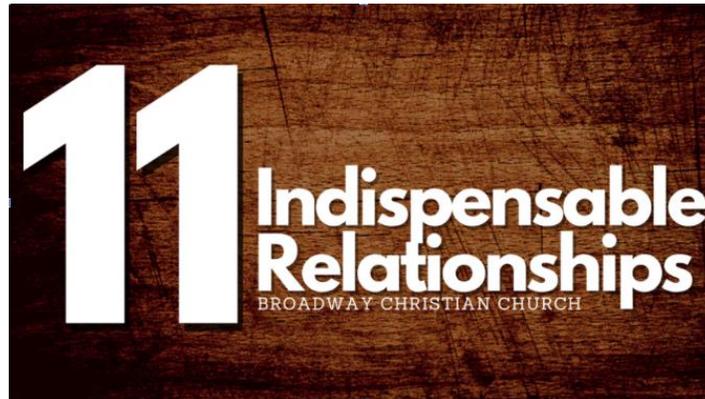


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The Scripture
Exodus 18:13-24

The next day Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him from morning until evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?" Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God." Moses' father-in-law said to him, "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. Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God; teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do. You should also look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you but decide every minor case themselves. So, it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace." So, Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said.

The Message
“11 Indispensable Relationships: You Need a Truth Teller”
Terry Overfelt

Please pray with me, *Lord may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you. Amen.*

Have you been making your list? As we have been moving through this summer inspired by the book, *11: Indispensable Relationships You Can't be Without* by Leonard Sweet, 11 essential prototypes are found in our stories of faith. He calls them *God's Dream Team* for your life.

Today the lens is turned to a lesser-known relative of Moses in his father-in-law, Jethro. Jethro is at Moses' side in three very pivotal moments. Three **truth-telling** sentences that are spoken out of respect and at least a quarter century apart shape and shape up Holy Moses. In all three, Jethro dramatically changes the direction of Moses' journey. Was that his intention? Jethro was God's man, too, and he was just being himself: a good listener, a family man, a Midian priest - holy man and giving the truth he knew, unsolicited, uncontrived, and divinely prompted. Here are the Jethro sentences that guide us from the Scriptures today.

“Break bread with us.” “Go to Peace.” And “Now listen to me.”



Now I'm showing my age, but when I heard I got to tell the story of Jethro, this one came to mind. Jethro was the naïve nephew of Jed Clampett from the *Beverly Hillbillies*. Jethro was always changing directions and looking for the exciting job that was worthy of his sixth-grade education. He ruled out brain surgeon.

Moses' job and direction have been changing since his birth. He was born a Hebrew **slave** when there was a call from the Pharaoh to kill all the male children, because he was afraid their numbers were growing too big to manage. Baby Moses escaped this horror when his mother hid him in a basket and sent him through the reeds of the Nile. He floated to the steps of the palace, and the Pharaoh's daughter rescued him and lo! the servant girl, Miriam, Moses' sister, suggested they get a Hebrew mother to nurse him. Back in his own mother's arms he was born a Hebrew but raised as an Egyptian **prince**.

One day when Moses saw an Egyptian official beating a kinsman, Hebrew slave, and

he in turn killed the official. Now he was a **murderer**. He ran from Egypt to the region of Mt. Horeb. Traveling about 20 miles a day it may have taken him 18 days over the 360 miles. When he arrived at the watering well, he appeared to be an Egyptian in dress and demeanor. This was enough to intimidate some shepherds, who were giving a family of seven sisters a hard time at the well. Moses ran them off and helped the sisters to feed their animals. Now he was a **protector**. When the women arrived home, their father noted that they were earlier than usual. When they told him about Moses and how he had come to their rescue, their father Jethro, ...no not that one, asked them to invite him to their table. The invitation to *break bread with us, came* from Jethro as well as an immediate offer to give his daughter Zipporah as a wife and a job as a **shepherd**. Moses would remain with this family about 40 years. He and Zipporah had two sons.



One day while tending the sheep, one of the bushes becomes afire with God. God has heard the cries of the enslaved Hebrew nation in Egypt by now numbering somewhere between 30, 000 and two million...I know big discrepancy...depends on who's counting, but that's a lot of voices bending the ear of God. God wants Moses to go back to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to, "Let my people go!" Moses argues with God about his speech disability, and his lack of credibility with the Hebrew people. God gave him a couple of convincing, cool tricks...turning his shepherd's crook into a snake and inflaming his hand with leprosy only to have it tucked back into his cloak and healed. And he says that Moses' brother, Aaron will be his spokesperson. God will tell Moses what to say, Moses will tell Aaron, and Aaron will tell the people. Now comes the second **Truth Telling** sentence of Jethro that sends Moses off to be the **Liberator** and **Prophet of God**.

"Go to Peace."

Jethro uses an interesting turn of phrase that Leonard Sweet points out. It's not one that makes many translations, and it is very tiny. Instead of the blessing we are most familiar with, "Go in peace," Jethro tells Moses to "Go to peace." "Go in peace," is a statement of moving through life and knowing we will eventually die. While "Go to peace" is a charge for bringing peace into the world while we have time. Sweet says, going "to peace" "is a wresting of beauty, truth, and goodness out of the jaws of death, and is a push to make the best use of whatever life remains." Quite different blessings. (p. 62)

This signals Jethro's **truth-telling** kick in the seat of the tunic for Moses. *Jethros bless us to go to what God is calling us to do so that we can receive peace in our lives.* (Sweet p. 64) Oh and by the way...Jethro packs up his daughter, her two sons, and a

donkey to go along with Moses. Jethros are blessers and not flatterers. Remember that Jethro, the Midian priest, is not part of the Hebrew community.

