the Old Testament: he is the key figure in Israel’s story of salvation. Yet even he must learn to delegate; even he is susceptible to burn-out; even he is to work collaboratively. And, as it turns out later in the Pentateuch, even he is not indis-

pensable (Deut. 31:1-8). As I read this account again, I’m impressed by the way Jethro offers this advice. First, he spends a day in patient observation before making any comment. Second, he asks Moses to give his view of why he works this way before expressing an opinion (14,17,18). Third, he offers the advice carefully: consciously supporting Moses’ best interests, and with careful suggestions for practical implementation. I’m also impressed by the way Moses responds. He is not proud or defensive: despite his unique role before God, he does not appear to resist the “letting go.” Meanwhile, the waiting lists are reduced and the people go home satisfied (23)!

APPLICATION • Are you someone able to both give and receive advice? Which comes easier? How might you be a “Jethro” to offer good advice to a “Moses”? Is there some area in your life where you need to be a “Moses” and listen to good advice? How can one of these affect your life today?

Pray

Lord, show me the one today with whom I can share practical help and also show Your love. Help me to be like Moses, willing to accept needed advice in this mixed-up world.

Encounter with God

Pray

Lord, may my encounter with You today bring new meaning and purpose to my life.

Read

EXODUS 19:1-25

Meditate

CONSIDER • How have your encounters with God made a difference in your life?

THINK FURTHER • This is a momentous chapter in the Old Testament. Here, at Mount Sinai, God forges a new relationship with Israel—a covenant—which Israel will ever look back to for its identity and security. This is the day God has been preparing the people for throughout the wilderness time since leaving Egypt. The covenant is entirely God's initiative: he voices the invitation to Moses in vs. 4-6, who subsequently presents it to the elders and the people (7,8). On the basis of their experience of God's faithfulness so far ("You yourselves have seen...how I carried you...," 4), they are invited to make a formal commitment in their relationship with God ("obey me fully and keep my covenant," 5). As to the consequences, they will become God's uniquely precious people, distinct from all other peoples on earth (5b,6).

The covenant is a two-way relationship: both God's commitment to Israel, and the expectation that they will respond with commitment in turn, are expressed

here. The outcome of this relationship is also momentous: God has plans for this people which are universal in scope, as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (6; 1 Pet. 2:9). Here, the word "holy"—which describes Yahweh and his presence—is now applied to his people. There is a clear suggestion that Israel should imitate God and thus mediate his presence and his character in the world. How does this remind you of the "new" covenant in Christ (Heb. 8:6-13), I wonder? In fact it is not entirely new: it represents a development of God's original promise to Abraham of blessing ("all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" Gen. 12:2), with which the story of Israel began.

Through Christ you are an inheritor of this covenant, and called to bear God's presence and character in the world. How do you do this?

APPLICATION • What have been your "mountain top" experiences? How have they prepared you to be God's "presence and character" in your world? Will someone "be blessed" today through God's presence in your life?

Pray

Lord, remind me that the lost can only be reached through the evidence of God's presence and character in Your children. May my life bear that witness today.

The Ten Commandments

Pray Help me, O God, to know what it means to love You with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Read EXODUS 20:1-26

Meditate

CONSIDER • “Love” for God and others is the foundation of all the commandments. How does your love measure up?

THINK FURTHER • Today’s reading may be ever so familiar, known to you from childhood, perhaps. In both Jewish and Christian tradition, these ten “words” (as the Hebrew calls them) summarize the whole of the Old Testament Law that follows in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. They are so important that they are found again in Deuteronomy, repeated almost word for word (Deut. 5:1-22). They have come to represent, for Christians, that part of the Jewish Law of which Jesus said no “jot or tittle” will pass away (Matt. 5:18 KJV). They are the only laws which God spoke to the people directly (1,18)—after that they asked Moses to mediate for them.

Consider the ten as a whole. First of all, there is an introduction which is too often ignored. Here is the motivation for keeping the Law: *because* I am Yahweh (the particular name by which God has revealed himself to Israel), *your* God, who has rescued you from slavery, *therefore...* (see vs. 1,2; 3:13,14; 6:3).

Notice how grace precedes law. Because Yahweh has brought salvation to the Israelites by his preventive grace, therefore God now asks Israel to live in such a way as to guard this freedom.

