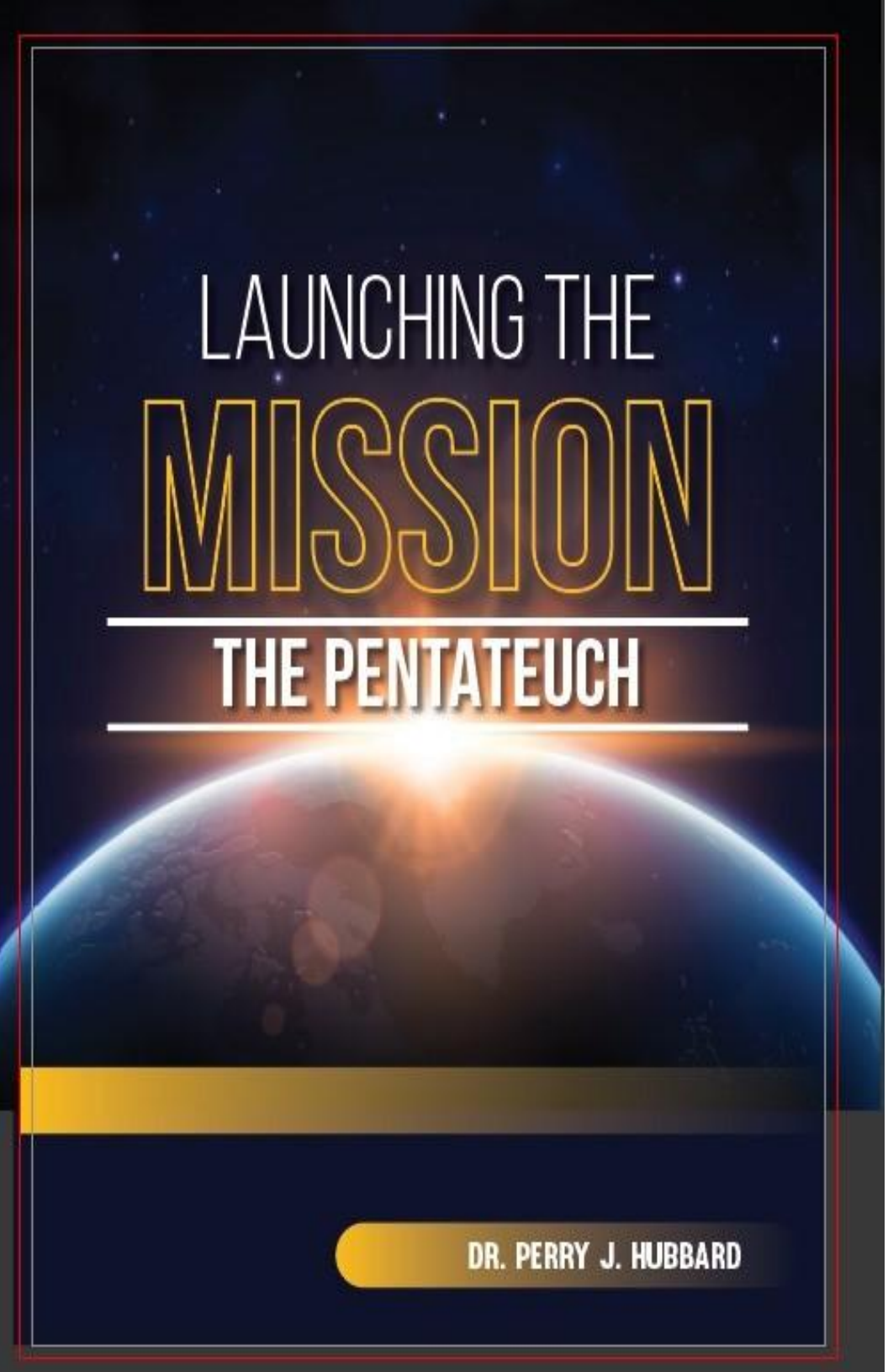




LAUNCHING THE MISSION

THE PENTATEUCH

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Launching the Mission – The Pentateuch:

Volume 1 – Old Testament Missional Commentary

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Pentateuch 1 - The Glory Land

Ge 2: 8-9, 15

We are all looking for a place where life is pleasant and there is no trouble. A place where all our needs are cared for, and life is easy and pleasant.

God created the Garden of Eden for Adam and Eve. It had everything they needed. It was beautiful. Life was great, and God was always around to walk with and talk to. It was a place where all their needs were cared for and pleasant. But was it easy?

They were told to work and care for the garden. It was not intended to be life without responsibilities. God put Adam and Eve in the garden, not for them to just lounge around and have every need met. The truth is, there were no angels assigned to care for their every need. God did not provide in that way. Instead, God put them there and then told them to take care of it, and, can you believe this, they were supposed to work the garden.

So did they plant the seeds, weed when needed, and deal with insects. We don't know what work they had to do. At a minimum, they had to harvest what was available.

We don't know if they had to make shelters. We assume that since it was the Garden of Eden, the weather was perfect. So, no need for protection from heat, rain, cold, and so on. Did they have to make beds to rest on? Or did they even need to sleep? We do know there was day and night, and so they

probably did sleep. How and where is not specified. So, work could have included providing a place to rest.

They did not have to make clothes. That issue didn't arise until after they sinned. But did they have to avoid too much exposure to the sun? If so, then they had to find places that were shady and comfortable.

We are told that they could eat from any tree except one. What we don't know is if the trees produced fruit year-round. There are some that do. Even if there aren't any of these, then did the fruit trees have seasons? If so, their diet would change as the seasons came and went. That is, if they had seasons.

Did they have natural trails they could walk? Did they use the trails created by the animals? Did they have to clear trails? How did they get to and from the different sources of food?

What did they have to care for?

It is a fascinating question and opens my thoughts up to the questions I should be asking as soon as I accept God's call to mission. I need to think about what the words 'work' and 'care for' mean.

We may not be able to answer those questions as relates to Adam and Eve and what these words meant for them. We may not because there is no way for us to explore the context and setting in which they lived.

There is one more thing that is part of this whole process. They are told one thing they cannot do. They are not allowed to eat the fruit of a specific tree. I will not get into what that means

or doesn't mean, but it does have a critical truth that must be dealt with. There are always things that are taboo.

Dare we explore the world of thorns, poisonous plants, insects, and other dangers? Dare we ask if there were dangers to be dealt with in the garden? Things that existed to teach and observe. Things to reveal their need to care for themselves and the world they lived in. Were there cliffs? Were there rivers? Did they know how to swim?

I could continue asking questions. And that is my point. Every time we enter the world of another person, we need to think about what the words 'work' and 'care for' signify in relation to the people who live in that particular place in the world. It is not the Garden of Eden in so many ways, but it is the same in that it provides everything needed to live. The point is that we need to be willing to ask questions and not just assume we know the answers based on our perspective.

The work will be different. The types of foods and fruits that can be produced will not be the same. The issues of security and protection will be different, yet the need for both exists. The issues of living in what God has created will vary but have the same purpose: living according to God's intent and plan.

Every place a person lives is or can be the Garden of Eden. It may not be a perfect habitat like that garden. But it can be a place to live and know God. It can be a place to obtain what is needed to live. But none of that is possible if we are not willing to work and to care for what has been provided.

Sadly, we are too quick to judge and criticize. We are too ready to feel sorry for someone because we think what they have is somehow less than the garden we think we should have. We want 'easy'. We want 'pleasant'. We want it to provide for us. We forget that God told them to work and care for the garden.

As I close this, consider what the promised land was. It was a place of mountains, valleys, plains, forests, rivers, and deserts. It had so much potential. But not every part of it was going to produce grapes or wheat or be fit to raise sheep. Each part had to be worked on and cared for according to what was possible.

All too often, we make this mistake when we think of the promised land. We forget it was not perfect in the sense that it would provide what the people needed on its own. It would provide according to the work invested. It would provide if cared for. I don't know of any garden that does everything on its own.

Here is what I mean. If you choose not to work or care for a garden, then you have to become nomadic. That means living in a place until you exhaust what is available. When that happens, then you have to move on to another place and then move again and again. You may return to a place, but only after it has had a chance to recover from your activity.

This is a better description of how we treat all that God has given us. We use up what is available to satisfy our wants and desires. We want a perpetual promised land or Garden of Eden, but without having to do the work to make that possible.

If we don't have what we think is correct or necessary, then we complain, grumble, and condemn the place and the people for not having what we want. This is the foundation behind ethnocentrism and all the damage it has done to missions. This is how we damage the garden God has provided in each place.

No two gardens are the same. Even in the same community. We should think about that as we carry the gospel beyond where we are to the world. God has provided everything that is needed if we will work and care for it.

Follow up

Biblical Study – Consider this: there is only one text in the whole Bible that actually calls Canaan the promised land, and it is found in He 11:9. The most common description of this land is “a land flowing with milk and honey.” Now read Ex 33:3. Why did the people refuse to go to this land? What was more important to them?

What did Jesus offer the people when he talked about the kingdom of God? Read Mt 5:10-12 and Jn 15:20. Now read Jn 14:27; 16:33.

Now, define what the promised land could mean.

Cultural Insight – Why are cultures so different? Why is there so much variety in the food and fruit available in each cultural setting? What can you learn from this reality in presenting God's love and truth in another culture?

When we offer people the gospel, what are we offering them? A solution to all their problems or a relationship with Jesus?

Personal Reflection – How often do you find yourself making comparisons between what you have and what another person has? Why do you do that? How does that harm your ability to do God’s work and care for what he has given you?

Pentateuch 2 – Crushing the Serpent – The Seed

Ge 3:15

What a promise. What a hope. Someday, the serpent who led us into a trap will be crushed.

Sadly, it was not to be something that happened at that moment. It is amazing how quickly sin permeates everything, quietly and without our awareness.

When we lived in Sierra Leone, there was an interesting reality that occurred every year and did so without much fanfare. If you wanted to, you could do a couple of things to become aware of what was happening. One was to find a river or dry gulch and then check it regularly during the rainy season. What you will see is the river rising and the dry gulch filling with water.

This is important because quietly it affects many trails and paths that are available during the dry season, but not as the rain increases and time passes during the rainy season. It was

interesting how one day you could use a particular road or path and then not. Sometimes it meant significant detours to get to certain villages and farms.

The other was to dig a well. If you dug your well during the rainy season, you would not have to go far to find water. But when the dry season came, little by little the water level would drop, and you would have to redig the well. Not a wise choice since the water has weakened the wall of the well, and so digging deeper could result in the wall collapsing and trapping you.

The best time for travel and for digging a well was at the peak of the dry season. Movement is so much easier because you need fewer bridges to move around. Digging a well and reaching water in the dry season means you will have water throughout the year.

What does this have to do with crushing the serpent, and why would it take so long to reach the point where this would happen? Keep in mind that according to some people's calculations, there were at least 4000 years from the Garden to the coming of Jesus. That meant a lot of rain had to fall, or should I say, preparations had to be made so that when the correct time came, there would be an endless supply of forgiveness and mercy.

Crushing the serpent was not about a quick solution for a given moment. It was about understanding how sin runs in our lives, how deep it flows, and being sure that when the time came to resolve the issue, it would be the right time. In the Scriptures, this was called the opportune moment or correct

time (Ga 4:4). God knew when to dig the well and when to come to the world. He knew the path that would be open and what it would take to provide salvation to all who would believe.

An example of this would be Paul's Macedonian call setting. He wanted to go to Asia, another province in the Roman Empire. Instead, God sent him to Macedonia (Acts 16:9). Years later, we find him in Ephesus teaching and discipling. We are told that by the end of his time there, all of Asia had heard the gospel (Ac 19:10). God's timing.

Over and over, we will see this pattern. God chooses when to act, and it is not based on what we think or know. We would question why Israel had to spend 400 plus years in Egypt and end up as slaves. We might question why wars are fought to take control of the land promised to them. We might question why God used Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, the Greeks, and the Romans at different points in the history of preparing for the crushing of the serpent.

We would question all of this because we do not see where the water level is or when to dig the well. We do not see all the possible routes because they are hidden from view and yet to be revealed.

Truly, we are called to live by faith and trust God to know when something needs to be done. At the same time, it is important that we do not hesitate. Hesitation would mean lost opportunities to declare the gospel. Hesitation would mean not taking the risks involved in opening the roads being revealed to reach the nations.

Go to Hebrews 11 and the hall of faith and consider what each of these people did and why they were involved, even though they were not present when the serpent was crushed. We, too, are called to depend on God. We are not the ones who convict of sin. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot see deep enough. What we can do is live in a way that makes it possible to reach a lost person at the right moment and lead them to the well of living water.

Bible study – Consider the following scriptures. Jn 5:24-27; 1 Co 15:54-57; 2 Ti 1:8-12. Consider what God has accomplished for you and those he sends you to with the gospel. How will what you know help them crush the serpent of sin in their life?

Cultural Reflection – I have used a couple of cultural examples to explain the process and timing of God in providing what was needed to save all who confess and believe from the destructive reality of sin. What examples could you use from your experience and the culture you are a part of to explain what God did?

Personal reflection – Reflect on how and when you heard God speak to you. What was happening in your life, and how did that prepare you to respond? How will this knowledge help you share the gospel with others?

Pentateuch 3 The war begins

Ge 4:3-7

We all know this story. Cain brought some grain, and Abel brought the best from his flock. One tried to...well, what Cain was intending by his action has been the subject of many a sermon. I have my own ideas of what was going on. Cain was not thinking of the best he could give. He was not thinking about truly honoring God. He was not thinking but only comparing.

What does that mean?

My question for all of us to consider is how often do we expect others to accept something less than our best? We do enough to get by, or we use shortcuts. In case you are not clear, let me share a couple of examples.

One of the places where we served, we encountered two families that moved into the area where we had established churches with indigenous pastors. They came with food, clothes, and supplies, and shared them with everyone. This kind of generosity attracts people. Of course it does. But they don't come to hear the truth; they come to get the stuff. When the stuff runs out, they abandon the people who were using it to attract them.

I was on a trek to visit several of our most remote churches. I stopped to visit one of these families. It was a pleasant visit and interesting. Their house was not typical of the area, nor was the furniture in it. They did use local resources for the

house, but on a grand scale. The furniture was brought in, but not via road, instead via helicopters. So much wealth. They brought in clothes, food, and other materials. Their church grew quickly at first and then began to struggle. People wondered about all the money involved in using helicopters and not employing local transportation and people to do the transport. Also, the supply of gift materials began to diminish.

I chose not to comment and keep my visit friendly. Towards the end, the father made an interesting comment. He stated that he wished his pastors were as faithful as ours. It was not hard to see why. As their gifts became less and less, the faithfulness of the people became less and less. Also, the people wondered why they couldn't benefit from the level of funding that allowed for transport by helicopter. (It is very expensive.)

It was not long before the funds to bring supplies by helicopter ran out as well, and this family left. They, in a sense, were like Cain; they did something, but not what was of true value.

In another country, two new groups arrived in our village. The one, a false cult, built its church right next to ours. They too came with gifts and promises. The other, a Muslim cult, started visiting all the villages where we had churches. They both caused a great deal of confusion. The focus of these groups was not on living in a way to honor God but to honor their system of belief and steal people from other groups. In fact, the Muslim cult group treated the other Muslim group in the same way they treated our church, seeking to draw people away.

None of these had much interest in helping people find the truth in the gospel. They had their own version and sought to attract people from existing ministries. They didn't want to do the hard work and give their best in service to God. They wanted to do what may look good to others, but be like Cain's offering, unacceptable.

Too often, those who follow them see the money, the materials, and nothing more. They do not see God's heart in what is being done.

True missional work is about doing what is best, not just something that we think is adequate. It is about caring for people, but in ways that reveal what true love is. So many types of ministries can easily get lost in this. Medical ministry, agriculture, well digging, and so on. If we are not careful, people see the action, want what is offered, but never see what is involved in giving God our best.

Those who use things to, in a sense, bribe people into the church, do not want to do the harder work of living and serving. It may look good on their report home, but it doesn't last. Then they, like the family I visited, wonder why the people of other churches are more faithful. The next step is jealousy, and if one is not careful, that can lead to destructive actions that damage the message we have been called to proclaim.

Each day we need to evaluate the reason behind our actions and if they truly represent our best, our all, for God.

Bible study

Read the following scriptures: 1 Sa 15:22-23; Ps 51:16-17; Ho 6:6. What attitudes are critical in being sure God is pleased with the work a person does for Him?

Cultural Insight

How do you think your culture affects what you decide is the best way to do your work? How does that compare with what you have seen in the above passages? Does culture help to define the best way to serve? If not, why?

Personal Reflection

Consider the different times when you were given an assignment. This could be a while ago, in school, at work, or even preparing for an activity such as participating in a sport. Are talent and ability the only factors in doing a good job or excelling in an activity? What else is critical to doing your best and excelling?

Pentateuch 4 Short cut - Enoch

Ge 5:24

Have you ever heard the phrase ‘some people are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good’? It is a quote of Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., a physician and poet. It is a sarcastic remark about people whose focus was so totally on heaven and being acceptable to God that they had no function or purpose in relation to others.

So, was Enoch so focused on walking with God that he had no thought for or concern for those around him? It is a question worthy of answering.

Consider the history we have. Enoch was the father of Methuselah. So, he was a family man. That meant he had to do what was necessary to care for his wife and children. In all of that, he maintained a focus on God that allowed him to walk with God. Something his son Methuselah could observe for 300 years. He was also the grandfather of Lamech, who was the father of Noah. Lamech had the opportunity to know and observe his grandfather for 178 years.

Now we have two people who have intimate knowledge of the life of Enoch. These two people lived almost until the coming of the flood, which meant they could tell Noah about their father and grandfather. They could tell the story of how he walked with God and then one day simply vanished. I want to believe that the life of Enoch had an impact on Noah's choice to follow God and not the way of the world.

Enoch may have had an incredible relationship with God, but it was not to the exclusion of others and their need to see and understand what was right. He was truly heavenly-minded in the way he lived.

But is that what we are saying when we use the phrase so heavenly minded, they are of no earthly good?

Consider that this phrase is being used in a sarcastic manner. It suggests that the person has lost contact with the needs of those around them and can only see themselves and what they

need to do to gain entrance into heaven. The problem is not in having a focus on heaven and God but in how that focus is expressed.

The tendency is to put on what could be called a religious façade. This means creating the appearance of being heavenly-minded through how one acts. We could make a list of such things. They would be attending religious activities, avoiding certain types of behavior and people, wearing specific types of clothing, and other similar guidelines. The best example of this type of person would be the Pharisees of Jesus day.

They sought to be perfect in their following of the law (as defined by their group). They avoided contact with certain kinds of people, and they could be found at the temple on a regular basis. These and other practices, in their minds, made them people that God would approve and accept. As a result, they were cold and distant from the needs of the people around them. Jesus was especially harsh in his comments about this type of lifestyle. He had so much to say about them and their failure to truly understand what it meant to walk with God. To him, they were clearly of no earthly good.

Here are some of his comments and evaluation of their lifestyle and approach to being heavenly in their minds and actions.

- Blind leading the blind – Mt 15:14; 23:16-24 – appear to have truth but are confused
- Whitewashed sepulchers – Mt 23:27 – appear to be alive but are dead

- Appeared clean on the outside but filthy on the inside
– Mt 23:25-25 – concerned about the sin of others but are blind to their own

There are more, but this is sufficient to give some credence to the statement on which we are reflecting. Sadly, if these types of people are the only examples of people who are heavenly in their focus, then we are doomed.

Thankfully, it is not. The truly heavenly-minded people have a clear earthly focus. Jesus would be the greatest example of this. His total focus on doing the work of his Father meant that he was able to be just as focused on the needs of those around him. In his own words from John 10:37-38

Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does.
38 But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father."

The Pharisees, in order to maintain their heavenly state, avoided contact with those they considered impure and so unworthy of their presence. Jesus: the one pure and righteous person, the one who came from heaven to earth; the holy son of God; spent his life reaching out to the unworthy, helping them to know God.

This is at the heart of the mission. To become so heavenly-minded that we become a person who is truly useful and able to represent, reflect, and reveal God's love for all. A truly heavenly-minded person has time to touch the sinful, has time to heal their wounds, and has time to serve others as Jesus did.

This is at the heart of the mission. To become so heavenly-minded that we can truly see people the way God sees them, as one created in his image, and so guide them to becoming the child of God he created. A truly heavenly-minded person has eyes to see beyond a person's sin, has eyes to see the possibility that forgiveness can bring, and has eyes to see the possibility of each person being restored.