Yesterday, I was talking to an old acquaintance who is Jewish. We were at the funeral of a young man. She told me that her faith teachings identify family is the most important relationship. This is the place where we learn to interact with each other and be in relationships. This is where we learn to be community, and it affects how we will move through the world for the rest of our lives. Therefore, it is so important to get right. When it doesn't go well, there is a lot of repair and recognition especially on behalf of the children to relearn or repair how to be and contribute to society in healthy and life-giving ways that bring beauty, truth, and goodness.

Jethro was not thinking that God, of all beings, wanted Moses to go and do this thing without his family. For me, yesterday, my old friend was what Sweet calls a “**shot of Goy.**” This is when someone who is not in the same community or community of faith with you, who are more “doers” than “believers” come in for *Witness* with you. We could both agree on this beautiful common ground about the importance of family. Jewish households needed their “shot of Goy” for strict sabbath observance. These are Gentiles hired to do work on the sabbath forbidden to a Jew. You know some famous people who made a good living being a “shot of Goy” for Jews in their youth: Elvis Presley and Colin Powell. We need people of other cultures and faiths in our lives, not just to “witness” to them but also to keep us honest and faithful in our own rituals and beliefs. (p. 65) Jethro was this to Moses.

Whose cultural, social, political, faith, economic, ethnic practices could you find room to honor, even enable if not only because you honor the relationship with the one who is different than you. You would be Jethro-ing with a “shot of Goy.”

Well, at some point in the story, Moses does send Zipporah back home to Jethro. It was likely once the ten plagues got underway, but some say, it was once he was trying to move thousands, even millions of people on foot through the desert for what would be 40 years of wandering. Maybe Zipporah even insisted. No matter, once Moses has parted the Red Sea and come near Mt. Horeb again, Jethro packs the little family up and takes them back to where Moses is camped with his liberated people.

This is where today's Scripture enters in. Moses meets Jethro with a bow of reverence. The next day it was “take your father-in-law to work day.” Jethro observes people standing around Moses from morning to evening, waiting for him to **Judge** their concerns. Jethro asks Moses, what is this that you are doing for the people, sitting alone?” Moses said he hears disputes, he decides between one and another, and makes known to them the statues and instructions of God. (Exodus 18:16) Jethro says, “*This is not good, you will surely wear yourself out and these people with you. The task*

is too heavy, you cannot do it alone!” And here comes his third phrase from the **Truth Teller**.

“Now listen to me.”

Jethro says, “I will give you counsel, and God be with you!” After this conversation, Moses delegates to people who fear God, are trustworthy and hate dishonest gain, and gives them office over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Moses lets them sit as judges for every minor case. Jethro closes with, “So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace.” (Exodus 18:23). Note that last line, again emphasizing the value of Jethro, ***all will go to their home in peace.***

Ah, the family value again, *go home*. Now I know COVID put a lot of us home, I mean really, even working from home, so this is an invitation for us to think about what it means to go **home**. One child recently told his dad who is back in the office that he wished they could have COVID time again. A time when the whole family came to the same room, on purpose, for a nightly game before dinner. Ah, here the child was the **Truth Teller**.

Who are your truth tellers? Who is your someone who causes you to re-think a habit, pattern, or action, change directions, and live into the strength and job that God intends for you as a partner to **Go to Peace?**

Can you name your Jethros?

My mother-in-law once asked me how many times I have to say “No” to our toddlers before they realize that’s the answer.

My friend once suggested I reconsider my threat to withdraw financial support from our 19-year-old son if he got a tattoo. She said, “Be careful, you won’t win this one.”

And I’ll close with this story, because our Truth Tellers may not be someone we are in relationship with. God is whispering the truth in love to us all around us. You may have overheard a Jethro.

I was standing in the post office line when the young woman in front of me asked for a couple hundred stamps for her wedding invitations. “I’ll take the ones with flowers, that say, ‘Love’.” The female postal worker asked her if she thought her fiancé would like those, too. The reply came, “Oh, he’ll be okay with whatever I want.” Have you ever seen the half torso, elbow supported, climb over half the counter to get your attention

move? The two women were up close and personal as the postal-service worker vehemently said, “Then you hang on to him, because it’s a whole lot easier to keep training the one you have than it is to start all over with a new one.”

That’s the time when I started calling my husband, Jeff, my boyfriend again, because I was nicer to him if we were dating.

Not sure any of us will have as many careers, calls, or surprise turns as Moses; rescued child, Egyptian prince, murderer, shepherd, prophet, liberator, deliverer, judge, husband, father, and son-in-law, but when we have taken on too much, have one learning curve after another or we are admittedly just making it up as we go, may God send us a Jethro, who will direct us with truth telling. And may we Jethro to others, saying, “Now listen to my counsel, and God be with you.”

Remember that often when we part, our words have been and still will be, “Go in peace!” Yet for today, there is work to do, truth to ring, from the inside and the outside. So, hear this, Go to peace.”” Turn to your neighbor and say, Go to peace.””

It is so. Amen.

Song of Response
“God, Heal Our Souls”
Michael Tatum

WORDS AND MUSIC: MICHAEL TATUM

1. God, heal our souls. We’re dying here now.
The pain we all feel is breaking is down.
Injustice we see is screaming so loud,
so, God, hear our souls; breathe life in us now.

2. God, heal our souls. We’re wasting away;
all talking so fast with nothing to say.
Not embracing the “we;” it’s just “you,” “me,” and “they.”
So, God, heal our souls; speak truth in this day.

Bridge:

We need you, Healer; won’t you hold us tight?
We need you, Healer, won’t you bring us light?
And when the darkness gets too hard to fight,
we’re screaming out to the heavens, God, renew our lives.

Ending:

God, hear our souls; we’re dying here now.