Of the Ten Commandments, notice that the first four relate to loving God, and that the succeeding six concern living with your neighbor. It is loving God that comes first—out of which, we may suppose, loving one another follows. Notice too that the commandments are not all negative, as so often supposed: the first five offer positive proposals for how to live well under God, and only the second five guard us as to what *not* to do.

APPLICATION • Jesus said the most important commandment is to “love the Lord your God with... heart...soul...mind, and...strength” and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30,31). How does your love for God measure up? What about your “brother” or “neighbor” (1 John 4:20,21)? Is love for God and “neighbor” your greatest motivation in life? Is there a “brother” with whom you need to be reconciled (Matt. 5:23,24)?

Pray Lord, You know that I love You and I want to love You with all my heart. Help me, Lord, to seek reconciliation with my “brothers” and to love them as I love myself.

Service and Freedom

Pray

“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength” (Isa. 40:31a). Renew my strength today, Lord.

Read

EXODUS 21:1-27

Meditate

CONSIDER • Paul introduces himself to the Romans as “Jesus Christ’s slave” (Rom. 1:1 NLT). Could you comfortably apply that to yourself?

THINK FURTHER • Many translations use the word “slave” in this passage rather than “servant.” Maybe your response to the Bible containing laws which allow slavery is one of horror. However, what is meant here is not slavery as practiced in the Roman Empire, or in nineteenth century North America. It was a form of bonded service, which arguably acted as a kind of social security system. These laws challenge us to think about the provision we make for the needy in our society today, and how we can prevent “caring” institutions and traditions from becoming oppressive.

People who fell into serious poverty or debt, or were abandoned children, would sell themselves into servitude in return for food, clothing, and housing. These laws curb the possible abuses of this institution, so that it remains essentially humanitarian in nature. People are not to be kidnapped and sold into servitude (16). The length of servitude is limited (2). A woman taken

as a slave-wife, perhaps because her family could not provide a dowry, has her rights as a wife protected (7-11). The slave is the owner’s property (21), but their physical well-being is protected; they are not just chattels (20,26,27). Given this context, vs. 8 and 9 become slightly more understandable. This culture has not the modern emphasis on personal freedom over all else. For some, at least, the security of serving a kind master was preferable. Of course, the reality is that freedom is relative, as those who are enslaved to poverty or other ills know. It was because Paul knew what it was to be a “slave of sin” (Rom. 6:20-23) that he was happy to be a slave of Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION • God gave laws, because without “laws” there would be chaos. How do you feel about the laws of today? As a child of God, how should you respond (Heb. 13:17; 1Tim. 2:12)?

Pray

Help me, Lord, to respect and obey those in authority and to uphold the laws of my land, unless they conflict with Your holy Word.

Living As God's Image

Pray

Lord, this world needs to see You reflected in Christians. Show me, and enable me, to be an image of You.

Read

EXODUS 22:1-31

Meditate

CONSIDER • We are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). What does that mean in terms of how we should live our daily lives?

THINK FURTHER • There are basically two different types of law in this passage: case law (1-17) and statements of legal principles (18-31). There is a theological coherence to this collection of disparate laws. The starting point is Israel's exclusive relationship with the Lord (20,28-31); first-born sons were "redeemed" by monetary payment (Num. 18:15,16). As a result, Israel was to reflect God's holy character, to act as God's "image." The laws in vs. 21-27 provide a practical outworking of this. Israel is to image the compassionate God of the exodus, who is concerned with the underprivileged, the weak and the oppressed (Psa. 103:6-8). The law against bestiality (19) prohibits violation of the important principle that humans differ from the rest of creation since they alone are made in God's image. A theme that runs through vs. 1-17 is that of responsible behavior. To "image God" is to behave with due care and concern for one's neighbor. Israel's law seems to have been unique in the

ancient world in applying this, even to protecting the life of a thief (3). The woman is not treated merely as a chattel (16-17). The issue here is seduction, in which both partners have some responsibility for their actions. The man is to accept his responsibility and marry the woman. However, if the father regards him as an unsuitable husband, he can veto the marriage, but the man must still pay the bride-price. The woman, by her own action, has damaged her marriage prospects, which might, however, be improved if someone else is able to marry her without paying the bride price. The principle of responsible behavior is widely applicable today. It would, for example, support the "polluter pays" approach to environmental protection.

APPLICATION • What responsibilities do you have today? How are you prepared to "image God" in each of them?

Pray

Lord Jesus, show me the unique responsibilities I bear in Your world and enable me to bear them well, reflecting Your image in each and all.