This is the heart of the mission. To become so heavenly-minded that we truly walk with God and guide others to walk in the same way. A truly heavenly-minded person is able to walk anywhere and everywhere and not be misled by the world. A truly heavenly-minded person has the ability to reveal this way of living to others. A truly heavenly-minded person walks with God, and the world is drawn to them.

Bible Study

Read the book of Daniel. How often did Daniel need to make critical choices? How did those choices affect him and his friends? In each of these, how did these acts of obedience impact the lives of others?

Personal Reflection

Are you a heavenly-minded person? Now for the hard question. How does that make you useful here on earth?

Cultural reflection – Consider Paul's statement in 1 Co 9:22 about becoming all things to all men. How does this relate to the idea of being heavenly-minded so that we can be of earthly good?

Pentateuch 5 – Reset - Noah

Ge 6:14-16

We are a people who, in general, do not like the unknown. We want to know what to expect. When we are forced to deal with the unknown, we don't want to do it alone. The great explorers did so in the company of others. They didn't go off across the ocean alone. But that meant convincing others to go with them. For some, the promise of doing something new was enough. For others, the hope of fame and reward would attract them. Each person has their reason for leaving the familiar to enter into the unknown.

What is interesting is that, in going exploring, they used what was familiar to them. They used boats, wagons, horses, and other equipment. They often brought food that was familiar to them, at least at the beginning. Once it ran out, they had to explore eating what was unfamiliar to them. They brought familiar clothing and so on.

With all that in mind, let us consider the life of Noah. He was one of the very few people who actually still believed in God and were found righteous. I say this because in his early days, he had parents and grandparents who knew Enoch. I want to believe that this was the basis of how he chose to live, and therefore was considered righteous. He heard and heeded what he learned about Enoch and what it meant to walk with God

from two key people who possibly lived long enough to hear about the plans to build something very unusual, an ark.

Now we get to the point of this study. Noah was called to do something that was completely unusual. He was to explore a part of our world that we often avoid. He had to explore in depth what he believed about God and whether he would do something unheard of and enter into the unknown.

He was not alone in this process, but one wonders what was involved in convincing his wife and sons that he was not crazy. More so to also convince the wives of his sons to stay and be a part of something that probably did not inspire confidence in the sanity of the head of the family they had married into.

Build an ark. What's an ark? It will be 450 cubits by... what's a cubit? Build it of gopher wood. What's gopher wood? (Excerpts from the comedy routine of Bill Cosby) I can just hear the conversation and all the questions about this and that. Worse, there were no plans or examples to refer to. How did Noah know how to do everything that was involved in building an ark?

Keep in mind, this had to be done with simple hand tools. Probably using pegs and pinions to hold it together. There were no nails, bolts, or plates back then. So very careful and time-consuming work. A hundred years of work. Oh, don't forget all the animals. There was no school in zoology and animal husbandry. So how does one plan to feed a few thousand animals for upwards of a year?

Then the daily taunts and jeers, which easily led to questioning one's sanity. Why am I doing this? Why is my family still here? What next?

But that is what missions is. It is entering a country, culture, group, or even another life with the intent of building an ark. You don't know what it will look like, you don't know what tools and materials will be available, or what will work. You don't know what will be expected of you in providing for and caring for those who respond. You don't know how friends and family will respond. But you are called to build an ark, develop a relationship with others, so that they can be saved from the judgment to come.

The problem is that all too often our fear of the unknown kicks in, and we don't hear the directions God gives us. Worse, we ignore them. We just don't want to be responsible for building what is needed to provide for another to enter an ark, a place of safety, where they can learn about God.

Even if we accept this part of the work, we truly do not want to be involved in the second step. We don't want to be responsible for the ongoing care and maintenance of another person as they learn about God and how to live in the ark of God's love and presence.

Did you hear what I just said? Think about it. The one place on all the earth where God was clearly present and involved was the ark. He was intimately involved in the plans for its construction, and he was clearly present in the ongoing care of all those who entered the ark. Imagine feeding thousands of

animals multiple times a day and then cleaning up after them. That is a lot of work, and it involves a commitment.

The ark, well, that is easy. I can build something. I can say hi. I can invite them to church or some event. I can help them find the way. But don't ask me to deal with their problems. Don't ask me to babysit them when they are struggling. Don't ask me to be there all the time to help them. Don't ask me to clean up after them when they fail and make mistakes.

But that is in fact the mission. We are to be the ark that people can enter into and find all that they need to find God, be discipled, and become mature followers of Jesus. We are called to enter the unknown and bring God's message of hope and love to others.

It all seems overwhelming, doesn't it? It doesn't have to be if we keep one thing clearly in mind. God is involved in every step of the process. God is providing the insight and knowledge needed to build what needs to be built and then maintain it. God is present in all that happens and has promised to provide us with exactly what is needed.

So, let's get busy and build an ark, invite people in, and care for them so they can build an ark for the next person.

Biblical Study

There is an important word that is part of this story. It is the word covenant. This word is used in relation to Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. Read the following scriptures and write a definition of what this word means.

Ge 8:20-9:17; Ge 12:1-3; Ge 17:3-8; Dt 28; 2 Sa 7:5-16; Mt 26:26-29; Lk 22:19-22

Cultural Reflection

How will those of another culture believe we truly love them and care about who they are? How will they believe the words we speak and the actions we perform? Write a covenant that would reveal your commitment to build an ark for those who have not heard the truth of God's love.

Personal Reflection

Take pen and paper and write out your own personal covenant with God. It should include what you hope God will do and what you will do to reveal your commitment to the covenant.

Pentateuch 6 – Launch - Abraham

Ge 12:1-5

The story of Abraham covers so much time. It starts when Abraham is 75 and he is told to leave his home and travel to an unknown location, unknown to him but not to God, the one who told him to go. The next 25 years are filled with life. You know successes and failures. Some of the failures are significant, such as lying about his wife being his sister twice. Allowing his wife to convince him to have a child by her handmaiden. The successes are grand as well. The recovery of Lot and many others after they had been abducted. The

pleading on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah. The completion of the test related to the sacrifice of his only son, Isaac.

Abraham is called to go. He is told the point and purpose of his call. He is reminded of this on several occasions. He is protected from his own foolishness and poor decisions. He is protected from so many potential enemies and dangers.

What he is not told in all of this is how long it will take. He is not told exactly how God will carry out all the promises. On one occasion, his faith is put to the test when he is told to sacrifice Isaac. On two occasions, he tries to use his wisdom to advance the plan. He suggests that his servant be his heir. He then has a child by someone other than his wife as an attempt to provide an heir. God rejects all of his efforts to humanly fulfill what God has promised.

It is so typical of us as humans. We know the promises. We have seen others be blessed. We have been given our task, and then the waiting happens. The waiting makes us impatient. The waiting suggests we are not doing what we should be doing. The waiting challenges us to be the source of the answer and blessing. The waiting that some people see as failure.

That is not to say we have no part in what God has told us to do. Abraham had to leave his home. Abraham had to learn to trust God. Abraham worked at protecting those around him, bringing about Lot's rescue twice, once by his own hand and another time by pleading with God for his safety in the face of God's judgment. He had to keep sleeping with his wife, a strange idea, believing she would become pregnant, though

she was past the age of childbearing (well, maybe that wasn't so hard to do). The point is that he had to remain in the land God sent him to. Continue living where God has sent him. Continue living as a child of God. Continue in prayer and faith.

It is hard to imagine all that Abraham went through waiting for a child to be born to his wife. Twenty-five years is a long time. Remember that he had already waited a long time for his wife to produce a child. He was already 75 when they left for Canaan. He was 86 when Ishmael was born. And just to keep things in perspective, he had a number of children by other wives after Sarah died.

To make things more interesting, his only son had only two boys, not encouraging when you are promised that you will be the father of nations. He didn't live to see the twelve born to Jacob. He had to live and believe by faith that God would keep his promises, which God did, in time.

So, what about us? How many of us like to wait? Wait in line, wait our turn, wait to be noticed?

Consider this, most couples who get married hope, even expect to have a child. Yet so many have to wait and wait and wait. This was true of a couple that I know. Finally, after many years of trying, they had a child, and then another, and finally twins when they were almost 50.

Consider this: most of us hope to find a good job, one that allows us to advance and receive a good salary. But many people find themselves in jobs that are in factories or service-

related. There is no hope for advancement, though there may be increases in salary. Life in this type of world means always waiting, always saving, so there will be enough to enjoy some special event or accomplish an important goal.

When those goals are reached, there is great joy. Unfortunately, all too often, there are setbacks, deviations, and alterations. Health issues, accidents, and life just conspire to interfere with what we hope for, and so we find ourselves waiting even longer. Now comes the temptation to advance our goals through other means. Means that are not likely appropriate or approved in general,

When it comes to serving God, there is another factor that, like Abraham, causes unnecessary problems. The line of Ishmael became a problem for the line of Judah later in history. Sadly, our ideas of how to fulfill the goals and purposes of God are all too often a source of future trouble. Too often, we put what we think should be, ahead of what God wants to be central. Or what we desire and focus on has little to do with what we have been called to do.

Instead of waiting on God and the results he is seeking, we look to ourselves and redefine the results according to our skills and abilities. Now we are in a different kind of waiting. Now it is God waiting for us to see the truth. To see that we are not waiting on him. Why do we do this? Why do we create our own plan and activity? Usually, it is so that it doesn't appear like nothing is happening, when in reality, God is at work preparing both us and those around us.

An example. In a store, instead of just getting in line and waiting, we look for the shortest line or the one where the people in line have the least number of items to pay for. In an office, we try to find the time when the line might be the shortest. How many times, instead of simply waiting for our turn, do we leave hoping to come back and find that the line is shorter? Do we realize that all the time involved in going and coming may actually use up more time than if we simply got in line and waited for our turn to come up?

How many times do we treat God this way? If things are moving in a way that appears slow or nonproductive, we do something, anything, that we think will produce results. Sadly, our efforts are often counterproductive, even negative. As a result, God needs to intervene, correct our errors, and set us back on track.

Actually, waiting on God is not about inactivity. There is much to do that will prepare us to be ready for the time established by God.

We need to learn the language of those we are reaching. Sometimes this is a new language that we must learn. It can take many years to learn some languages, and even more if it is not already written down. This is critical to our ability to communicate. Even when we share the same language, there is still much to learn about the vocabulary, slang, and accent of those we are seeking to communicate with.

As an example of this, consider Gen Z and their style of communicating and their vocabulary. My daughter made me

aware of this, and so I bought a copy of the New Testament in GenZ language.

Here is an example of the text in King James English: "And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple." Updated version (GenZ): "So Jesus bounced from the temple and his crew rolled up to him, flexing the sick architecture of the place."

As you can see, they are really different. Truthfully, not many understand the King James anymore, and so we have the New International Version. That works for many, but maybe not for the newest group or generation. So, you can see you may need to take time to learn this new way of communicating if we want to reach the newest generation.

We need to learn the culture of the people. There is so much information to be gained in understanding not just how people live but why they think and act the way they do. Culture is a portal to deeper understanding in critical areas of belief and life. Again, it takes time and a significant commitment to observing and being teachable if we are to gain access to this information. People need time to learn to trust you. If you don't allow for this, then you may not gain permission to do what God has sent you to do.

There is a lot of discussion about the new culture of the cell phone and how it affects how people live and interact. If you don't understand this, then you may fail to receive permission to be part of their world and life.

We need to learn our place within the group we are serving. This can take time and requires patience and humility, attitudes which can take time to develop and live.

I have seen this over and over. The younger generations do not know how to communicate with the older generation. The same is true of the reverse. Understanding how we fit in with each other's world can be a challenge. Building trust and openness takes time.

We need to learn to observe. If we are in too big of a hurry, we can miss critical details. Observation requires time and repetition to be truly effective in helping us see and understand what is happening around us. This is critical to knowing the best time to act. We must learn to observe what God is doing. We must learn to see how people are responding to us. We must learn what information may or may not be useful or effective. We must learn who the people are, and that will help us learn to love them as God loves them.

There are many gestures in the world. They do not have the same meaning for every group. In one country, it can be positive, in another, truly offensive. Observation is key in identifying key details and then learning how to ask about the meaning and purpose of so many things.

There are no shortcuts to carrying out God's plan and missions. Abraham is a great example of this. Many years would pass before the nation he was promised would exist, and many more years before the promise that he would be the source of blessing for all would become a reality.

We are called to wait on the Lord. We are also called to do our part in becoming the tool or person God needs to carry out his plan to reach the next person with his love.

Bible Study

The word wait is so important. Read the following scriptures and think about what they tell you about waiting. Also, consider who you are waiting for and why. Ps 27:14, Ps 33:20, Ps 130:5, Is 30:18, Mic 7:7

Cultural Application

Jesus told the disciples to wait. Why? What happened? Act 1:4. How will waiting for God to lead affect our ability to carry out his mission to reach every tribe and nation? What should we be doing while we wait in relation to the cultures we contact in our lives?

Personal Reflection

What are you waiting for in your life? Tit 2:13 What should you be doing while you wait? 1 Co 1:7; 4:5; 1 Th 1:10. Will your efforts help or cause other issues?

Interestingly, God did not stop Abraham from trying to rush things, even though his efforts did cause issues.

Pentateuch 7 – Sacrifice - Isaac

Ge 21:1-12

I wonder what was going through the mind of Isaac that day as they approached the mountain. More than that, Abraham told the others to stay and wait, and then loaded a donkey with Isaac, then took a knife and went up the mountain. Just fire, a knife, and no sacrifice.

We know that he took note that there was no lamb or other animal that would serve as a sacrifice. He asks his father about that. Abraham's answer is a bit cryptic and evasive. God will provide what is needed.

They have now arrived at the specified place, and still no animal. Abraham arranges everything and then binds Isaac. Now things get a bit real and frightening. It is hard to imagine what Isaac is thinking. It is hard to imagine him not struggling but submitting to being bound. It is hard to imagine his thoughts as his father places him on the altar and raises the knife.

The word is that God will provide a sacrifice. There is a lot of speculation about what Abraham was thinking. Was he thinking that God would give him another son? Would God allow him to kill his son and then raise him back to life? No answer or idea is given about this.

I have not seen much speculation about what Isaac was thinking.

What could have been going through his mind? A lot could have depended on what he had been told about all that God has done. About the promises given to Abraham and his place in those promises. Did he have the faith of his father? Did he understand what was happening and why? We just don't know.

We do know that God responded to them both. Abraham didn't have to sacrifice his son that day. Isaac didn't have to be sacrificed that day. But what does that mean?

For me, it could be as simple as the fact that we must be willing to sacrifice what is most important in our lives before God can truly use us. It could be as simple as allowing key people in our lives to provide the direction we need to do what God needs us to do.

For God to carry out his plan, we all need to be willing to sacrifice what is most dear to us. Jesus talked about the need to hate our parents if we truly wanted to follow him. He talked about taking up a cross daily if we wanted to follow him.

How many people have been called by God to make what we consider great, even incredible sacrifices, so that God's plan to reveal his love and salvation could be realized? How many must let go of those called, sacrifice that friendship, the familial relation, or partnership of a coworker, so God's call can be fulfilled?

In this story, there are two people: the one who will carry forward the work and plan of God (Isaac) and the one who must let go of any claim they have to that person (Abraham). Every time God calls someone to serve, whether at home, in

Judea, in Samaria, or to the world, this is what happens. No action is without cost to both the one called and the ones related to that person.

It is amazing how often our first consideration is what it will cost us to obey God's call to mission. The truth is, it is often more difficult to get someone to commit to reaching a neighbor than to get someone to commit to leave all to serve where God sends.

Think about it. We don't like to sacrifice what we have to make space for another person, family, or group into our lives. In the same way, those who have to make room for those people don't like the idea of sacrificing that connection to make room for others to, in a sense, replace them. I say replace them because the time and commitment that was theirs will not be allotted to another.

Sadly, this factor often limits the growth of small groups and or their ability to divide and form two groups in order to reach more and provide needed fellowship for others. I have seen it happen. That pressure to not change is constant. We don't like to make this sacrifice because of the sacrifices involved in allowing others to enter and replace what was.

For those going to Judea, Samaria, and the world, it is a little easier. But only a little. Easy because of the distance involved. Still, there are people who remain so connected to friends and family, even once they have physically moved, that there is no room for new relationships. They don't sacrifice the one to make room for those they have been sent to love and reveal God's love to.

Sacrifice is not an easy concept. We treat it all too lightly and so never really understand it nor access its power. Abraham and Isaac learned much about what was involved that day on the mountain.

Study

Explain why Samuel made the following statement.

1 Sam 15:22 "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice,

Now, consider the following statement made by Paul. 1 Cor 9:22-23

I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings

What is the connection between obedience and sacrifice as defined by Paul?

Finally, read what John says about sacrifice.

1 John 4:10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Take all three of these and explain the value of your sacrificing your life as Christ did for you.

Cultural Application – When entering another culture what sacrifices will you have to make? Why will you make those sacrifices? How will they affect your family and friends?

Personal Reflection – What kinds of sacrifices have you made in your life? Why did you make those sacrifices? Did your sacrifice have the results you desired?

Pentateuch 8 – Mystery - Jacob

Genesis 29

How does one deal with the life of Jacob? It is filled with numerous stories, and many of them are about deception and failure. We could talk about how he tricked his brother out of his birthright. We could talk about how, with the encouragement of his mother, he cheated his brother out of the blessing. We could talk about how two sons used a cultural requirement to murder the men of a community. We could talk about how one son slept with his stepmother.

There are so many stories, and all of them make one wonder how God could include this man in the blessing given to Abraham. How could God protect him from his brother's wrath? How could God choose to meet him and reveal his plan to him in a dream? Why would God willingly wrestle with this man? So many questions. So few answers.

In spite of all the errors, falseness, self-interest, and acts of self-preservation, God chose to carry out his plan through this grandson of Abraham and not Esau. Esau was set aside for reasons we will never know.

The life of Jacob provides an interesting study in how God can keep things on track in his plan in spite of our foolishness and failures. In spite of our ethnocentrism and inability to understand what is happening. In spite of the influence and actions of others that either encourage us to follow a deceptive practice or seek to deceive us as well.

All of which is interesting, but what does the life of Jacob have to do with missions?

What I find interesting in the life of Jacob is all the cultural events that are part of his story. They take the form of customs and practices, and sometimes deviations from them. Consider the following ideas.

1. The Birthright – There was a clear understanding that the oldest son had the right to the birthright. This is a benefit that passes from the father to the oldest son. What is contained in it can vary from one culture to another. Usually, it involves a significant portion of the father's property and wealth. It also often involves the right to lead or be the head of the family. Jacob, for the price of a bowl of soup, convinced his brother Esau to relinquish this right. A foolish action. Sadly, there is not much in the life and behavior of Jacob that suggests he would make a good leader for the family. Although, as we learn later in his story, he was very good at managing animals and other valuable properties.
2. The Blessing – This is a unique piece of some cultures. The senior member of the family, or father in this case, has the authority to pronounce blessings or curses on the various members of the family. The most important

one is the words given to the future head of the family, in most cases, the oldest son. In this case, Rebecca helped Jacob fool her husband into pronouncing the blessing on Jacob. What Esau received, though an attempt at a blessing, comes out almost like a curse. It is for this reason and the loss of the birthright that Esau desires to murder his brother.

3. The Future Bride – Here again, we see culture at work. The head of the family has a great deal of power in the selection of the spouses of his children. This resulted in Jacob being sent back to where the family originally came from to seek a bride. Esau then realized his parents were not happy with his selection of brides and so married another woman from a more approved lineage.
4. Bride Price – Many cultures have a bride price. It is what one family pays for the bride of their son. In this case, Jacob agreed to work for seven years as the bride price for Rachel. This was because he had no other means to pay for this, and probably would not have even thought of returning home to obtain the necessary animals and other items required, because of the threat of his brother.
5. Marriage Order – Apparently, in the culture of Laban, it was not proper to approve the marriage of a younger daughter until the older one was married. This was the background to why Leah became Jacob's wife. What is interesting is that during the seven years that Jacob worked to pay for the bride price of Rachel, he did not learn about this rule. Culture created a strange marriage situation for him.

6. Children – In so many cultures, for a wife to be successful, they need to have children. For this to happen, sexual intimacy is necessary. Apparently, this cultural force was sufficiently strong that, though he did not love Leah, he fulfilled his obligation to her in this area. This reality became a point of contention throughout his life, resulting in a competition between Leah and Rachel, who also drew two of their handmaidens into the process.
7. Recompense – When Jacob finally returned home, he was still concerned about the threat of his brother. At this point, he begins a process of recompensing his brother for the loss related to the birthright and blessing. He paid his brother a significant amount in the form of animals and maybe other items.

What is interesting is the number of times that serious errors were made and the cost involved in dealing with those issues. Jacob had to flee his brother, and then upon return, provided a significant gift in the hopes of resolving that issue. Jacob misunderstood the rules of marriage, and it cost him an extra seven years of labor, followed by more time serving Laban to overcome the impact of those years. The family relations were never fully resolved, and that is seen in other events in the lives of the children of Jacob. A key one being his favoritism towards his son Joseph, born by the woman he loved. This alone would provide more situations of cultural importance and impact.

In missions, we need to be very careful about how we act, and especially the impact of such actions. While many cultures are forgiving of early mistakes, if we don't learn from them, the

period of forgiveness will come to an end. It is somewhat easy to overcome the earlier errors, but over time, the cost and effort to correct them will grow and may reach a point where it is not possible to do anything to resolve the damage done.

A case in point would be the action of Jacob's two oldest sons. They used a cultural requirement, circumcision, to provide a way to murder the men of a community. This created an environment of distrust that probably was never overcome and resulted in the birthright and blessing passing on to the fourth son, Judah. It is interesting to note that in Judah, the fulfillment of a key aspect of the blessing given to Abraham is carried out.

When we are insensitive to the culture of others, when we are too focused on living by our culture or our interpretation of how things should function, we can cause serious problems for the proclamation of the gospel. So many of these types of errors are made with the best of intentions. These are the ones that can often be repaired. Sadly, there are those errors that are not, but rather are based on selfishness and self-preservation. These are harder to correct if that is even possible. The damage can be so serious that those who have committed them are set aside to be replaced by those who are better equipped to adapt and follow the direction of God in their lives.

In many ways, we are like Jacob. We are trying to carry out the task given to us. We sometimes abuse the culture, misuse the culture, and misunderstand the culture, while believing we are the ones in control and so need to do something. In truth,

we are not and should never be allowed to think this way. We need to depend on God, which at key points Jacob did.

It is wise to always pause and carefully consider what we are doing as we interact with those God has called us to serve. To be sure we are following God's direction and not our own. Making sure we are not creating barriers, but opening the way for them to know God.

Bible study –

Naaman bathing in Jordan as opposed to a river in Assyria? Could there be a cultural issue in this?

David's wife was berating him for the way he was dancing before the Lord? Why would she act and think this way?

Read Ro 14:20-21; 1 Co 10:32-33; Ja 3:2. Write a guideline for your life that would help you avoid making cultural errors.

Cultural Application – Why is ethnocentrism a problem when it comes to sharing God's word with others? What kinds of problems could this attitude cause?

Personal Reflection – Reflect on your life. Have you ever done something that could confuse or even prevent someone from believing what you tell them about God is correct and worth considering?

Pentateuch 9 – Humility - Joseph

Ge 37

The story of Joseph starts out happy but quickly turns sour. He is the firstborn of Jacob's beloved wife Rachel. That is the happy part, then comes the favoritism, special treatment, and gifts. This creates the sour part.

Joseph now receives two dreams. They suggest he will be in authority over not only his brothers but even his parents. There is some basis for such an interpretation of the dreams. While not the firstborn son of Jacob, he is the firstborn son of the favorite wife. There is already enough tension in the family as a result of the behavior of at least three of the older brothers. These dreams are not going to help the situation, especially in the context of what has been happening.

We could delve into that and all that resulted from that, and its impact on what would happen. Rather than that, let's look at the dream. Joseph will be superior to all the members of the family. In the current context, that becomes a bone of contention. No one, including Jacob, can see how that is possible. It makes sense. No one is interested in how Joseph is interpreting his dreams. Especially when it moves from merely sheaves of wheat bowing to the sun, moon, and stars bowing. Still, there was truth in the dream, just not the way it was presented. A great deal of time and many changes would have to happen before the real focus and setting would reveal the truth contained in them.

Let me tell you a story about myself.

When I was eleven, I was attending a children's camp. It was nothing special. Times for games, chapels, and all the events that make up a children's camp. For me, it was a fun time, and I got very involved in one specific competition, a bible memory event. Each day, we were given verses to memorize. The one who did the best would get a special prize. I won the competition and thought that was truly the highlight of the camp. It was not. (Oh, I got a trophy which I kept for many years, as well as a certain amount of money as the prize.)

The last night of camp, we had a bonfire. The leaders placed a stack of small sticks up near the fire and then asked us to pause and think about all we had heard and learned that week. They said that if God had spoken to anyone or they had learned something special, they should come up and pick up a stick. After sharing what they had to share, they threw the stick into the fire as a symbol of their commitment to fully commit themselves to what they had learned.

I watched as a number of campers went through the actions of sharing and throwing their stick into the fire. I really had no desire or interest in doing likewise. At least until I heard a voice, which would not be surprising, but what was a bit unsettling for me was that there was no one next to me to be the source of the voice. The voice said, 'Perry, I want you to be a missionary doctor.' I was stunned and impelled to stand up, take a stick, and repeat the words I had heard and finally throw the stick into the fire. In fact, I can still hear that voice. It is strange.

Afterwards, a nurse came up to me to encourage me to follow through on what I heard. What was interesting is that she did not question whether or not I had heard a voice. Instead, she supported it and made it clear that, in fact, God had spoken to me.

It would be years later that I would take any action on the direction given. I made the choice to begin preparing for medical school. That meant enrolling in a pre-med program of biology, chemistry, and many other science classes. After graduating from college, I applied to a few medical schools and was rejected. Confused, I found a job at a hospital working in recovery and later in emergency. That year, I reapplied and was once again rejected. That left me a little bit confused.

Now comes the next interesting bit. Near the end of my final year of college, I received a letter from a seminary. It was not an invitation to apply, which would have been normal. Instead, it was a letter of acceptance. Without applying, I had been accepted into the school. A year later, after my second rejection, I contacted them and learned that I could still enter the seminary, and so I did. I figured that, as a missionary doctor, it would be good to have a better knowledge of God's word.

At the end of that year, I reapplied for medical school and once again was rejected. During the time of training, I spent 3 months in the Philippines as a short-term missionary. While there, I looked into the possibility of attending medical school there. This did not work out for me, so I went back home.

I applied one more time for medical school. Because of the lapse of time, I was required to take the MCAT, or entrance exam, again. On the day scheduled for the exam, something told me not to go, and so I didn't. Strange as it may seem, I felt relieved and freed. As a result, I decided to go back to the seminary and complete a Master of Divinity. I also found a job as an assistant pastor, not what I expected.

By now, I was a little bit confused about what God meant when he told me he wanted me to be a missionary doctor. I had been rejected 4 times by the medical schools. I was now a pastor. After seven years of that, I found myself as the director of a bible school. None of which had anything to do with my concept of being a missionary doctor.

Fast forward. During the years that followed, I began working on my doctorate. Can you guess the focus for that? Well missiology. In the end, I received a Doctor of Ministry in Missiology. I literally became a missionary doctor.

Why do I tell the story? Consider again the dreams of Joseph. He and his family put one interpretation on them. As a result of all that was happening, that interpretation was rejected and resulted in Joseph being sold into slavery. Many years of learning humility and how to serve passed, and then the story takes a twist. The slave/prisoner suddenly becomes the second-highest authority in the land of Egypt. That meant even the priests of the gods had to bow to him.

So what's the point? God has spoken to each and every one of us who are called followers of Jesus. We have been given directions that are quite clear. What is not clear is the

interpretation of those instructions. Interpretation in relation to how it applies to me. It is not hard to be influenced by the people around us, the situation we are experiencing, and other factors. This influence can make errors in assumptions about what it means for a particular individual.

For example, I interpreted the message as meaning medical missions. My mother didn't focus on that, but on the missions aspect. She was closer to the truth of the message than I was. As a result, she actually signed me up for a short-term mission trip to Kenya. While I was there, God spoke again. This time it was just after my grandfather had died. God asked me if I was willing to serve him in Africa. I said yes. Which I did for a few years, and then he moved me on to the South Pacific, the Caribbean, and finally to Latin America. Each step took me farther from medical practice and closer to his real purpose to train future missionaries from everywhere to everywhere.

Back to Joseph. His dreams were interpreted by him and his family in relation to that small group. It created a serious rift, so much so that the brothers sold him into slavery. Joseph then went through a series of steps to prepare him to be the kind of leader that God wanted in the setting that God had in mind.

God is calling each of us. Our task is not to assume what God wants or will do. Our task is to allow him to prepare us and keep our eyes on him. Our task is to allow God to have control so we will finally arrive where he is sending us.

Bible study

David's life was interesting. He was rejected by his father and others as God's choice. Consider all that he had to go through before the anointing of Samuel was actually fulfilled in his life.

Read again Paul's evaluation of his life in Philippians 3:4-14. Paul rejects much of his past, but how much of that past was used by God to prepare him for the work he was called to do?

Cultural Application

Think about the influence of your culture on how you interpret the events of your life. Influence of parents, friends, professors, and others. How does each of these affect your interpretation, and how do you decide which to listen to?

Personal Reflection

Has God spoken to you? How did he do so? How did you interpret and apply what he said? Did you get it right the first time, or have you had to rethink what you thought he said? What changes did you have to make?

Pentateuch 10 – Excuses - Moses

Ex 2:1-14; 3:11; 5:1

I have been observing all that goes into a marriage proposal. There are so many ways that people attempt this. Some are well planned. Some are almost spur of the moment (mine was). People will go to great lengths to set up what they think

will be a memorable and perfect moment to ask a young lady for her hand in marriage. Most of the time, it is successful and there are tears of joy, hugs and kisses, and the display of the ring for all to see.

Then there are those fails. All the planning and preparation only to be rejected. I watched one TV show where the man asked the girl on the spur of the moment, and she said no. he asked why, and she said he wasn't ready. It was a shock, but he slowly saw her point. Later, he asked her again, and this time, she saw the change in his attitude and said yes.

Now that was a TV show, and it was staged that way to increase the drama and so increase the interest of the audience. The question, though, is how many times do proposals go through this same process? The girl wants to get married, but the guy is not ready. The guy wants to get married, but the girl is not ready, or vice versa; they see that the other person is not ready.

Actually, we could apply this to many aspects of life. We all have goals for our lives. We all think we know when the right time for fulfilling those goals has come, only to be denied, rejected, or told to wait. Worse, to be told there is more we need to learn, or we need to become more mature or experienced. The answer is, how do you expect me to learn or gain experience if I am not allowed to try?

What is interesting is that not all lessons can be learned in a classroom or applied directly to what we think we are ready to do.

Consider again Moses and his life. He saw an Egyptian mistreating a Hebrew. He reacted, reacted quite strongly, and killed the Egyptian. He tried to hide this fact but didn't succeed. He was discovered, and instead of explaining his action, he became afraid. But of whom is he afraid? The Hebrews? The slaves accuse him - but of what? Clearly, they don't see him as a leader with authority. Even his action of protecting one of their own does not lead them to believe he could be calm and understanding. They reject him as a potential leader. Something is not in place or is clearly missing that would convince them to respect and follow Moses at this time.

A little background here. Moses is a member of the royal family. He has had a great deal of education and a great deal of power because of his status. His use of all that in this situation reveals how little he understands about leading others. It is not clear why he would kill the Egyptian for abusing a Hebrew. Is there some story he has heard? How much contact has he had with his real family? No information is given. All we know is he protected a Hebrew slave by killing an Egyptian; instead of defending himself or explaining the why of his actions, he runs.

The next image is of him as a protector. He protects the daughters of Jethro and then waters the flocks. Now he enters a different time of training. His subjects are sheep, a most unruly group bent on all manner of mischief and trouble. Besides that, it is the location where he must learn to lead. It is not a fine city with organized structures and plenty of resources; it is a wilderness.

Here he encounters God, who calls him to lead. Now, instead of a strong reaction, Moses is timid and sheepish, if I can say that. He has become much like the sheep he leads when it comes to people. Still, God has decided he is ready, and he calls Moses to lead.

Things go much differently this time. Moses does not depend on his power, status, or authority. He depends on God. Instead of fleeing the Pharaoh, he stands his ground and defies the Pharaoh. The first round of preparation was inadequate for this. A big reason for this is that it did not involve the presence and activity of God, nor did it involve real-time experience in the challenges of leading a reluctant group. People are reluctant, like sheep, until they know who you are and that you can be trusted.

I have seen this in various ways and manners. Sometimes it is easy to be established as a leader, even when you know you are not truly qualified. This happened in one country where we lived. My status and authority were established by two key factors. The first was about who I was, not as a person, but as a representative of an organization and as an American. Being the resident missionary elevated my status and defined my role. The second had to do with my position within the church.

The day I arrived, I was the principal of the bible school. That placed me at a specific level within the hierarchy of the culture. I learned more about this in meetings where each person is assigned a status, and so when they have the right to speak. The people of higher status are usually the last to speak and have the greatest influence on any decisions that are made.

I discovered that by virtue of the above two items, my place was quite elevated, even though I had done nothing to warrant such status. My task then became living in a way that accorded with the status I had been given.

In another area, I experienced the opposite of this. I was given a title by the group, but that title had little authority or responsibility. It would take years of developing relationships and demonstrating that I indeed had the skills and capacity to accomplish what was asked of me. Even then, when they gave me the freedom to act, it was with a certain amount of trepidation and concern, and only with the affirmation of a couple of key people were they able to let go of their authority so I could move forward.

In missions, we often arrive with a great deal of ability and resources. We have had experience in critical areas in our home country. Sometimes we are given a great deal of freedom and authority by those we have come to serve. The issue then is not to abuse what has been given and learn to confirm their decision.

The flip side of this is that no matter what our experience or ability is, it is unrelated to the culture we are entering. We cannot assume that we should have complete freedom to carry out our task without the involvement and input of the local culture, as represented by key leaders and contacts within that culture.

Whatever way you are treated, there is one key reality. You must be sure that you live in accordance with the expectations and guidelines of the group you are serving. Actually, that

word serve is the key in all of this. In the first instance, Moses had not learned much about serving. He was at the top of the hierarchy and so should be served and obeyed. By the time he returned to Egypt, that had all changed. He had learned how to serve and care for the needs of others. He had learned that to convince sheep to follow him, they had to learn to trust him. That opened the way for him to understand how to lead others by being a servant.

It really doesn't matter how you obtain your roles and rights. If you don't reveal a servant's heart in the process, then all you do will be doomed to failure. If you aren't willing to submit to the teaching and guidance of others, you are doomed to failure.

Remember this: when it comes to God's mission, he knows exactly what preparation is needed for each person to carry out their part in reaching the world with the gospel.

Bible study

Read the story of Rehoboam in 1 Ki 10:1-17. He had access to two groups of advisors who gave him very different advice. Why did he choose poorly? What happened as a result? What had he failed to learn from the life of his father?

Read the story of Jeroboam in 1 Ki 12:14. Jeroboam was an accepted leader among the people but he made a serious error. What was it? Why was his reason unacceptable?

Cultural Insight

How would you discover what you need to be an accepted leader in another culture? How long would you be willing to do what is needed for this to happen? Why?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever had anyone reject your leadership? Consider these scenarios: a sibling, a spouse, a family member, a co-worker, a friend, or another possibility. Why did they reject your leadership? What did you do to restore or establish your leadership? If you didn't, why didn't you do so?

Pentateuch 11 - Faithful - Spies

Nu 13

There are many interesting images available in the world that test your perspective and ability to see what is there. A couple of the more obvious ones are the image of a hag and a young woman. Most people see one of them at first glance, then, with a little help, they can see the other. Another one involves the images of angels and demons. Again, a person will usually see one quickly and then, with a little help, see the other. It is all about first impressions.

There is another set of these images that asks you how many of a given object are hidden within the picture. These are more interesting in that often the hidden images are used to create a larger image.

Another set was made famous by the “Where’s Waldo” series of books. There is a very complicated image with a multitude of objects, and you are asked to find one item, like the image of Waldo, in the sea of objects and information before you. They can be quite challenging, and your ability to sort through such a plethora of information will test your visual acuity.

The last set I will mention here are 3-D hidden images. These are unique in that they are made up of a repetitive image with a 3-D image buried in the repetition. The challenge is that you have to uncross your eyes to see the 3-D image that is incorporated into the repetitive design. At times, I can accomplish this with ease. At other times, it seems impossible to succeed.

The key in all of these is realizing there is something hidden from view. The interesting fact about this is that those images are hidden in plain sight. To see them involves first knowing there is more to be seen and second choosing to adjust one's thinking to do what is necessary to see what is hidden.

How much of life is like that? There is so much to see, but on one hand, we just don't know what to look for and so don't see what is there. Or we choose not to take the time and invest the necessary energy to find what is there.

Have you ever been on a scavenger hunt? You know what to look for, but have no idea where to find the items on your list. The only way to find the items is to begin asking people if they have the item or know where to find it. Or the “bigger and better” hunt. You start with an object and then go hunting for something bigger or better. In this hunt, you have no idea

what you may find, but if you don't invest the time and overcome your fears, you won't find anything that is bigger or better. I once participated in this type of event and was given a car, title and all. Obviously, I won that day.

So here we are in the wilderness and ready to send in the spies. They are told to pass through the land and bring back a report. They do this, and all of them report back with stories about the richness and beauty of the land. They even bring back samples to verify that what they have seen is true. Then it comes to the next part of the report. Ten of the twelve report that there are giants, fierce warriors, and well-defended cities with high walls. They report that it would be impossible for them to defeat such enemies and attack such cities. They see what they were afraid they would see and become afraid and hopeless. They say we appeared as grasshoppers by comparison \

The other two spies see this, but much more. Their vision is not impaired by fear and hopelessness. They have also seen and remembered all that God has done. That list is impressive:

1. Ten plagues
2. Parting of the Red Sea
3. Manna every day
4. Water when needed
5. Fresh meat as requested
6. Defeat of enemies
7. Hearing the voice of God

They have seen all of this, and so their vision is not impaired. Sure, they see the giants, the fierce people, and the walled

cities. But they see them through eyes that have been open to all that God has done. They are willing to see not just what is but what is possible if they trust God to keep his promises.

Now, let's look at our eyes and what we see. When we meet a new person, what do we see? Do we see a stranger, a person who makes us nervous, someone who could be mean to us? All too often, this is just what we see, and we can hardly smile or say hello. Look again with God's eyes. Now what do you see? Do you see a potential new member of the family of God, a person in need of a friend, a person who needs forgiveness, someone with the capacity to receive and give love? Will that help you to smile and say hello?

This is an important lesson for all of us to learn when carrying out the mission God has given us. In a sense, we are spies in the world around us. The difference is that we are not trying to find secrets to expose or weaknesses to exploit. We are searching out those in need of God's love and forgiveness.

While doing that, we are also spying out the land or culture so that we can understand how to approach the people of that place. learning the best way to say hello, the best way to be a friend, and the best way to open the door to deeper discussions about God and his love for them.

Most of us can see the wonders, the beauty of a people and a place. The issue is what we focus on next. Do we focus on the dangers and difficulties, or do we focus on the need and the power of God to deal with whatever challenge we may face?

Bible Study

Read Ph 1:3-6. Remember that when Paul was in Philippi, he was beaten and thrown in jail. How could he make the following statement about the people of Philippi?

Read Ja 1:2-5. What are the promises found in this passage that help us shift from fear to joy in dealing with the lost around us?

Cultural Application

Cultures are so different. They create a great deal of uncertainty and fear because of the differences. Differences in food, clothing, language, and so many more areas. Think about what you can do to overcome just one of those differences in order to create a door to share God's love.

Personal Reflection

Reflect on a time when you misinterpreted what someone said and did. How did that affect your relationship? What could you have done to avoid what happened? What lessons did you learn that helped you in the future?

Pentateuch 12 – Talent - Oholiab

Ex 31:6; 35:30-35; 36:1-2; 38:23

The story of Oholiab is very short. He is mentioned briefly in connection with the construction of the tabernacle. God has chosen him to gift him with special skills to help in the construction of the temple. What is interesting is the role he is

to play in this process. He is to help Bezalel, who will be the lead craftsman, in an important role. He is also given another ability besides skills in various crafts. He is given the ability to teach others.

When we think about projects and goals, we generally focus on the key person or leader. This person has the vision and knowledge to organize everything, as well as key skills in critical areas of what is being done. This is the person we look to and also give credit to when the project is completed and the goal is reached.

Yet there is a second level of leadership that is critical to that person's ability to be efficient in training and mentoring others. We often call this discipleship.

Consider with me an interesting fact of life on this planet. We all too often lose skills and knowledge. Over and over on various websites, I have encountered a number of types of posts about remembering the past and the skills and tools that were common then. Many ask how many of you remember this, and then they post pictures of items that are no longer in use. They very often follow this with the comment about how, if you do, then you must be at least a certain age. I have on my property several of these types of items: An old stone apparatus for sharpening tools, a unique rack called a dump rake, a hay loader, and a number of smaller items. They are no longer used and often not recognized because they have been replaced by more modern concepts and tools for carrying out the task involved.

Another type of post often asks the question of how they did or accomplished what they did, given the fact that they didn't have access to modern technology. This is often followed by another important question: What happened to the knowledge they possessed to do such amazing things?

To prevent the complete loss of old knowledge, a great deal of energy and resources are expended to create museums, replicas, and training sites to maintain the knowledge and skills. At least for those, we can find enough information to make that possible.

Now join me in another critical thought. The fact that you can even read this material and consider these questions reflects a key concept. You have been trained in the use of the tools and skills needed to do so. To be honest, one does not have to look back too far to realize what has happened and how much has been lost, even in the last generation, to see the reality of what can happen if one is not careful.

Take this one step further and consider this concept. Christianity is always one generation away from extinction. This is because we believe that each person must choose to follow Christ, and then each generation is one step away from losing all that knowledge. To prevent this from happening, great efforts have been made to ensure that the next generation will have access to the critical information and training to make it all available to the next generation.

We have been told over and over in Genesis until the book of Revelation the importance of teaching our children, the next generation, all we know about God and His word. Further, we

have gone to great effort to maintain copies of the words God has given us. Further, we are continually involved in the process of translating that material into other languages as well as keeping it current or updated.

We also have schools to prepare people to help us grow in our knowledge of what God has given, and so we have pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so on. To expand on the availability of such learning, we design programs for the different age groups as well as unique groupings of people. For example: Children, youth, college, and so on. As to groups, we have ministries to addicts, single parents, felons, special needs, and that list goes on as well.

We are each challenged and gifted in one way or another, even as Oholiab, to provide critical knowledge and teaching, so that what we have learned will be passed on to others. This is a core truth and guiding principle of missions: to go and teach all nations so that they will have God's truth and be able to grow in their knowledge of God and repeat the process for the next group, the next tribe, the next generation.

Here we see the truth Paul was teaching Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, and that was to take all he had learned from Paul and teach it to others, so they, in turn, teach the next group, and so on, until it reached all the way to you. This is the heart of missions.

If we don't do this, then, like the lost skills of the past, the truth of God risks being lost.

Think of it this way. Each generation encourages the next generation to have babies, then to train those children so they,

too, will have babies, and so on. In this way, humanity does not fade into oblivion and become forgotten. If one generation decides not to have babies, then that group of people will cease to exist.

We need to do the same, encourage and teach each generation to have offspring. In other words, to tell others about God so that God's word will become part of the next generation and even expand to others. We do need great leaders, but more importantly, we all need to be disciple makers (Mt 28:18).

Bible Study

There are several key scriptures that make it very clear that we are to train others. The first is a very familiar one, Mt 28:18-20. This passage contains two comments that one must learn and apply. They are 'make disciples' and 'teach them everything I have taught you'.

Take time to reflect on these declarations by Jesus and how they should affect the work and ministry of Christ's followers.

The next is 2 Ti 2:2. Here, Paul tells Timothy to train others and to do so in a way that will make it possible for those being trained to repeat the process. What does this tell you about the process of training and what should be taught?

Cultural Application

Paul tells us that he will become all things to all people in order to win some. Read carefully 1 Co 9:15-27. So, how important is it to do our teaching in a culturally appropriate

way? How will this affect the effectiveness of training others in God's word?

Personal Reflection

Twice, Paul challenges others to follow his example (1 Co 11:1 and Ph 3:17). Why would he say this? How important is your example in communicating and teaching others? Take time to read the chapters where Paul makes these statements. Could you say the same thing to others about your example of what a Christian is?

Pentateuch 13 — second fiddle - Aaron

Ge 4-10 et.al.

Tell me, have you ever heard the phrase, the second fiddle, in regards to a person? Another phrase would be right-hand man, or Executive Secretary.

If you are thinking about a musical instrument, then you may have a good idea of the positive meaning for someone who is a second fiddle. They are not the main player, the one who has the main melody or main part when the fiddles or violins are playing. The truth is that if we just listened to the second fiddle part, it might be quite boring. Listening to the first fiddle is much better because we hear the main melody, at least when the fiddles are given the lead in the musical piece.

Even better is when both the fiddles play their parts in unison. This allows a completely different and more complex sound to be heard. There is a unique interaction that occurs as a result of one fiddle playing the melody and another playing a counter melody, also known as a harmony.

That is the positive element. The other is that there is a lead person who is always in the forefront, always taking the lead. Also, always gaining recognition. The second fiddle person is there to support the person in accomplishing whatever task or goal that is being carried out. In the negative sense, there is no recognition, no praise, no reward. The second fiddle is there to make the lead person look good. It also means they will not get the chance to advance because they don't have the skills to do what the lead person is capable of doing. They are always relegated to a lower position of responsibility and, as a result, less honor and recognition.

Right-hand man, or person, has a more positive connotation. In this case, the lead person understands that they could not accomplish the given task without the help of this person. They have certain skills and freedom to do what the leader is either not able to do or doesn't have sufficient time to accomplish without this right-hand person.

The Executive Secretary takes us another step further in this process. While all the key work will be done by the head person, the executive secretary is there to make sure that the leader is able to organize their time and efforts in an efficient manner. They are critical to dealing with various issues so that the person they serve can maintain their focus and not get

sidetracked. They also deal with all the people who want to see or talk with the person they serve, so that only that which is necessary is brought to the attention of the leader.

Aaron fills all of these roles. Why do I say that? Well, because that is what Moses needed at different times. Moses cried that he couldn't do certain things, mainly speak clearly. So, God provides him with a helper in the form of Aaron.

There are times when Aaron is clearly playing the second fiddle. Moses gets the message, and Aaron is expected to do the communicating (Ex 4:30). What is interesting is that so often when a message is communicated, it is as if Aaron is not there, and it is Moses speaking. So, the first fiddle shines and the second fiddle provides the backup and support. Aaron is expected to support and be in harmony with the messages that Moses gives him from God.

Then, in other situations, Aaron is the one acting like the right-hand man. He is the one who holds the staff of Moses and is the one who throws it down and it turns to a serpent (Ex 7:10). He is the one who stretches out the staff over the Nile and turns it to blood (7:19), stretches out the staff over Nile and produce frogs (8:5), strikes the staff on the ground and produces gnats (8:17), and in the end we are told in Ex 11:10 that Moses and Aaron performed all these miracles in Egypt. In the end, though, it is Moses who holds the lead position. Even later, once they have left Egypt, it is Aaron and Hur that hold up the arms of Moses until the enemy is defeated (Ex 17:12). In all of these, while Aaron is involved, it is Moses who is the leader, and Aaron is merely a support person.

When we look at the right-hand man, we see Aaron in this role at later points. There is one time when he fails in carrying out this responsibility. That is when Moses is up on the mountain, and Aaron submits to the demand of the people for an idol (Ex 32). Still, he remains an active person in helping Moses lead the people.

Lastly, as something like an Executive Secretary, he is assigned to take over the responsibilities for caring for the tabernacle. He deals with the daily realities of care of the tabernacle, dealing with all the sacrifices, and so on. This frees Moses to focus on meeting with God and dealing with many other issues of leading the people.

As we mentioned in the previous story about Miriam, there is one event where he tries to escape these roles. He and his sister try to be recognized for their work independently. They want to be seen as, in modern terms, co-CEOs with Moses. God rejects this. The problem could be viewed in this way. They want to be seen in a certain way by the people and forget that what is more important is to serve in the role given to them by God.

Missions are no different. We have all of these people. We have the leaders, the second fiddles, the right-hand person, and the Executive Secretary. The difference is that, in the world of business and organizations, the honor goes mainly to the leaders. In the kingdom of God, all are honored equally. All roles are critical. Paul put it clearly in his comment that some plant, others water, and still others harvest. All are critical in the kingdom, and without any one of these, then there is no

fruit, and the gospel is not shared (1 Co 3:6-9). We see this again in his description of the body of the church, and that every member has its purpose, none being greater or less worthy than the other, in 1 Co 12

There is one other unique role that needs to be considered and can easily be attached to any of the above three concepts. That is the role of a go-between. This is a person who is called on to intercede between two people, a person and a group, or even two groups of people. Another name for such a person could be one who intercedes, representing the concerns and needs of one party to another.

Aaron exhibited this role in a couple of ways. He intercedes or acts as a go-between when the people who rebel in Numbers 16:47. He grabs a censor and runs among the people to protect as many as possible from the judgment of God for their rebellion. At other times, he joins with Moses in praying for the people when they have failed, and God is ready to judge and enact punishment (Nu 16:22).

Aaron and his sons are given the role of interceding on behalf of the people. They are to receive the sacrifices brought to them and then present them to God. (This responsibility is clearly laid out in the book of Leviticus.) They are also to act on God's behalf to pronounce God's blessing on the people as instructed in Nu 6:23.

As we become involved in the mission of God, we need to be reminded that while we may use these terms to identify varying roles of different people in the work of proclaiming the gospel, no role is of more or less value nor receives more

or less honor and reward. All will be honored based on one truth: that they served in the place God put them, using their skills and gifts to bring honor to God. This was a key point of Jesus parable of the talents (minas). The judgment was not on how much they produced but on their faithfulness to use what was given (Mt 25; Lk 19).

I would like us to consider in more depth the role of an intercessor.

How important is an intercessor? How important is it to have a go between? Someone who represents you and your interests to others?

Our world is filled with examples of people who take on this role. Let me list a few examples:

In politics, we have quite a number of these

1. Ambassadors who represent countries
2. Senators and representatives who represent large groups of people
3. Governors and mayors

In business, we have others

1. Negotiators who help two parties in different areas
2. Human resource people who intercede between the employee and the employer
3. Foreman and others who supervise and guide the work

In life, we have

1. Lawyers who help people in dealing with the law and court systems

2. Wedding planners who help plan weddings
3. Travel agents who bring travelers together with so many aspects of travel

That should be enough to help us see how important this role is.

First is the work of communicating God's expectations and direction. Aaron served Moses in this capacity. He communicated the words being given to Moses to different people, the people of Israel, and to Pharaoh. He was also expected to fulfill various actions in this capacity. He performed a number of miracles at the direction of Moses.

More important was the second role, that of intercessor. He was tasked with presenting the sacrifices of the people to God. The most important one of these is the sacrifice for sin for the entire people of Israel, and, as needed, other sacrifices offered by the people in relation to specific sin, thanksgiving, and both the making of and fulfilling of a vow.

On one key occasion, he failed in this role, and instead of guiding the people to wait, he submitted to their pressure and made an idol. On another occasion, he, along with his sister, opposed Moses' authority. He was not punished directly but watched as his sister was made leprous. He then intercedes for her healing.

What we learn from all of this is that God sees the role of intercessor as a critical one. In Aaron, we are given examples of the critical nature of this role and its importance. An intercessor is a spokesperson for God, one who is able to

clearly state what is expected by God. In this area, they are the ones who represent God and all of the interests of God.

They also stand between God and us. They represent the concerns of God and give direction to the people on how to fulfill the expectations that are part of this relationship. This person also brings the needs and concerns of the people before God. In this role, they approach God to present their needs and requests.

The intercessor is also to be an example of what God expects of others. They are to represent what God declares as moral and ethical. To this end, the intercessor is able to help others see the truth and so align their lives with the truth.

Finally, this role involves the process of restoring the relationship. They bring their offerings and words of repentance and confession before God.

This is a mission. All of these roles were brought to a new level in Christ. He became the final high priest as well as the final sacrifice. He intercedes for us and is able to restore us. He dwells with us to guide and instruct.

We are called to fulfill this role as well. While we cannot forgive as he can, we are not expected to receive sacrifices as did Aaron and those who fulfilled the role of priest during the time of the temple. We are expected to bring God's word to others and to reveal to them their need to come before Jesus. We are expected to intercede in prayer.

The goal then and now is the restoration of a person's relationship with God. That was the mission of the priesthood

as represented by Aaron, and it was the mission of Christ. It is our mission as well: to bring people before God through Christ so they can be restored.

Bible Study

Consider the following people who for a period of time served in this manner

Elisha to Elijah

Barnabas to Paul

Joshua to Moses

Timothy to Paul

Silas to Paul

Cultural Reflection – As you enter a culture you may be given a title and a role that suggest you are the leader. How should you handle this if you are to disciple others to become leaders in their culture?

Personal Reflection – Have you ever been the assistant to another person or functioned in this way? How did you feel when people recognized their success? Did they give any credit to those who helped them? If they did how did that impact you? If they didn't how did that impact you? Now reflect on Jesus words that the first will be last and the last first?

Pentateuch 14 – Wrong Road – Sons of Aaron

Lev 10:1-3

One of the major issues that missions face when encountering other belief systems and even the various heresies of Christianity is the concept that there are many roads to God. An extension of this is that the gods of these systems may, in fact, actually be God seen from a different perspective.

We often approach this by identifying some of the key differences between Christianity and other belief systems and false cults. They are, without exception, based on a system of works that must be done to be acceptable to the god and so make it possible to gain his approval. Alongside that is the concept that it may be possible to be good enough to be approved by the god at the center of their system of belief.

Very early on in the establishment of the religious structures of the Jewish belief system, as established by Moses, we have an interesting story that will be played out in many ways throughout the historic record of the Jewish people and their relationship to God.

Before I share that story, consider this illustration. Today, when buying many items, there is what is called “some assembly required”. This idea can vary from a very simple process with simple directions to a very complicated process with very detailed instructions. We all have purchased such items, and once we have them, we make a decision to either

follow the instructions or assemble them on our own. There are many stories about this and how, especially men, seem to think they can assemble an item without even opening the instructions.

On occasion, there is success, but this is usually due to the simplicity of the item to be assembled, and the limited knowledge required to make use of it. The more complicated the item, the more likely it is that something will go wrong in the assembly process, which results in leftover pieces and the failure of the item to function. Also, along this line is the failure of many to read the instructions on the proper use of the item, which, as well, yields negative, even dangerous, results. (Just look at the “fail videos” that exist, and you will see what I mean.)

Most people learn quickly that there is no room for deviation from the plans for assembly, and especially for the instructions on the proper use of what is being assembled.

Now, let's return to the story I would like to highlight in relation to following the instructions given to us from God about what is expected of us in establishing a correct relationship with God, and so being allowed to be approved by Him.

In the books of the Pentateuch, we encounter the story of the two oldest sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu. In Exodus 24:1-11, we are told how they, along with 70 elders, are allowed to go up into Mt Sinai and see God. What they see is not described, but they are not killed and share a meal in God's presence. A key part of this passage is that Moses reads to

them from the book of the Covenant, and the people and leaders agree to do everything the Lord has said.

In Exodus 28:1-2, we are told that Aaron, along with his sons Nadab, Abihu, Eleazer, and Ithamar, are to be set aside to serve God as priests.

In Leviticus 10:1-3, we are told how Nadab and Abihu take their censers, add incense to them, and put fire in them. But the fire involved in this action is unauthorized and is contrary to the command of the Lord. As a result, fire comes out from the presence of the Lord and consumes them. In verse 3, the Lord declares, "Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored."

This indicates that something in what they did and how they did it did not bring honor to God in the sight of the people. This judgement is repeated in Numbers 3:4 and 26:61 with the further statement that they had no children and so their lines came to an end.

This will become a constant theme throughout the history of Israel and highlighted by the prophets. There is only one God, and there is only one way to serve Him.

Please keep in mind that the actions of these two men were carried out, not before the law was given, but afterwards. It occurred after they saw God's response to their father's creation of a calf idol to represent God at the demand of the people. They witnessed God's anger at this violation of the covenant. This action was carried out after Moses had received and presented the Ten Commandments to the people.

It was carried out after Moses had received all the instructions for the construction of the tabernacle. It was carried out after Moses had received and shared with the people all of the sacrificial law as well as civil law, which is recorded in Leviticus.

They attempted to worship God in a way that was not acceptable. A way that was based on their thinking. A way that deviated from what God had declared was the appropriate way to worship him. A pretty clear statement that there is only one way to God. This way involved a system of sacrifice for sin. But not just the action, but a correct attitude in the process. An attitude of obedience and not an attempt to curry favor or appease God.

We are told this truth by Samuel in dealing with the failure of Saul to obey God's direction in 1 Sam 15:22, where he declares that sacrifice without obedience is unacceptable. Then David in Ps 51:16-17 adds that the true sacrifice is a broken and contrite heart. These sentiments are repeated over and over in the prophets.

The problem being that if our sacrifices are not done in obedience to God and with a correct attitude, then both the sacrifice offered and ourselves remain unacceptable to God and cannot enter into His presence. It is in Jesus that the two are brought together, and the perfect sacrifice is offered. With this in mind, Jesus declares that he is the only way into the presence of God (Jn 14:6). Paul further strengthens this with his warning against a false or another gospel in Galatians 1:6-10.

The warning is against seeking the approval of man or the recognition of man for what I have done or created. Such an action resulted in the death of Nadab and Abihu. Today, it is just as dangerous for those teaching false truths and creating false paths to gain the attention of others. Though the punishment may not be as immediate, the result will be the same: separation for eternity from God.

We have been given the same mission as Moses: to declare the whole word of God to the current generation as fulfilled in the life and action of the Son of God.

Aaron's sons were chosen; they were in line to inherit the role of High Priest. But things do not go well for them.

Let's look at what happened to each one. Nadab, the firstborn, is allowed to ascend Mt Sinai and behold the God of Israel. He is in line to inherit the role of high priest.

Abihu is the second oldest, and he, too, is allowed to ascend Mt. Sinai, as well as be in line to hold the responsibility of high priest. Did this event create in them a pride that would later be their ruin?

Neither of these two will be able to assume this role and its responsibilities. They both die at the hand of Yahweh because they have offered strange fire. We are not sure what this strange fire is, but what is clear is that it was something that was not authorized by the law. The event is significant in that it is recorded three times, Nu 3:4; 26:61; 1 Ch 24:2. The question is: why did they think they could act this way?

Eleazar is the third son of Aaron. He, along with the other brothers, was consecrated to the priest's office. He is given oversight of the Levites and the tabernacle. He assists in the census and succeeds his father as the High Priest. He also becomes an advisor to Joshua. At his death, his son Phineas takes his place.

Ithamar is the last son of Aaron. He, too, was consecrated to the priest's office. He was made the treasurer of the offerings and supervisor of the Gershonites and Merarites, overseeing the service of the Tabernacle. For some reason, the high priesthood switches to his family by the time of Eli and remains there until the time of Zadok, when it returns to the line of Eleazar.

Eleazar and Ithamar failed to follow one instruction; instead of eating the burnt offering, they allowed it to be consumed by the fires.

All this is fascinating, but what does this have to do with missions?

Consider this. At this point in the history of Israel, God is establishing the sacrificial system with all its rules and regulations. Again, why is that significant? It becomes the basis to explain the need for one final sacrifice, which is provided by Jesus.

There is another idea to consider. One of the key issues for many people as they look at the message of many faiths and many prophets is that there is more than one way to God. For some, the God they serve may even be the same God everyone

is serving. One God with many names. This is a key feature of Baha'i, which has the goal of blending the teachings of all the main belief systems into one structure that would be all-inclusive.

Now, let's go back to Nadab and Abihu. God has called Abraham and stated that He would make him a nation and use his descendants to bless all nations. He repeats this to Isaac and Jacob. Then they are sent into Egypt, where his family multiplied and became a people. God then arranges for them to be freed and takes them to Mt Sinai to begin the process of establishing them as a unique people. This will involve maintaining a proper relationship with the God who just demonstrated that all other gods are false. The God who just revealed himself in incredible miracles and power. The God who has provided them in amazing ways.

Now comes the time for God to reveal his nature and what he will expect of this nation that he has brought into being. Moses receives the 10 commandments. He also receives all of the information for the construction of the temple. Besides those two key items are the various laws and guidelines for all sacrifices, rituals, and guidelines for many aspects of how they are to live and care for each other. It is a lot of information, and Moses is tasked with teaching this information to key leaders and the people. These people are being told the acceptable way of knowing and serving God.

Consider this. Let's go back to the example of buying something that needed assembly. What did you do first? Did you read the instructions? Be truthful. How often did you try

to do the assembly without reading the instructions and then attempt to use whatever it was, again, without reading the instructions? Now, tell me, how often were you successful in this process?

Your success rate was probably related to how complicated the item was to assemble, as well as how involved it was to operate. If you made a mistake, when would you realize that you had done something wrong? That awareness may depend on what step you missed or what part you placed incorrectly. It could have become evident the first time you used the item, or maybe at a later time, it would fail. Either way, it failed. It may also be that only some of the features function, or in some way, it doesn't do everything it is supposed to do.

There are two solutions. First, before you even consider assembling and using it without following the instructions, reconsider that and don't proceed. Second, if you find things not fitting or pieces are left over, then stop and review the instructions. This may mean going back, disassembling the item, and then following the instructions. Either of these is good because you will not risk a failure of the item to function or worse risk damaging it, yourself, or another person who may use what you have assembled.

Well, here at this point in time, the people are being given a set of instructions, and the end result is the complete and full development of a relationship with God. Honestly, they have not done well. Even as Moses is receiving the instructions, they decide to go down their own path and convince Aaron to help them. This results in a disaster, and many of the people

are punished for their involvement in an unapproved approach to worshipping and serving the God who has just rescued them.

Now here is where it gets interesting. Over and over in the presentation and review of the laws and guidelines being given by God are statements about how they are to follow exactly all that they are told. Now we come to Nadab and Abihu with their unsanctioned fire and incense. Instead of reviewing the past events and reviewing the instructions they have just received, they choose not to follow the instructions and introduce an outside element into the instructions. Well, in a sense, they use something highlighted in those instructions, but in an unapproved way.

This deviation is dealt with quickly and severely. God is clearly stating there will be no allowance for options or other avenues to entering into his presence. There will be only one approved way to come before God. This is later highlighted over and over throughout the history of the people of Israel, as well as the clear statement of Jesus that there is only one way to God, and it will be through Him, the One who followed and fulfilled all of the instructions that had been given.

Now, if there was ever a point in time when deviation or failure to follow the instructions might be allowed, it is at this point in time. If there was ever going to be more than one way to come before God, then this is when it might be allowed. If there was ever a moment when you could successfully make a mistake in following the instructions and everything worked out, this is that moment.

But it is not allowed, and Nadab and Abihu become the example to all just how clearly God is proclaiming that there is only one way to come before him. Which means there will not be multiple ways to God or to heaven. There will not be multiple ways to obtain permission to enter into God's presence and so into heaven. There will be only one way, JESUS CHRIST.

Bible Study

Consider the following stories about people who did not follow instructions and what happened

- Saul not waiting for Samuel - 1 Sa 13
- Saul not destroying all the enemy and property – 1 Sa 15
- Achan and theft of items – Joshua 7
- Josiah – 2 Ch 35:20-22

Mission Thought

How dangerous is it to not clearly understand the beliefs and culture of those we are trying to reach? Why would this be dangerous? How could it affect our message and what we teach?

Personal Reflection

Do you enjoy buying a product that requires assembly? Why or why not? What are the benefits and disadvantages of buying a product that requires assembly? How can you apply that truth to sharing the gospel?

Pentateuch 15 – Me too and me first

- Miriam

Ex 2:4; Ex 15:20ff; Nu 12; Nu 20

One may wonder why I have included Miriam in the list of people and God's mission. Who is she, and what do we know about her?

First, she is the older sister of Aaron and Moses. Second, she is key to saving her brother Moses and paving the way for him to live in the household of Pharaoh. Now for a little more of her story.

Miriam is present throughout the story of the Exodus. In fact, she is a critical part of making it possible to happen. She watches over her brother Moses and bravely approaches the daughter of Pharaoh (the very person who ordered her brother's death) to recommend a nursemaid for the baby.

The next time we hear about her is after the crossing of the Red Sea when she sings a song of praise in honor of the God who has rescued them from the army of Egypt. Here she is called a prophetess, and as she sings, the women follow her.

Up until this point, she is doing well, but in Numbers 12, things turn sour as she and her brother Aaron complain about Moses' position and his marrying a Cushite woman. They claim that the Lord has spoken through them as well. For this jealousy on their part, they are judged. Miriam is punished with leprosy. Aaron is not, but must watch as his sister bears

the brunt of their insubordination and criticism. Moses pleads for them, and Miriam is healed but must endure the cleansing period.

The last time she is mentioned in the context of the Exodus relates to her death. We are told that she died and was buried. This is notable in the fact that in this entire story, she is the only woman who receives this recognition. Later, she is one of a few women who appear in the genealogies of the book of Chronicles.

Finally, we have a reference to Miriam in Micah 6:4. Here, we are told that she is one of three people that God sent to lead the people.

So again, why include Miriam in my studies on missions? We could talk about the role of women and children in God's plan, and we would do well to do so. They have played important roles throughout the story of God's involvement in the world of man and in revealing his plan to bless the nations through the line of Abraham. It would be an interesting study, and I may include a review of some of the women and children who exemplify all that it means to be available when and where God wants to use them.

But there is another piece that is important to consider. The mission is God's and not the property or domain of any individual. This truth is highlighted by what happened in Number 12.

First, let me tell you a little about what is happening in my life. I have served as a missionary for many years. I received

my call from God when I was eleven. At 19, I helped start a coffee house ministry, which saw over 100 young people receive Christ as their savior in the first year. As part of that, I was leading a bible study for new believers.

As a missionary, I have served as the director of three bible schools and been involved in the development of the department of missions for what is now a regional conference in the church I work with. In some ways, my life has followed a similar path to Miriam's.

Now comes the point. I have struggled with what I would call a lack of recognition. Actually, I have only shared a little of what my life and ministry have been about. The issue I feel is a lack of recognition and, dare I say, honor for all that I have had the privilege of doing. Learning to work quietly in the background so that those God chooses as the key leaders will be free to be effective.

That is not to say that I am not appreciated. I do receive, privately, words of thanks and appreciation. Yet, in my humanness, I find myself in Miriam's place. Wanting a little more public recognition.

Why? Why, when missionaries are generally held in high honor for all they do. Why, when people are always amazed by the sacrifices and service they give? Why is right. Honestly, it is the reality. Even key leaders find themselves having the unthinkable, inescapable desire to have just a little more status or be honored like others.

To help us understand this, let me review all that has happened in the life of Miriam before we reach Numbers 12.

As a young girl, she is instrumental in making it possible for her baby brother to become a part of Pharaoh's family and court. Okay, her parents take the risk of putting their baby in a basket in the Nile with the hopes that he will somehow survive. It is a pipe dream. The Nile is not a safe place. There are crocodiles and other dangers. He could have easily washed up anywhere or nowhere and simply disappeared or died. Instead, he manages to float into the bathing area of the one person who can bring about his rescue from the death edict ordered for all Hebrew babies.

I could ask questions like, did the parents choose a place that might lead to this result? I kind of doubt that. In their minds, it was unlikely they would believe anyone in the pharaoh's family would spare an unknown baby. So did Miriam sort of direct the basket and hope above hopes that he would be spared. Again, hard to say. But however, the basket arrived where it did, she was there to take advantage of the situation.

There are a few things to consider in her actions. She first had to overcome her fear of the people she was about to encounter. Remember, she is a Hebrew, a slave, someone who would be quickly identified and forcefully removed. She could not hide this reality. This means she had to find a way to sneak into the bathing area without being caught and then be close enough to be seen. She is a young girl, someone who would be dismissed without any consideration, but she avoids that as well. Now consider what it took for her to not only enter a

forbidden place but then have the courage to speak. Then, of all things, to suggest a Hebrew woman as the nursemaid for the baby. So a young Hebrew girl in a forbidden area recommends a slave, not just any slave, but of the accursed Hebrews, and boldly, audaciously confronts the daughter of Pharaoh. She does all of this and does it before the guards can get to her and in a way that captures the attention of the pharaoh's daughter.

There are so many ways that this could go badly. Yet it didn't. God was at work and chose a young girl to participate in the plan to not just rescue her people but begin the next phase of preparing a people and a world for the coming of the one from the line of Abraham that would fulfill the promise of all nations being blessed.

We have little information about what happens once Moses is weaned. Once the nursemaid is no longer needed. Once the sister is no longer welcome. Once life moves on. Does she watch and wait? Does she see her brother and try to talk to him? That would be truly dangerous, approaching a member of the royal family, and why, because he is your brother. I don't think that would have gone well. It is unlikely that he is even aware of much of his origins. He has probably been told that the god of the Nile brought him to Pharaoh's daughter as a gift. Not important. The point is, she has no way to maintain any contact with him.

So fast forward. Forty years of watching and wondering why your brother was spared. Then to see him fail. He murders a person and has to disappear or be executed. It is interesting

that any other member of the royal family may not have been judged this way. That is any blood member. But Moses is not a blood relative; he is an anomaly. It is not likely he has the same exemptions as others, and so he disappears, and hope is lost.

Another forty years pass, and lo and behold, who should appear but Moses. He calls Aaron to join him. Does he call Miriam as well? Does he know the part she has played in his life? We don't know, but if the statements are true, that she was considered a prophetess and, according to Micah, one of three sent by God, then she will have an elevated place within the people of Israel. This is evident by the readiness of the people, at least the women, to join her in celebration of God's rescue at the Red Sea. Further, she has been used by God to communicate with the people. How and when this happens is not made clear, but God does not deny this when she again enters the picture and mentions that she has had a role in the leadership of the people.

Until then, she disappears from the scene. When she reappears, she is not a happy person. Why? Well, for a long time now, she has been in the background. She has been involved. God has used her to help lead the people. Just how this is done is not clear, but the information clearly suggests that she is being used by God. But it is all in the background. She is not in a prominent place. She is not being recognized in a way she feels would make her, shall I say, honored?

It really doesn't matter what is happening in Moses' life. Anything will do. His marriage is simply a device to push her

agenda. God responds and makes it clear that the mission is His. This is what I need to keep clearly in mind. The mission is God's, not ours. God puts us where he knows we will be most effective.

Miriam was where she was needed, in a supportive role, not where she thought she wanted to be. I am learning the truth of this as well. Prominence and recognition are not what we think they are. Or do not gain us what we may hope for. What do you think the result would have been if Miriam gained what she desired? What damage to the mission would have happened?

I must ask that same question. Is my desire to be recognized by others really that important? In fact, what kind of damage could result from such selfish behavior? Sadly, there are many examples of how wrong this can go in the history of the church, from local bodies to larger organizations.

Always, always, always, we need to be reminded that the Mission is God's. He will, at the right time and place, honor those who serve faithfully. The true servant knows this and is satisfied. We need to be always conscious of Jesus' warning that those who seek the honor of people now have received their reward and have placed at risk all that God has for them.

At this point, we could be distracted by the comments about Moses and his humility. While this is important, what is also important is that God does not deny that Miriam and Aaron have been a part of the plan. He simply reminds them of one important thing. The recognition of the people is not critical.

So where do children and women fit in God's planning? This is a sticky question. It has been the center of much debate. All too often, children and women are not accepted as equal participants in the work of the church. Yet they are all too often the first to act and the first to respond.

The Bible has many stories of children and the role they have played at critical times. We could talk about the boy Samuel, who, in a time of silence, heard the voice of God and prophesied. He began his service in the temple at the age of three and may have received his first message by the age of seven.

Then there is David, who is a young man when he kills the giant Goliath and is enlisted in the army of Saul. There is no clear idea of how old he is, but we learn that as a youth, he has confronted lions and bears in defense of his father's flocks.

Naaman is won over by a Jewish slave girl. A girl who has the courage and temerity to face her enemy and tell him the truth. She also reveals the extent of God's love for even our enemies. This from a girl who lived in a time of great wickedness and idolatry in Israel. She reveals much about the ability of children to see the truth and live it.

Miriam, as a child, knows what must be done. Her brother must be saved. She has seen the action of her parents to preserve his life and takes the next step. She makes sure that he is found and, in a sense, is the protection needed for him to be saved. She is one brave girl to risk entering the presence of her enemy and protect her brother.

The value of children is further highlighted by Jesus' treatment of the children and his comments regarding the attitude we should have as his followers. We must regain our childhood, the ability to believe and act. An ability Jesus praised as the children ran through the city proclaiming the arrival of the Messiah to the chagrin of the Pharisees.

Miriam is all that we should hope our children to be. People who are ready to be used by God as needed.

The second part of this story is about Miriam as an adult and her role as a leader. She is called a prophetess and, as such, is respected by the people. She leads them in a time of celebration, and those willing follow her and join in.

The next time we meet her, it is not at her finest hour. She is complaining and using the dissatisfaction of the people related to Moses' wife to, in a sense, usurp some of his authority. It is in this event that we learn more about her position and role as a leader. She claims that she and Aaron are also recognized as ones that God uses to communicate His truth to the people. You do not make such a claim without some basis for it. In fact, God does not deny this claim. He merely says that how he communicates with them is not the same. Not the same in that it is not face-to-face but via other means that are clearly not at the same level.

The people recognize her position and, out of respect, refuse to depart the scene of her failure until she is restored to them. That sign of respect is played out later when we come to the mention of her death. Again, she is the only woman who is recognized in this way.

Now, let us consider other women who have appeared in God's plan. We could talk about the outsiders like Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba, and of course, Ruth. We could talk about Deborah (Judges 4), who served as a judge. Also, Miriam wasn't the only prophetess. There was Huldah in the time of Jeremiah (2 Ki 22:14), Anna at the birth of Jesus (Lk 2:36), and the four daughters of Philip who have this title (Acts 21:8-9). But that only begins to reveal the place women have had in God's plan.

The list is long and filled with many names and great acts of faith and obedience. Just to mention a few, the wife of Noah, Hannah, the mother of Samuel, Abigail, the wife of David, Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Priscilla, Esther, Lydia, and on this list goes.

The point is that, in God's plan, everyone has a place and a part to play. Sometimes it may seem minor or unimportant to us, but to those involved in God's mission and the ones receiving their attention, it is a matter of eternal consequences.

From the beginning of the story with Adam and Eve, women have always had a place in what God is doing. Miriam is a prime example of that. Even in a male-dominated world as existed in many of these times and places, God chooses women and, yes, children to play a part in what he is revealing to us about His mission.

Dare I be a little proud and boastful? My wife was an excellent preacher. Her sermons and messages were well thought out and presented with clarity and purpose. I have had the

privilege of hearing her speak, and now I have discovered that she wrote them out, and I now have them to enjoy once again.

Dare I state that so often it is the women who are ready to go to the mission field? More so than the men. Further, they do this in the face of many challenges. The truth is that more single women have entered the world of the missions than single men. They have faced and overcome great obstacles so that the name of God could be praised around the world, much like Miriam as she led the people in praise to the almighty God.

What is interesting is that the people of Israel refused to move from that place until she was restored to the community. This suggests that there was truth in the claim of her and Aaron that they, too, received messages from God to give to the people. God's response does not deny this, but highlights the fact that the manner in which they received God's word was different. God spoke face-to-face with Moses but apparently used other means to communicate with them.

Bible study

Read Paul's comment about who is important in leadership in: 1 Co 1:11-17 and 2 Co 3:3-9

Consider why Paul discusses the idea of people claiming to follow a particular person

Cultural Study

One of two things often happens as a person enters a new culture. This often depends on the perception of the culture of

that person and the status assigned. The greatest danger is when the one entering a culture is assigned a greater status than they normally would have in their culture. Why would this be a possible source of the kind of issues dealt with in this study?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever been jealous of the status and popularity of another person? Why? How did that affect your relationship with the person and others? How could your attitude impact your ability to serve?

Pentateuch 16 – Parental Influence - Amram and Jochebed - Moses Parents

Ex 2:1-10; 6:20; Nu 26:59

How critical are a person's parents in responding to God's call to missions? I have my own story about this. When I was eleven, I received a very clear call from God to be a missionary doctor. My parents were pleased. They had wanted to serve as missionaries but were denied. That did not stop their involvement in any and all ways to reach the lost. They invited visiting missionaries to the house for meals. They organized backyard Bible clubs for the neighborhood. My father was a key member in supporting a

youth outreach ministry called the Natural High Coffee House.

When I was 21, I was to learn how seriously my parents took my call to missions. I was returning home from classes one day when my mother presented me with a paper and told me to sign it. I asked why and what it was. She said it was my application to serve as a short-term missionary in Kenya. Over the years, we had contact with several missionary families, and when she heard about the short-term missionary program, she obtained a form and filled it out for me. All that was left was for me to sign it and send it in. When I hesitated, she simply asked me if God had not called me to be a missionary. I said yes, and she said: “Then sign it.” Which I did and was accepted to serve for three months in various areas and ministries.

My parents were a great source of encouragement as I pursued God’s call to missions. I am sure there are many more stories of parents who encouraged and supported their children in seeking God’s guidance in serving in this way.

Here we have one of several unique stories where the parents were called to guide their children into serving the Lord. Let me list a few, and then we can come back to the story of Amram and Jochebed.

One of the saddest was that of the parents of Samson, who were called to raise their son to be a Nazarite and lead the people of Israel against the Philistines. Along the way, something was not communicated. Of all the aspects of the Nazarite vow, he was only faithful in one of them, and that

was not to cut his hair. In that, he also failed because of an unacceptable relationship with a prostitute.

The next is the story of Hannah and Elkanah. She sought the Lord for a son and promised to commit his life to God's service if He responded to her request. Her husband agreed to her vow, and so at the age of three, Samuel entered the service of the temple. Based on his faithfulness in serving, they did an excellent job of preparing him and maintaining their support of God's call on his life.

Then we have Mary and Joseph and the call to raise the Son of God. Mary quickly agreed. Joseph was a little slower to believe what was happening, but agreed to be obedient. They faced many challenges. We only know of one key story in which Jesus remained in the temple talking with the key leaders at the age of twelve. The end result was that He submitted to their authority and grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Lk 2:42-52).

The last of the more prominent stories is that of Zechariah and Elizabeth (Lk 1:5-80). An angel came and told Zechariah that he and his wife would have a son, and they were to raise him as a Nazarite. He didn't believe the messenger and was struck dumb until the birth of his son. It is clear they fulfilled their role because we are told that the child grew and became strong in the spirit.

Oh, yes, there is another. Timothy and his mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois (Ac 16:1-3; 2 Ti 1). Paul tells Timothy to remember their faithfulness in teaching him. Also, at the recommendation of the church, which also

would have seen their commitment, he accepted Timothy as a member of his ministry.

The most negative extreme would be the response of Saul to Jonathan. He was angry with Jonathan for accepting God's decision to select David over him (1 Sa 19:1). In fact, Saul became so angry that he even attempted to kill Jonathan over this (1 Sa 20:30-32). In the end, Saul was removed, and all but one of his sons, including Jonathan, were later killed in a battle with the Philistines.

Here we see a couple of extremes. Parents who accepted God's call and did poorly in preparing their child for that service. Then we have those who took that call seriously and aided in the preparation of their child so that when the time came to serve, he/she was ready. Finally, an example of a parent who opposed God's plan for his son.

There are a few other examples of not-so-positive responses. When Samuel came to the house of Jesse seeking God's anointed one, the father did not even consider David as a possibility. Later, we see a similar attitude in the comments of his brother when he is asking about the king's reward for killing Goliath. David did not receive a lot of support and encouragement. Fortunately, David did not let this dissuade him from following the call placed on his life.

In missions and ministry, we will see all of these extremes. Parents who hear God's call on their child's life, but for one reason or another are not diligent in following through. Then there are those who don't see what God is doing, and though

they might discourage them directly, there is no clear support in obeying God's call.

The best situation is when the child and the parents have a clear understanding that God is calling. Both are in their own way being obedient. The parents are doing their best to raise their child to understand what God's call is and a willingness to let them go at the appropriate time to serve. This would be the example of Hannah and Elkanah, Mary and Joseph, and Elizabeth and Zechariah. The children are willing to submit to the instruction and guidance of the parents, as we see in several of the examples above.

Did Lois and Eunice anticipate the action of the leaders of the church in Lystra? We are not told this. We are also not told if they were resistant to the recommendation of the church leaders. Yet Paul's comment that Timothy should make full use of the gift that he has been given by them suggests that they were in agreement with their son/grandson being chosen to serve in the mission of God.

The truth is, parents can be, and are, a powerful influence in this process. If they are in agreement and confirm their support of God's calling for their child, then they will be a source of great encouragement in the process. If they are not parents, then it will create any number of barriers and struggles for the one called. This could place a young person in the difficult place of denying their parent's authority in this area of their life in order to be obedient to God's call.

Besides parents, are there others who can be a source of encouragement in doing what God is calling a family and

their children to be and do? What part did Miriam play in following her brother into the private area of Pharaoh's daughter and then recommending the mother of Moses as the nursemaid? There must have been some agreement on her part and that of Aaron, because when Moses returns, they are the first to come to him and support him.

We don't know how the other children of Hannah responded to having their older brother serving in the temple. But they watched as, year after year, the parents returned and provided clothes and other essentials.

That is another aspect of supporting the call of God in the life of a child. It is not just accepting it and supporting it. It can also mean helping at times with some aspects of ordinary life. I know my parents and my wife's parents were always willing to send us things we needed that were not always available where we served, or were so expensive as to be prohibitive.

Are you proud and humbled by the fact that God chose your child for this? I say proud and humble because both go hand in hand. The ability to boast of God's goodness and the humbleness to realize that one is not worthy of the honor and yet rejoices in all that is involved.

Where are you in this spectrum of allowing God to call your child and supporting that call, even where there is great risk?

Bible study

We are called to train up a child in the way they should go (Pr 22:6). Does this include being open to and willing to

respond to God's call to missions wherever that may take them?

Read Ge 18:18-19. Do you think that this same purpose applies to all parents who are followers of Christ? What part do you have in the promise made to Abraham in relation to this information?

Personal reflection – This question goes both ways. Children, how supportive have your parents been in your decisions related to your walk with the Lord? Do they encourage you to seek God out in critical decisions for life? Parents, how are you doing in encouraging your children in their walk with the Lord and seeking his guidance in the mission?

Cultural Thought – How does your culture and context respond to those who seek to follow God wherever He leads? How do other parents treat those who encourage their children to go? Is there a culture of obedience or apathy in this area?

Pentateuch 17 – Manna – the nomads

Many references

Have you ever been bored with the food that has been served? The same old food day after day after day after....? Probably not, at least not all of us have to deal with eating the same food

every day. us. But this is not true all around the world. There are countries where, if there is no rice served, it was not a meal. Others where a meal without tortillas is not a meal. We could talk about ximi, a very thick corn porridge served in much of central and southern Africa. It is served at almost every meal. In Chile, they have bread and cheese at almost every meal. With a little investigation, we will discover that much of the world has a basic food that is prepared for the majority of the meals in a home. They may have special foods, but very often they are reserved for special occasions.

Could you eat the same meals over and over? Even if there was some variety, there may be only a few options. Some places have the same elements at almost every meal, but in one form or another. Do you realize how much the use of flour is part of many cultures? You go to the store to buy bread in a multitude of forms. The forms suggest variety, but there are only minor changes in a few elements and in the shape of the bread. So many countries and cultures use the same elements in creating different types of food, but in the end, they are all just flour.

Then try this. You have gotten used to your normal options of food types. (Keep in mind I am talking about what people generally cook at home based on diet, finances, and availability, not the incredible variety that exists because of ethnic foods that may or may not be available.) Now you move out of your normal place of residence. You move to a place where all the food you are used to eating is not available, and now you have to have the same old food every day of another country and culture. Foods and flavors that are normal for

your new place of residence, but don't taste normal, and you don't really know how to prepare them.

If you don't acquire a taste for these new additions to your diet and the fact that that you cannot obtain what is your normal diet is, then you are going to struggle. Let me explain what I mean. In the USA one of the main staples of many meals is potatoes. In Italy it is pasta of a multitude of types and sizes. In Russia there is a heavy focus on cabbage and beets. In much of Asia and other parts of the world it is rice, rice, and more rice. This would be typical of most parts of the world. There is always a basic food that is expected at every meal. Besides all of that are the spices and preparation that affect what you consider to be acceptable flavors and texture. Honestly, if it becomes too much, we complain. Not that what we enjoy would taste that much better for those who are accustomed to their local diet. The truth is they could complain about the lack of what they enjoy when confronted with our normal diet.

There is an interesting flip side to this. If you do come to enjoy the shift in this new diet and its daily regimen and then return to your roots you may find yourself wishing for food from the diet in the other country and culture. It seems strange but we are also strange creatures in what we expect and desire.

Now we are in the exodus. The people have been accustomed to eating leeks and onions. They may have also been accustomed to eating fish because of the nearness of the Nile River. Also, there would been a plentiful supply of water available with little to no limits. All this change once they are living in the wilderness. The water supply is limited, almost

nonexistent at times. There are no gardens. People on the move don't have time to plant a garden and then wait for a harvest. That and there are limits on what you can carry with you. So there is no ability to store for future use along with other issues.

There was a popular song from a number of years ago that highlighted this

They cry and God responds. He gives them manna. It appears as a small flake which can be gathered in sufficient quantity that it can provide for the needs of a family. The instructions are very clear only collect what you need that day during the week and a double portion on Friday because it won't be available on Saturday. They learn quickly that no matter how much they actually collect it always only enough for that day. Anything left over spoils. They also learn quickly that this food supply is in fact never available on the sabbath. What they gather on Friday will last until Sunday.

They are happy and for a while do not complain. But over time they become tired of the constant repetition of the same food source every day. There were not too many options on how to use it. basically ground into flour to make cakes (Nu 11:8) and added to water to make a porridge (Ex 16:3). They also received a supply of quail at different times. This could probably be roasted or boiled and some meat dried for a later time. They were glad for the manna but over time grew weary of the lack of change in diet and so complained wanting the leeks and onions of the past.

There was a song titled “So you want to go back to Egypt” by Keith Green that highlighted the cry of the people of Israel and reflected their weariness for the same food every day.

Eating leaks and onions by the Nile,
Ooh what a breath for dining out in style
Ooh my life is on the skids
Building Pyramids
And in the morning its manna hotcakes
We snack on manna all day
And we sure had a winner last night for dinner
Flaming manna souffle
Oh no manna again?

The chorus goes

Oh manna waffles
Manna burgers
Manna bagels
Fillet de manna
Manna patty
Oh no manna Cotti.
BaManna Bread

How little it takes for us to complain about what we have because of what we don’t have. The thing is what we don’t have is usually tied to our past or some history that we want to recover when we had some form of normality in our world. We knew what to expect and when to expect it. What is so strange is that often the past includes negative realities that somehow, we manage to ignore, even forget.

So here we are living our normal behind. A normal that we were as quick to complain about as enjoy. Now we are in another world and nothing is normal. We struggle with the new foods. The exotic nature of being a different world and culture is quickly wearing off. What was easy to do is not complicated. Before, at home, when you went to a store you know where to find what you needed. If you needed anything you knew where to find what you needed and if not, who to ask for help.

Now the store has little that is familiar and it is organized in a way that you struggle to comprehend. That and there are few things on the shelves that are familiar. In fact, you may need to learn how to negotiate a mix of stores and locations to find all of the items on your list. The emotion and excitement of your early arrival is gone. The people who were helping you sort things out have returned to their normal routine and there you are wishing for the past.

Like the Israelites you find yourself in a type of wilderness where you have little to no control over the rhythms of life. You are frustrated by the options you don't have. Just once could you find this or that. Just once if you did, it didn't cost ten times what it cost back home. You forget all the challenges of living at home because of one thing; it was familiar and now nothing appears familiar.

What is needed is a clear idea of why. Why did I leave? Why did I accept this change? Why did I agree to obey God's call?

Keep in mind I am using manna here as an example. It is only one of many things that involve changes in how you live. We

could talk about time, space, relations, all things that relate to changes in what is normal to you and now change in one way or another. So many changes it becomes overwhelming to the point you forget anything that was negative believing that somehow everything was almost perfect.

The people of Israel forgot they were slaves. They forgot that the pharaoh at times chose to kill all of the male children born. They forgot they were forced to do heavy labor, make an unlimited number of bricks and on this list of suffering goes. So much so they were ready to eat leeks and onions every day. Tell me what kind of diet is that? How is that any better than manna?

They forgot all the wonderful things God had done to make possible their rescue from slavery. They forgot the fact that they did not have to work for the food they received. They forgot the promise of a wonderful place to live. They forgot this even after they had the incredible report of the plenty of the land. They forgot.

When we accept a call to serve God we will be confronted by the same things. We will forget all that God has done to save us and bring us into his family. We will forget that God has promised to care for us and guide us. We will forget all that God did to prepare us for this adventure, this is how we saw it at the beginning. We will forget that incredible opportunity we will have to share God's love with others.

Why? Because we get bored. Because we get tired. Because things are not as easy as we would like. Because we lose sight

of the destination and purpose for all that God will do because we go.

The manna or something else will come. We will yearn for the past. What we do next will be critical to where we make the adjustments needed to live in the place God places us and learn to present him, his love, and the gospel to those who have not heard.

Bible study – Read the story of the widow of Zarapheth (1 Ki 17). What do you think her life was like after the drought ended and Elijah returned home?

Read the report of the spies (Nu 13). Was the report regarding the land good or bad? What scared them? What did they forget as they listened to the report? What did they prefer?

Personal Reflection – What change have you made that you wish you hadn't made? Why? What did you wish you had done instead?

Mission Thought – What change in your life and habits do you think will be difficult to make if you are called to serve in another culture? Why would it be difficult to make that change? Now consider what you might miss and how that would affect your decision to go where God may send you?

Pentateuch 18 – Cause for complaining – Nomads too

Ex 15:22-23

Do we know what is absolutely essential? Do we have things we believe we could never live without? Do we bargain with God regarding those items?

The people of Israel have left the Nile River, a place where water was always available. They have crossed the Red Sea, another source of unlimited water. They are led into the desert of Shur, and there is no water. It has only been three days, and they can't find water. Please keep in mind that people who are used to having water readily available are not going to do well in a desert. Why? Because they are not thinking about the wise use of the water they have. They probably have not planned for the process of collecting and distributing the water they have. They are probably not thinking about how to use the little water they have. In the past, it was not a problem to wash clothes, wash plates, bathe, and other aspects of water usage. That and all the water they needed to cook. Now they run out of water. We are not told how quickly this occurred. What we are told is that it is only three days into their travel into the desert and they need water.

At this point they come to a place that has water. They probably run, rush, or surge to the water. The first people gag on the water, and the next people pay no attention to their response and gag as well. Now there is confusion. People are

gagging and trying to pull back from the water, and others are pressing against them; it is a dangerous situation. Slowly, the number of people gagging on the water ceases to increase as everyone else becomes aware that something is wrong. Now the crowd begins to turn nasty. They desperately need water. They are struggling with the fact that there is water, but it is not safe to drink. Even if it is safe to drink, the taste is so bad that they can't swallow it. They barely get it into their mouths, and their bodies react.

Moses cries to God, and he is shown a piece of wood. The instruction is to throw it into the water. I would love to know what kind of wood he was shown. I have never heard of a piece of wood that could remove the bitterness of water and make it sweet. I doubt any of the people know of such a thing as well. But Moses does so and declares the water safe.

Do the people respond immediately to this news? What do you think? Who do you think will be the first to test the newly cleansed water? Do you think the people are going to be resistant? Do you think any of the people who first tasted the water will be among those who agree to test the water? Do they expect Moses to take the first cup of water? Will they believe him when he says it is now safe to drink? How many will doubt that he is being honest? They have seen the reaction of those who first arrived.

Somehow, they overcome whatever fears they may have had. People begin to drink. Now begins another challenge. We are talking about a very large number of people who are desperate for water. If there is no care given to how and when a person

is given access, there will be other problems. Too many, too fast could make the site a muddy mess and further compound the problem. People rushing into the water to wash off three days of dust could affect the quality of the water. We are not told any of this. Clearly, things go well.

What follows is interesting. God decrees that whoever listens carefully to his voice and commands will not cause God to send the diseases of Egypt on them. This is interesting because polluted water is often a source of disease. Again, no real explanation, but it is clear they need to learn how to live differently. Soon after this, they came to a place with twelve springs and seventy palm trees. Here they camp for a while. Then it is off to another desert, the desert of Sin. This time, they appear to have figured out how to use water more carefully. They are not complaining about water but something else. They have now run out of whatever food they thought to bring with them. They may also be reluctant to sacrifice their sheep and other animals to satisfy their hunger.

They will complain about essentials over and over, especially regarding water. They are still learning how to live in the wilderness. In Ex 17, once again, they are complaining about water. This time, Moses is told to hit a rock with his staff. Can you imagine their behavior when God calls them to watch as he climbs on a rock and says from the rock God will provide water. Then he raises his staff and strikes the rock. Water comes from the rock. Not just a little, but it will have to be a torrent of water. Why? Because we are talking about way over a million people who need water. Not only them but all their

livestock. Oh yes, this is a part of what is happening. It is not just a few who need water but a multitude who are crying.

To be honest, water is going to be a central aspect of life. It is used in many ways. They will need huge supplies of water to survive in the desert, especially after they refuse to enter the promised land. (If you have time, read Leviticus and all the ways that water will be needed in the rituals being laid out for the people.)

This will become an issue again shortly after the death of Miriam. This time, the cry is for water tubs, also for things that grow because of water, figs, grain, grapevines, or pomegranates (Nu 20). Again, God tells Moses what to do. Moses must be frustrated, tired, or just plain fed up with these people. He errs in both words and action. The people do get their water. I doubt they get the other items. Remember, it is a desert, but once again, they think back.

It will not be until they arrive at the Jordan that they will have water and finally stop worrying about what they think they need. That is the point. What do you think you will need to obey God to go? What do you want more than anything else that you believe you cannot live without?

Water is a key issue. We will wonder whether the water is safe. We learned quickly in Sierra Leone that we had to filter all the water we needed for drinking and cooking. The toilet, the laundry, and washing other items did not need filtered water. We also learned that during the rainy season, we would have an unlimited supply of water that we collected from the roof.

When the dry season came, it would not be so, and we had to learn how to conserve water.

This is the obvious need. What may surprise you is what else will raise its head and create an almost unquenchable desire to have. Something that may cause you to cry, to complain, and grumble. Even when you get some relief, you find yourself once again complaining. Even to the point of making the people around you suffer because of what you think, I emphasize, what you think you need. It may not be as loud as the people of Israel, but in different ways, you will let the people know that something is missing that we think we need.

It could be friends and family, and the more we talk about such things, the more likely they may feel rejected or unacceptable in this area of our lives. Such a situation can seriously affect our ability to see what God can do and is doing. It could be, as mentioned in the previous study, food. If we only think about what we had and never learn to appreciate what is offered to us, then the people we have come to serve will see this and feel ashamed if and when they offer something from their cuisine. If we can only talk about our holidays, our fun places to visit, and our country, they may not invite us to share in their national holidays and other special events. They become insignificant in our eyes and will slowly begin to avoid us. We have no water to share. We have no life to share.

Of course, if they ask about these things, it is acceptable to share a meal, share information, talk about family, but never to the exclusion of sharing in a meal in their house, hearing about their history and country, and especially taking an

interest in their family and friends. I could easily expand the list of things that become like water to us and so create an environment of grumbling and complaining about what we don't have where we are.

It is an important point to learn how to manage life and keep our lives in balance with the realities of where we will be serving. Thankfully, we will not be wandering in a wilderness in search of water and always thinking about the lack of water. The reality, though, is that we can turn the place where we have been called into such a desert, always in search of something that is critical, but without considering how the people and the place can be a source of anything we lack.

We may not understand what to do. We may need God to give us a tree or something that doesn't make sense to us, but opens the way to supplying what we need where we are. We may need God to simply lead us to what is available and learn to enjoy the oases that are available until we learn more. We may even need God to strike us because we have become a rock blocking what is hidden; the culture and people become finally evident to us, and we realize just how abundantly it can supply what we need.

The only danger is in assuming that God will guide in any way that we can anticipate. Cultures are like that. What works in one doesn't work in another. What works this time may not work every time. The goal is to stop searching with our eyes and heart and let God open us up to the wonders that are there waiting for us to enjoy.

Bible Study – How often was it necessary for God to open the eyes and ears of people so they could understand what God was doing? Consider the story of the servant of Elisha in 2 Kings 6:15-18 and his need to see.

Consider Paul's comments to the Galatians in Ga 1:6-9. What would cause them to abandon the truth they had received for a false gospel?

Personal Reflection – Think about something that you think you could not live without. Something that you expect to enjoy every day. Now consider what it would take for you to sacrifice that to do what God wants you to do.

Mission Thought – What do you think the expectations would be of the people in a new culture regarding your ability to accept and enjoy what they have to offer? What would happen if you rejected any of their expectations? Finally, how would you know if what they expected of you was acceptable and would place you in conflict with the Law of Christ, as Paul says in 1 Co 9:21.

Pentateuch 19 – Civil Law - Lawgiver

Nu 5, 19 Le 11, 13, 15

Have you ever taken time to read the civil law as laid out in the Pentateuch? It is quite a collection of guidelines for living.

Some are very specific and, in many ways, would not relate to our world today. Still, it is interesting, and I want to share a few of them with you to get us started on a very important topic: the customs and rules of a culture.

- Damage to an animal that you borrowed (Ex 22:14)
- Jealousy of husband and possible infidelity in a wife (Nu 5) – she is to drink the water of infidelity to determine this.
- Touching a dead body and the cleansing process (Nu 19:11-22) – isolation and a process of washing and being cleansed with a special water.
- Animals that were not to be eaten (Lev 11) – here is a sample: camel, pig, fish without fins, vultures, weasel, owl, chameleon, and many others. Most of these animals were carrion eaters or carried certain diseases. A good reason not to eat them.
- Regulations regarding rashes and mold (Lev 13) – which ones represent infectious problems or can cause further health issues, and how to know
- What to do if a sick person spits on another person (Lev 15) – wash the person and wash the clothes
- Rules about who you can have sexual relations with (Lev 18) – it is quite a list and usually involves limits related to family relations.
- Rules related to how to harvest (Lev 19:1-10) – a key focus being providing for the poor
- Seven-year cycle and year of Jubilee (Lev 25) – setting price for land and when to let land rest

There are many more of these types of civil law. (You can find another group of similar laws in Ex 21-23). Laws that were

not part of the moral law. It was probably in this area that many debates occurred that took up so much of Moses' time that when his father-in-law Jethro saw what was happening, he recommended a justice system that would free Moses from the majority of these and only bring the more serious cases or difficult cases to Moses (Ex 18:17-26).

This type of legal problem may have been the focus of Paul's comments in 1 Co 6:1-9. Members of the church were having troubles, and instead of resolving them internally, were taking their complaints to the civil authorities.

Now you are probably wondering why I have included this in a commentary related to missions. For me, it is quite clear. Every culture has its rules. Many of them are unwritten but are critical to the overall peace within a community. They involve what people are allowed and expected to do in many areas of their lives. Some are serious enough that you can be taken to court over the issue involved. This happened to my wife when she was accused of accepting stolen property, in this case, a chicken. Her action was to give the chicken to the person making the accusation. When the local authorities found out, they became upset that they had not been consulted regarding what they considered a serious breach of their civil law. Not so much what had happened, but that they were not consulted (another aspect of civil law: who are those who are responsible for maintaining and applying these rules to the community?) They arrested the chicken, a somewhat surprising action, then investigated the matter and determined that my wife had not accepted stolen property. They returned the chicken and required the person making the accusation to apologize.

Needless to say, the chicken did not live long and promptly found its way to the cooking pot, so there would be no further possibility of someone making any further claims. (Truthfully, we had received this chicken as a thank-you gift for preaching in another village.)

The point is that as we enter another community, and especially one in another culture, we need to begin the process of learning what the civil law is for that community. Most times, they are not written down but are well known, at least to the people of that community. For a while, we may be allowed a certain amount of liberty in failing to know what they are and conforming to them. In time, liberty will be withdrawn because the people will feel that we should by then know what they are and conform to their expectations. Failure to do so, even in obeying the simplest of these civil laws, can result in a rupture in our relations, even to the point that we may no longer be welcome in the community.

Moses took time to include many of these civil laws within the Pentateuch. They cover a wide variety of topics, most of which are not directly related to the moral law, the Ten Commandments, or the ritual law, that of the fiestas and sacrifices, and the activities related to the tabernacle. While those that Moses records clearly don't cover every aspect but give us a clear idea that the community had rules to guide their daily lives and how to live together in peace.

That is the point of civil law. Providing guidelines in areas considered important by each community so that the members can live in peace and have avenues to resolve any conflict that

may arise, either from carelessness to outright disobedience and lack of obedience. The first will be treated in a less intense manner. The latter can result in serious consequences.

This is something to keep clear in our minds and hearts. The community will allow a certain amount of leniency to you as a newcomer and impose less severe consequences, such as words of warning to not repeat such errors. The issue is that if we refuse to hear those warnings and act like we do not respect their rules, then the consequences can become severe enough that they may result in our no longer being welcome in the community. So strong can this response be that our movements will become limited, and we will be ostracized. A few may maintain relations with us, but we will need to ask why. Are they also people who have been marginalized for some reason, or are they hoping to benefit from us in some way?

When we enter a new community, it is wise to as quickly as possible find those who will be willing to take us in hand and teach us the rules. Keeping in mind that they are not always conscious of them until they are broken. We may make any number of mistakes, but having a person to help us will make it easier to correct those errors and make wise use of the honeymoon period that we will be given as strangers.

One more thing. Not everyone will be as forgiving as some. There will be those who don't want us in their community, especially those who are clearly influenced by Satan and his kingdom. They will be quick to attack and display our, what they would call, lack of respect for the culture and people. The

sooner we learn the civil law of a community, the sooner we can, to some extent, silence this type of opposition, keeping in mind that we will never completely succeed in this area until the people hear the truth of the gospel and respond. For this to happen, we truly need to do our best to avoid making unnecessary errors and not create a reason for them to reject the message we have that will bring hope and forgiveness.

And lastly, seeing people respond to the gospel will not change these civil laws. For the most part, they are usually not in conflict with the truth we bring for them. That means, even after people respond, we need to continue to obey the rules established by that community if we wish to remain and continue to share God's word with them.

On occasion, there will be rules or activities that are in conflict with what is good and healthy, as well as in conflict with what Paul calls the law of Christ. We will need to take care in how we handle these. The best way to deal with these is to allow the Holy Spirit to work as we share more and more of God's word. As this happens, God will open a way for them to see this and make the changes needed without our interference. An attitude that will be a normal reaction to any criticism we may raise regarding a particular rule that is in opposition to the teaching we have for them in the Bible.

A key word to always keep in one's mind and expressed in our actions is patience. God will work if we are good and faithful servants, willing to adapt as needed, so the people will hear.

Bible Study – Read 1 Co 9 and think through what Paul is trying to say in relation to how to live among people of a different culture. Why do you think this is so important?

Personal Reflection – Have you ever done something that would be considered inappropriate in your own culture? How did your friends and family respond? How did others respond? How do you think that action could affect your testimony with those affected by your actions?

Mission Thought – Every culture and group has its unique rules and guidelines for its community. Why do you think this is so? What is it about human beings that we feel the need to create specific rules to guide us in our relationships, especially as it relates to where we are living?

Pentateuch 20 – Moral Law - Righteous

Ex 20

We all know the basis for moral law. At least the basis in cultures that have been influenced by the moral law of the Bible.

It is divided into two areas that Jesus summed up as the greatest and second-greatest law. The first is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength (Mt 22:37; Mk 12:30; Lk 10:27). This is actually not the first time

this approach to understanding the moral law is presented. It also appears several times in Deuteronomy as Moses repeats the law and reminds the people of all they have been given. Here are the different versions we see here, and then a repeat of this from Joshua.

Dt 6:5 – Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength

Dt 11:1 - Love the Lord your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws, and his commands always

Dt 11:22 – to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways and hold fast to him

Dt 30:16 – love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees, and laws

Jos 22:5 - to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, to obey his commands, to hold fast to him and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul.

These sum up the first four commands found in Ex 20, which are

1. You shall have no other gods
2. You shall not make any idol
3. You shall not misuse the name of God
4. Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.

The point of all of these is to place God above everything else in this world. To emphasize this, we see the words of obedience to the laws, commands, decrees, and statutes. In Jesus, this is presented in the form of loving God with all one's

heart, mind, soul, and strength. The idea being that if we are able to love God in this way, there will truly be no room for other gods, idols, misuse of His name, and we will honor Him properly by living in a holy manner in His presence.

This part of the moral law is clear, and yet we are so quick to fail in so many ways. Hobbies, special interests, sports, education, and on we could continue presenting things that for an individual are given a special place in our heart, mind, soul, as well as a focus that we use a great part of our strength or focus to follow, often forcing God into second place.

Much more could be said about this. why? Because if we don't get this right in our lives when we are confronted by the beliefs of others, which include other gods, demonic worship, witchcraft, and such practices, we will struggle to convince people that God is truly the only god and the only one deserving of our love and our lives.

In fact, it is how we deal with the second of the greatest laws that we will be put to the test as to whether we truly love God above all else. With that in mind, let us consider the rest of the list and some of the issues that we may be confronted with.

So, we have several forms of this second law. The best known is Love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus uses this but takes it to another level. He agrees it is the second greatest law in Mt 22:39, Mk 12:31, and Lk 10:27. What is interesting is that in Mt 5:43, he adds to this truth. He states that this law is a place to begin, and then states that even more important is that we love our enemy and pray for them. Then in Jn 13:34, he states that we are to love one another as he has loved us.

Paul (Ro 13:8), Peter (1 Pe 1:22), and John (1 Jn 3:11; 4:7, 11) repeat the second law. John includes the direction of Jesus to do so in the same way He commanded us (3:11). He further adds in 4:7, 11 that this level of God comes from God and reveals God's love in us.

Now, none of this is new to us. We have heard these scriptures over and over. We think we know what this means in our own culture, but what happens to the laws that are behind these?

Let us review the other six

5. Honor your mother and father
6. You shall not murder
7. You shall not commit adultery
8. You shall not steal
9. You shall not give false testimony (Lie)
10. You shall not covet the property of others

These are known to us because of our background in the Bible and its influence on our culture, either historically or because God's word has entered our culture and so influenced it because of those who historically were carriers of this truth. There is a long history of this as the truth moved from the Middle East into Europe and through various epochs of missions spread to other parts of the world and slowly became the dominant system of belief.

Before all this happened, and in many other parts of the world, this was not true. They did not have this system of moral law. Yet everywhere you go in the world, in every culture and belief system, you will see the evidence of the reality of this moral law. The form it takes may be different, yet it is there.

A few examples may be helpful and also reveal some of the issues that will be confronted as one enters another culture and learns how they function.

5. Honoring parents – I doubt there is a culture that doesn't have this as part of its culture. How it is expressed could be quite different. One culture expects the children to live as a family together and submit to the parents' directions and wishes until they die. Another allows there to be separation at this level, but there are expectations on how to honor parents on special occasions. The question is, will we adapt and honor parents or elders in the manner of the culture? They may question our level of sincerity and commitment if what we do doesn't, in some way, agree with their expectations.

6. Murder – most cultures have this as a critical part of their moral law. Yet there are occasions where it is permitted. I think of the revenge killings of Papua New Guinea. Or the laws of the avenger in the Bible for the death of a person. The revenge killings are a normal part of life, but they are often the basis for war between tribes and go far beyond simple revenge, often allowing the group to kill any member of the family of the one who caused the death of a family member.

We also allow people to murder in times of war, in defense of one's person or family, and in other very specific situations. Yet we are told to love our enemies and do good to them. Learning how to handle such

issues has plagued mankind since the fall. Hatred over murder and revenge plagues relations between nations, for example, Palestine and Israel, between families, the famous Hatfield's and McCoys' feud, and the constant issues of war that plague the tribes of Papua New Guinea. The famous story of the "Peace Child" is an illustration of what happens and how God, in this situation, opened the door to resolve the conflict and open the door for the Gospel.

7. Adultery – this may seem obvious, but there are cultures where a visiting male is allowed to have sexual relations with a wife of the person he is visiting. This is a custom among various Inuit tribes and the Maasai. Does that mean it is acceptable? No. A flip to this is how churches have handled polygamy, which to many is considered a type of adultery. How it has been handled has often divided churches across Africa. The bible is very clear about the preferred relationship, one man, one woman. How we handle these is critical. The best way is to teach the word and let those from within the culture provide the answers and changes.

8. Steal - Again, how this is defined can vary greatly. I have one example for you to consider. There is a tribe in the Philippines that has an interesting rule about property. Let me use a garden implement as my example. If you place your hoe in front of the house, leaning on the wall, any person is allowed to borrow this hoe without permission and with no information about when it will be returned. Usually, people know,

and if there is a need, it can be recovered. But if you place the hoe within the walls of your residence and a person borrows it, that is considered stealing, and there will be consequences.

We have a story about Jesus and the disciples passing through a field and picking some grain to eat as they traveled. This was not considered stealing. What upset the leaders was that they did it on the Sabbath, breaking two laws in their minds: traveling on the Sabbath and doing what they considered harvesting on the Sabbath. Keep in mind, there is no law against cooking your meals on the Sabbath. The only restriction that I can recall is related to manna. You could not collect any on the Sabbath, but no mention or rule against cooking it on the sabbath (Ex 16).

9. Lie – the actual phrase is false testimony, but that covers many areas of not telling the truth. Yet there are many cultures where it is wrong to speak the truth directly. It is a matter of saving face and not bringing shame to the person publicly. In the Philippines, there are four levels of this and four ways to speak the truth. What happens is that in public, the people lie while looking for the correct avenue to communicate the truth. Does the world know the truth? That is not clear. It is clear that you are not allowed to shame a person publicly by telling the truth.

I had several interesting experiences where people lied to me to avoid appearing less than helpful. At times, I

would ask for directions to a place. I would stop and ask a person who, not wanting to fail to help a known person of respect and position, would give me directions that were wrong, and then I would have to try again with another person to get the correct information. A challenge. This was a pattern in the culture. If a person who is above you in status asks a question, you need to give an answer, even if it means you lie, suggesting you know the answer.

Learning how these systems of shame and expectation work is important, or you will soon begin to think everyone is a liar and become unable to trust almost everyone until you find someone who can explain this to you and show you how to proceed.

10. Covet – this is one that can become complicated. This is because the definition of what is yours and what belongs to the community can be blurred until you think everyone covets what you have, or at least desires to have what you have. This can be because it is different, and their concept of property may include more than you realize. It can be because you have more than they do, and that doesn't fit their concept of what is an appropriate amount of anything a person should possess; you become the rich among them, and their expectations of what you should and shouldn't do. At times, it can appear that they are coveting what they have, but they are not. Just a different level of what they expect of those who have more.

By now, it should be clear that two things are at work in all of this. God has truly placed his law in the hearts of all mankind. We all seek to worship something, and we will commit ourselves and what we possess to this, even if it is ourselves that we worship, a pattern that is becoming very common in the world today. We become the standard for everything, and all moral law is based on what we think. What is interesting is how consistent we are in following the moral law of God, even when we deny His existence.

The other thing that is clear is that every culture, every group of people has in its structure something we would call moral law. How it is expressed may be different from what we are accustomed to, but it is there. How we respond to the differences will have a significant impact on our freedom to share the truth.

Biblical Study - Jesus talks about many of the commandments in the Sermon on the Mount. Read chapter 5 and review how Jesus interprets the laws. Why was the thought more serious than the action? Now read verse 19. What do you think Jesus means by the phrase ‘the least of these commandments’?

Personal Reflection – In private review, how are you doing in obeying the moral law of God with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength? Consider how your commitment to this affects your testimony. Now think about loving your brother, not in the way that you love yourself, but in the way Christ loves you.

Mission Thought – Do you think there is any culture that truly follows both of the greatest commandments? What is your

responsibility in making it possible for you to be an example of these in another culture?

Pentateuch 21 – Ritual Law – Culture

Exodus many passages et/al.

There is a part of the Pentateuch that is a challenge to read. It involves several things. The first is all of the descriptions related to the construction of the tabernacle. It involves a careful description of each item for the exterior and interior. The second is all that is involved in all of the different rituals that are part of the various sacrifices. Again, extensive detail in describing what needs to be done, how it is to be done, and when. The last is the repetition of the gifts given by each tribe for the dedication of the tabernacle. The same set of gifts given by each tribe is shared. So the same list of gifts, with one change in each of the twelve presentations, the name of the tribe that gave the gift.

There are rituals related to cleansing this person or that object. There are rituals related to preparing a priest and a Levite for service in the tabernacle. There are rituals related to how the different festivals are to be held. There are rituals for almost every aspect of worshipping God and maintaining the relationship of the individual and the nation in a good state with God. Just take a moment and read Leviticus, and you will learn about the details involved in describing these rituals.

I will not try to go into any more detail in this area. The key is that there was a clearly defined way to live and maintain one's relationship with God at multiple levels. There is also a great deal of information on how to treat those who do not abide by and follow the rituals as given. The most common would be banishment or being cut off from the people of Israel.

Here are a few examples –

Eating bread made with yeast during the Passover (Ex 12:15, 19).

Anyone caught working on the sabbath (Ex 31:14).

Failure to keep the Passover (Nu 9:13). (There were two conditions involved. The person was not on a journey, which could prevent them from attending the Passover, and if they were, for some reason, ceremonially unclean.

Eating the blood of an animal (Nu 17:10)

Marrying the daughter of a foreign god (Mal 2:11-12).

Making a perfume in some way the same as or similar to that used in different aspects of the worship and putting it on anyone other than a priest (Ex 30:33).

Leviticus 18 has a list of detestable actions that are to result in a person being cut off from the people (verse 29).

What we see is that ritual law had a critical role in the life of the people of Israel. In fact, every group has its rituals that are usually followed in great detail, and not to do so may not result

in banishment, but will create a great deal of stress. Here is a list of areas in which there may be rituals to follow.

- Weddings
- Burials
- Dedication of a building
- Protection of a place
- Seeking a productive harvest
- Worship services in a church
- How to greet a person
- Rituals related to dress, food, and bathing

Stop and think about this. Almost every aspect of life has rules and regulations that guide us in how we behave, what we do, where we can be, and when something can be done. We don't think about these things because, for the most part, they are automatic; we have been taught all of these rituals since the day we were born. Even people who deny performing the proper ritual for whatever is being done (as defined by others in their world) end up creating their own set of rituals to express their defiance of what they call the status quo or system they oppose.

Jesus responded to such a ritual at the wedding of Cana in John chapter 4. There was a certain expectation of how things should be at the feast. A certain amount of wine and a type of wine, as well as a supply that would last throughout the celebration. It was not going to happen, and so would bring embarrassment on the host family. Jesus is asked to act, which he does in a way that creates a very positive impression of the preparation of the host family.

On another occasion, after being fed, the crowd wants to establish a new ritual, that of being fed by Jesus in the same way the people of Israel were fed in the wilderness. They wanted free food, food provided by the person they wanted to be their future king, not because of the critical teaching being given, but because he could make their life more comfortable. Jesus refuses to allow for this change in the rhythm or ritual of life. I wonder if they, after 10,20,30 or more years, would be happy with the same meal day after day, bread and fish.

Rituals are like that. Some of them we don't think about and really don't want them to change. They create an environment of predictability. Yes, that is the key. Rituals make life, to some extent, predictable and so manageable. We don't have to do extra planning. We already know what is needed, how to get any supplies needed, and we already know all the rules and steps involved. That is what ritual provides for us. It also gives a clear idea of how the world around us functions and so guides us in our relationships. Parents to children, spouses to each other, how to treat neighbors, how to treat enemies or outsiders. The list of areas in which the traditions or rituals provide guidance is unending.

Now, suppose you are the new person in the community. A person with your set of rituals, and you discover that everything is out of order and causing conflict. You don't know what is going on. You don't know why people do what they do. Actually, they probably don't know either; they just do it. You, though, don't know how to just do it. Instead of being comfortable, people are uneasy around you, and you are even more uneasy and uncertain around them. You probably

are asking why they do what they do. They aren't interested in the why; they want you to know the what and to do it.

Now comes the greater problem. For the most part, none of the rituals are written down. There is no guidebook that you can purchase to study. Yes, there are some tourist guides that have a few hints, but those hints are limited to specific settings and cover so little of the greater scope of the rituals. Rituals that involved gestures, mannerisms, schedules, activities, clothing, and again, the list will grow.

You respond by saying that we have opened this section, talking about all the rituals laid out for the people of Israel. That is true, but you need to remember that they had to start over again, learning how to live. Most of the rituals and practices of the past, while living in Egypt, had no value and were now useless. They had no rituals related to how to honor and serve the God who had rescued them. A clear example of this was what happened when Moses appeared to be gone too long, and they demanded that Aaron create a god for them to worship, and fell back into practices that they had probably observed in Egypt. This did not produce a positive response, and many died in this failure to wait and learn. Something that can happen to you while you are learning the new system of rituals. It is easy to fall back on what is known and mix our rituals with those of the new culture. This usually doesn't work and creates more conflict.

So, even as the people of Israel had to be taught a new set of rituals so that they could live in peace with each other in their new environment, as well as learn how to live in peace with

God, we, too, as we enter a new culture, need to learn how to live in peace with the culture.

I need to make a clear comment here. We will come into conflict with the rituals of a culture. It cannot be avoided. I say this because we are bringing to them the word of God, which will create conflict. It cannot be avoided if we hope to share the gospel and see them become children of God. Change will be needed, not in every area of their rituals, but clearly, there will be key areas that will be affected, and change will happen.

Our role is to do our best to adapt to the new structure with its rituals, at least in many areas, so that we can open the door to God's love and forgiveness, which, by its very nature, will introduce change into key areas of their ritual. A key one is who they place in the position of God in their lives and how that relationship will affect other aspects of their traditions and rituals.

So, are you ready to change many of the rituals that are the norm for your life so that you can walk freely among the people you have been sent to share the gospel with? Are you also ready to deal with the conflicts that will arise as people begin to see the truth and make critical changes in those same traditions and rituals? How you handle all of this may mean the difference between people truly becoming followers of Jesus or creating a syncretistic system that allows them to keep all their past and just add a new layer to their traditions without making any real change. A true challenge and all because we live and die by our rituals.

Bible study – Consider the changes that Naaman had to make to be a follower of God. Read his story and his request in 2 Ki 5. Consider carefully verse 18. How do you think his request could or could not help him to maintain his new belief?

Did Jesus act of turning water into wine change anything in relation to a wedding ritual (Jn 2)? Did it matter? Why or why not?

Consider Paul's comment that he is willing to become all things to all people in 1 Co 9:22. How important is this concept as you enter a new culture?

Personal reflection – Have you ever decided to become part of a specific group of people who had their own set of rituals? Think about sports teams, Boy Scouts, and other similar groups. What did you have to change in order to truly be accepted? How did those changes affect your ability to be a follower of Christ?

Mission thought – how will you know which rituals and traditions are alright to practice and which ones are not permissible?

Pentateuch 22 — The Vow — Individual

Le 22,27 Nu 30

Have you ever made a promise? Ever committed yourself to a course of action that meant you had to alter your plans, use your resources for that purpose, and then risk other resources and relationships in order to fulfill what you promised?

Think about the kind of promises that we make.

Work – we are hired and sign a promise that relates to how many hours we will commit to the work.

School – at first, the promise is made by our parents. They will bring us to school to be taught. Later, we choose to go to college, university, or a trade school. We sign agreements related to paying for what we will receive. We make commitments to attend classes and complete the assigned work. We do this to obtain a paper that states we have fulfilled the requirements of a particular course of preparation and so are capable of fulfilling the expectations of others as relates to our training.

Marriage – every marriage ceremony involves the making of promises. The key words are love and care for in every situation life brings until death. When taken seriously, they become the basis for the couple to successfully manage their life together.

Child dedication – parents promise to care for their children and help them become functional adults.

Sports – coaches expect the team members and team to make a clear commitment to the training program and use all their abilities to perform as expected, with the hope that they will learn to function as a team and possibly win.

Clubs – membership in a club often involves promises to place the interests of the club first and commit time to accomplish the goals of the club.

Military – Every soldier is expected to vow to give his life if necessary for the protection of their country and its interests as are defined by the leaders of the country.

Citizenship – We have pledges and songs and oaths that exist to reinforce the concept that, as citizens of the country, we are expected to commit ourselves to supporting the government and structures of that country. This is highlighted in the process of immigration and the goal of becoming a citizen of one's new country of residence.

We could continue this and look at more areas where such promises are made. The Bible contains a few of these.

The primary one was a vow to serve the one true God. To this end, a large number of commitments are expected and explained. Mainly, they are in the form of sacrifices that are required of each member of the community, and several are to be fulfilled by the entire nation.

There is also one that specifically relates to a person and a vow to serve God in some unique way. It is called the Nazarite vow. The details can be found in Numbers 6. This vow was about separating a person for a specific purpose and a specific time. These people have special rules to follow.

- Not allowed to touch anything that had died
- Not to use any product of the vine
- Not to cut their hair during the period of the vow
- Set aside for the service of God for a specific time period

In the Bible, we have examples of three people who were set aside to be Nazarites from birth.

Samson (Judges 13-16) – his parents were told that he would be a Nazarite from birth. His main purpose was to lead the people against the Philistines. Sadly, except for not cutting his hair, he did not do well at following the regulations set for a Nazarite. In the end, his hair was cut, and he lost his power until he finally confessed his failure and was given one last chance to defeat his enemy.

Samuel (1 Sa 1-28) – In this case, his mother pleaded with God for a son, promising that he would be given by her to the service of God. While it is nowhere mentioned that he followed the specific rules of a Nazarite, he did clearly submit to the central purpose of this vow. He, from his third year, was committed to the service of God for the rest of his life.

John the Baptist – (Lk 1; Jn 1; and many other passages) – His parents are told that they would have a son, and he was to be

a Nazarite from birth. In this case, we see the evidence of this. He lives a very separated life, a life that is simple with simple raiment. He is the one called to announce the coming of the Messiah, a task he fulfills without hesitation.

The next closest to this would be a vow Paul takes, which follows the pattern of the Nazarite vow in Cenchrea (Ac 18:18). We are not told exactly why he took the vow and for how long. But here we are told he had his hair shaved, which was the step to indicate the end of the vow.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, he was asked to join and support a group of people who had taken a vow and paid for the sacrifices that were required for this vow. He and they shave their heads to indicate they have chosen to make a vow. They then indicate the purpose of the vow, and he pays for the offering required for this (Ac 21:23-26).

There is also an example of a foolish vow by Jephthah (Judges 11). He vows to sacrifice the first thing that comes out of his house if God gives him victory over his enemy. God gives him the victory, but sadly, it is his daughter whom he does sacrifice. We are not told that God approved this vow, and from what little is seen, it does not follow the pattern given in the law for making such a vow. It provides a clear warning that vows are not to be made lightly, a point highlighted by Solomon's comments in Ecc 5:4-6.

So what does this have to do with missions?

Consider the fact that vows were made for a clear purpose to serve God in some special manner. This is the focus of the

discussion of vows in general as found in Numbers 30. Further, these vows can be made by both men and women. More instructions can be found in Leviticus 22 and 27. Vows can involve a promised action of a purpose, a gift given to honor God, and so on.

In general, the focus is on a person responding in some way to God. God is asking the person to commit themselves or some object to the service of God. This is what a call to missions and serving God in the proclamation of the gospel to others involves. It involves a vow to go where God sends us and do what God asks us to do. It also usually includes an understanding of a period of time to complete the work involved or deliver what is being dedicated to God's service.

The truth is, all of us as children of God have a responsibility to do what God expects of us. Do we understand this? Do we understand what it means to be His children? Consider what your responsibilities are to your parents and to your children. Even though you may not express them in so many words, there is a reality that, as parents, we are committed to caring for our children, even as God has committed Himself to caring for us by sending the Holy Spirit. At the same time, as children, there is the idea that when the time comes, we will care for our parents. In some cultures, this commitment is taken very seriously, to the point that the parents are expected to live with their children when they are no longer able to live independently.

So do you know what vows you have taken and what they mean? Do you believe and accept the truth that there are vows

and commitments that are part of being a follower of Jesus and, as a result, a child of God? Paul uses the idea of citizenship to explain this truth (Ph 3:20; Eph 2:19). We are citizens of the kingdom of God. Because of this, we have certain rights and certain responsibilities. Do we know what they are? Will we actively seek to fulfill what has been given to us as direction in the vows involved?

Bible study – Read John 10 and 17. Consider how Jesus understood his commitment to the work the Father had given him. Now read John 14 and review the promises that are made and our responsibility in the wise use of our lives in commitment to the wise use of what has been given.

Personal Reflection – Think about a promise or commitment that you have made in the past. It could be for any organization or activity. What changes did you have to make to fulfill the expectations of the group in relation to that commitment? Compare that to how you are doing in fulfilling what God expects of you as His child and a member of the kingdom of God.

Mission Thought – What is involved in revealing our vow to serve God to those of another culture and place? How will they know that we truly are committed to living as a child of God?

Pentateuch 23 – Bridge – Methuselah

Ge 5:21-27

Methuselah fascinates me. The person who has lived the longest of anyone on earth. He is the son of Enoch and watches as his father grows closer and closer to God until one day his father disappears. It makes me wonder how Methuselah responds to the sudden disappearance of his father. It makes one wonder how much the walk of his father affected his life and how he may have been a critical connection to the life of Noah.

As I study the genealogy, here is what I have discovered based on the numbers given to us related to when people were born and how long they lived. Using all the years, I can create a timeline of their lives. Starting with Adam as year one, Enoch was born in the 522nd year of the life of Adam. That means he had access to all the knowledge and history of the first man to live on this planet. The very man who walked in the garden with God, and the same man who created the separation of man and God because of sin. This means Enoch could learn all about what that meant.

Seth, the third son of Adam, dies before his father, and when Methuselah is 325 years old. Methuselah could easily have talked to him and learned much about life in the early years after the fall. Enoch is taken to heaven when Seth is 720 years old. Methuselah is about 300 years old when his father is taken to be with God.

Now we come to Noah. Methuselah dies the same year of the flood. This means that Noah had the chance to talk with Methuselah for a period of 500 years. Noah could have learned much about Adam, Seth, and Enoch from his great-grandfather. It is also possible that his sons found wives among the offspring of Enoch and Methuselah, which may explain how Noah's three sons could find women willing to marry the son of a man the rest of the world likely thought was crazy.

What is a bit sad is that though Methuselah knew these key people in the early history of mankind, he was unable to convince most, if not all, to listen to the knowledge he had, as well as listen to the teaching being given by Noah. Was Methuselah there to encourage Noah? There is no information regarding that. In fact, the only information we have is in the genealogies of Genesis, then in 1 Ch 1 and Lk 3. In those, we are told he was the father of Lamech and, by inference, the grandfather of Noah.

All this means that one person may have listened to the stories and history and paid attention. That one person was Noah. I would like to believe that Methuselah performed a very important role. He was a bridge of the truth and knowledge of God that existed in the lives of Adam, Seth, and his father Enoch. He lived until at least one person chose to listen.

This is the mission. Be the bridge. This is so critical. Bridges provide connections between regions that are separated by significant barriers. Rivers that must be crossed, at times with great difficulty and risk. I recently watched a video that

showed all that was involved in building the first bridge across the Mississippi River. A bridge that was one mile (1.6 Km) long, which furthered the expansion into the western part of the United States.

A bridge can cross great expanses of water besides rivers. There are critical bridges that connect and make possible the incredible growth that exists on the Island of Manhattan. They also cross canyons and shorten and simplify the process of crossing between two regions. In the early days, they were simple and crossed small streams and the like. Today, they are immense architectural structures that allow the movement of trains, cars, trucks, electricity, water, and other critical infrastructure. They shorten the time involved in crossing those immense barriers that exist. The Grand Canyon has only a few bridges, but they make it possible to get from one rim to the other with large vehicles, something that would otherwise be impossible.

There are many kinds of bridges: floating, drawbridges, swivel, and more. All have one purpose to make possible the communication or movement of people and materials across the barriers that exist easily and quickly.

This is the heart of missions. Creating bridges. Sometimes the process is simple. Creating a bridge to a neighbor. Sometimes it is a challenge and takes great effort. The entering of another culture with the need to learn the language and how life functions. The purpose is the same: to open the road for the gospel to reach the remote and unreached areas of the world.

In the world, bridges are made of wood, stone, concrete, and steel. In the mission, bridges are always made of one substance: a person. A person willing to take the risk to cross whatever barrier may exist with one purpose in mind: to carry the gospel to those who have not heard. Like a bridge, there are challenges: the nature of what needs to be crossed, the distances involved, and the materials needed. It is the same with becoming a human bridge. Some cultures are harder to enter, some languages are harder to learn, and in many cultures, the level of opposition to receiving the truth will be a key factor.

It doesn't matter. We have everything we need to succeed. It may not be with the first person who goes that the gospel is received. It may cost the lives of those building the bridge. I wonder if any bridge is built without some cost involved. Even the cost of a human life. Of course, there are costs. The question is, will we live in such a way that the information is made available and so become the bridge, or be part of building the bridge, so that those who have not heard will hear?

Bible Study – Read the book of Jonah. Jonah was sent to Nineveh. At first, he refused to go. He didn't want the Assyrians to hear the truth and be saved. God did not allow him to make that choice, and so he went. As a result, how many heard? What was the response of the people? What do you think would have happened if he hadn't gone?

Personal Reflection – Is there someone you know who needs you to be a bridge so they can learn about God? What do you need to do so that your life will become that bridge?

Mission thought – if you can find a copy, read even a small portion of the Book of Martyrs. What was the key reason for them risking their lives? What happened because they were willing to sacrifice their life to be a bridge? Do you understand why you can read this material today? How did people being a bridge make this possible?

Pentateuch 24 – Impossible - Sons of Noah

Ge 5:32; 6:10; 7:13; 9-10

If I understand the time correctly, the sons of Noah were born after he was 500 years old. The next 100 years would be the years of the construction of the ark. That means that when Noah began the work, they were babies. That means they never knew a time when their father was not being ridiculed for what he was doing. That and being attacked for the threatening message that he preached during that time. I say this because we are told in 2 Pe 2:5 that Noah was a preacher of righteousness.

We need to pause and consider what their daily life was filled with. First, there was the message of a coming judgment by God. One that would be capable of destroying all life on the

earth because of the vileness of the people (Ge 6:13). So, over and over, they will be hearing this message. Sometimes, in the exact words God used to tell Noah what was coming, as well as many others. Second, there was the instruction to build an ark, something no one had ever seen before, and therefore had no idea how to build. Besides that, it is not just any boat but an immense structure.

So here we have three babies, who become children, then youths, and finally men who are growing up with these two things constantly before them. For me, the idea of an ark and its size clearly suggests that Noah would not be able to build it on his own. He would need the help of others, and in this case, most likely the three sons. I can hardly imagine what this process looked like as they watched their father gather materials. That would be step one. Then begin to shape those materials while teaching them the skills they would need to help their father.

Can you imagine what they thought about all of this? I imagine they thought it was all impossible. An event that would destroy everyone except Noah and his small family. An object so big that it would hold what? They probably had no idea why it had to be so big until one day their father said they would also have to prepare for an unspecified number of animals. This was actually two things in one: build an object so big that it was hard to imagine why, and fill it completely with a vast number of animals, which they had no idea how to accomplish. More than they could imagine.

Now is when things get really interesting. These young men manage to find wives willing to be part of this menagerie of activity. I wish I knew what they used as a pick-up line. ‘Hey, you want to see something spectacular?’ Or the comment of God to Noah in a comedy routine when Noah is complaining, and God says, ‘Do you know how to swim?’ How about something really common, “Do you want to go for a ride with me, one that will take your breath away as well as save it for you?”

Were they part of a few people who maybe still believe? You know, children of the line of Methuselah, who is very much alive, as was mentioned in the previous story. Was he one of the few who believed in Noah and so helped convince three young ladies to listen and marry the three sons of the local crazy man? Did he know that whatever God planned in the way of judgment would happen, and so diligently encouraged them to listen until finally they did and married the three brothers. I wonder what that wedding looked like. Was there a ceremony of some kind? Did anyone bother to come, or if they did come, was it so they could jeer and laugh, making it that much more difficult for these three young ladies to marry the brothers?

However, it all came to be. The brothers found wives and believed what their father said about what God was planning to do. More than that, they all began to help in every way possible to build the ark and then gather the myriad types of food that would be needed.

So many impossibilities for these three. Being expected to believe the impossible, do the impossible, and convince three others to believe as well is another impossible thing. Learning to live with what the world believes to be impossible is a challenge and will easily appear impossible. There is only one way to do the impossible, and that is to trust God to make it possible. Then live and act accordingly, no matter what others believe.

I had a moment like that. I was called by God to be a missionary. When it was time to fill out the application, my wife wrote, “I don’t feel called to be a missionary, but I know my husband is, and I will go with him where the Lord leads him.”

That is what this story is about. The impossibility of following God’s call and message, no matter where it may lead, no matter what it may involve. These three boys, their three wives, as well as Noah’s wife, had to make that decision. God had spoken to their father/husband. They believed and followed him in doing the impossible.

This is what mission is all about: believing in the impossible. God has called us to be his voice, his hands, his presence in the world. He has called us to do this at home, in our community, with the outcasts (that is a challenge filled with all kinds of impossibilities), and to the world. To the world, to do the impossible, at least something truly difficult, learn another language, learn to live in another culture, and do so in such a way that people believe we have been sent by God. To believe that we can build an ark for them so they can be saved.

Build a relationship that reveals God's truth and love in a foreign world with people who don't believe in God, or that if he does exist, he cares.

So do you believe in the impossible? Noah and his family did so; they built the ark, prepared for the unspecified number of animals, and on the day chosen by God, entered the ark and were saved. God has chosen each of us to reveal the ark he has prepared for everyone willing to believe. Our task is to believe this is possible and announce to every tribe and nation so they can be saved.

Bible study – Read Jn 14:11-14. What does Jesus say about belief and how to learn to believe in his words? Now read all of Jn 14 and review your previous answer. The resurrection was an impossible event, but it did happen. We are called to believe in the impossible and live accordingly.

Personal Reflection – Have you ever had someone challenge you by saying they didn't believe you could do something you believed you could do? How did that affect you? Was there anyone who believed you could do it? Again, how did that affect you?

Mission Thought – So do you believe it is possible for people to change? Can they actually be open to hearing God's word? What will convince them to believe in what you are doing and saying so that they will enter into God's presence?

Pentateuch 25 – Mindless - Golden Calf

Ex 32

So here we are on the side of Mt Sinai. Moses has disappeared up the mountain. But not before a number of things have happened. Let me list all that has happened.

- The ten plagues (Ex 7-12)
- Establishment of the Passover (Ex 12)
- The crossing of the Red Sea and destruction of the army of Egypt (Ex 15)
- Water from a bitter well and a rock (Ex 15, 17)
- Manna every day (Ex 16)
- A vast supply of meat (Ex 16)
- Defeat of the Amalekites – simply by keeping Moses hands upraised
- They see God descend on Mt Sinai in fire and smoke and great rumblings
- They are given the 10 commandments and agree to live by them (Ex 20)
- Aaron and 70 elders are allowed to approach and see God (Ex 24)
- Day and night, the pillar of fire and cloud to guide them (Ex 13:21-22). This starts as they begin to leave Egypt.

At this point, Moses ascends the mountain to receive instructions for building the tabernacle and establishing the line of Aaron as high priests (Ex 27-31). At the end of this

time, he received the first set of tablets with the ten commandments inscribed on them.

Things get interesting. After the escape and about three months of travel in the desert, they are at Mt Sinai, the place God chose to do more than just communicate through Moses and a series of miracles. Now they will experience firsthand what it means to have the true God as their god. Wait, that is not quite correct. They have seen what God did to the gods of Egypt (the plagues were designed to reveal the weakness of many of the gods of Egypt). They have seen the power of God over the Red Sea. They have never been without the evidence of God's presence. From the day they began their journey, there has been either a cloud of fire or smoke leading them. A very real evidence of God's presence.

This is quite a list of proof of God's existence, his power, and his concern for their care. So what happens now? Moses is gone for a few days. But he has not gone just anywhere. He is up on the mountain that is covered in fire and smoke because of God's presence. They have received the ten commandments. Seventy of them have gone up the mountain and witnessed the presence of God. Through all of this, the mountain continues to be enveloped in fire and smoke. Every day, the people receive the manna promised.

It is now that God calls Moses into the mountain again. During this time, he receives the instructions related to the building of the tabernacle as well as a copy of the ten commandments written by God on tablets of stone. He is gone for 40 days.

What happens next really doesn't make any sense. They become worried about why Moses is gone. But why should that be a concern? In his absence, the mountain continues to be covered in smoke and fire. The pillars of fire and smoke continue to be evident as a testimony to God's watchfulness. The manna continues to be provided. So why worry about Moses? Life is okay, so why worry?

Yet they do. Consider, though, what they are worried about. They are worried about who will lead them. They also forget that Aaron has played a major role in all of the events. Yet they don't think of him as a possible leader. Instead, they want a god (some object) like those that have been humiliated and proven so inadequate in Egypt. They need a representation, something they can see.

Again, a strange idea, especially when there are 70 people, plus Aaron, who have been in God's presence and know that what they saw cannot be represented by an object. Still, they persist and convince, force, threaten Aaron to make them an idol. They have quickly forgotten the first two commands about honoring only God and not making any idols to represent him. Aaron fails to take a stand and submits. He gathers the gold and creates a calf for them to worship. He has created the first syncretistic event. Bringing together the pattern of belief (that of the Egyptians and others) and that of God. They think this will be alright.

Joshua, who has gone up the mountain and faithfully waits for Moses to return, is confused by the noise coming up from the camp. He thinks it is the sound of war. It is not; it is people

celebrating in a way not approved by God, the presence of their new idol.

God is furious and ready to wipe them all out. Moses pleads for them, and God recants and allows Moses to act. Apparently, not all of the people have agreed to this action. Moses calls the Levites to him, and they go through the camp killing those actively involved in this worship. God still acts, and others, who have been involved, die of a plague.

Why do I take the time to tell you all of this? What is its significance in relation to the mission God has called us to?

Consider this. You are called to carry the gospel to people who do not know God. People who may have any number of superstitions and beliefs in demons and gods. They also may have many objects and rituals they had depended on as means of access to their gods or spirits. As they respond, they will often seek ways to combine their beliefs, traditions, and rituals in some way with the new information they have been given. We call this process syncretism.

The problem of syncretism is a real issue. It will raise its head and create confusion. A prime example of this is what has happened many times in the catholic church and the use of statues to represent the apostles. In several countries where the church banned, by force, the worship of gods and spirits, the people saw these statues and treated them as idols. What they did was replace the name of their god or demon with the name of an apostle and honored that statue with their petitions and offerings. By the time the key leaders became aware of what had happened, they could do little to correct the error.

We have an example of this in the Old Testament. Jephthah promises that if God gives him victory in the battle against his enemy, he will sacrifice the first thing that exits his house upon his return (Jdg 11). Sadly, the first thing that does so is his only child, his daughter. She accepts his decision, prepares herself for the day of her sacrifice, and her father does just that, sacrifices his daughter. Nowhere is there any information that God approved such an action. In fact, one of the main reasons for the complete destruction of a number of the peoples living in the land was this very practice (Le 18:21, 20-2-5; Dt 12:31;18:10).

God's word is very clear. We are not to allow anything to represent God or be used by people as a tool to gain access to God. The Bible is very clear regarding this. The penalty for such practices was very severe in the Old Testament; it was death (Le 20:27). Anyone who tried to introduce such practices and so mislead the people of God was to be stoned (Dt 13:6-10). All through the scriptures, such practices are identified and judged.

People are reluctant to give up past practices, and we will need to be diligent in guiding them in what God sees as acceptable practice. There is no room for magic objects, good luck charms, or anything that would open the way to people combining past belief and practice with the true worship of God.

Bible Study

Read Ez 13:18-20 – Are there objects that people you know use as charms? Why do you think they do so?

Read Ac 8:9-25 – Here is the story of Simon Magus. He tried to buy the power to give the Holy Spirit. What was Peter's response? What do you think would have happened if Peter had not responded in this manner?

Read Ac 13:6-12 – here is the story of Elymas, also called Bar-Jesus. What was Paul's judgment of this man, who was a Jew but practiced sorcery? Why was it so important to make it clear that God did not accept such mixing of the truth with such practices?

Personal Reflection – This is a difficult question, but important. Reflect on your life and consider if there are objects or practices that you treat as a source of power?

Mission Thought – Consider how dangerous it would be to allow someone to maintain such a practice, no matter how innocent it may seem. How could that affect the truth about who God is and our ability to truly experience his love?

What role do pilgrimages and shrines play in confusing people about what God truly wants from them? There are many of these. Could some think that a trip to the Holy Land would be a means to gain God's approval?

Pentateuch 26 – Slave to Free – Former Slaves

Ex, Le, Nu, Dt key theme

This word is used over and over in scripture. Paul talks about it in some very strong ways. He talks about how, before he was saved, he was a slave to sin and under its control (Ro 7). He also talks about being a slave to others for the purpose of bringing them to the Lord (1 Co 9:19). So, what does all this mean?

Let's explore what happened to the people of Israel. In the time of Jacob, there was a severe famine in Canaan, and through all that happened to Joseph, they were able to move to Egypt and enjoy an extended time of freedom and peace. This was because in Canaan, they were still wanderers, not considered a part of any group. They were also small in number, and so it would have been easy for them to have been attacked and everything brought to an end. This is evident by the trouble Isaac had in finding a safe place to live, as seen by the fact that every time he dug a well to find some kind of permanence, people from the region would either take control of it or destroy it (Ge 26). Having a well meant to those around them, the person has the right to live in that place. Later in this chapter, he meets with a key leader who comes and makes a pact with Isaac. In this way, it authorizes Isaac's presence in the land and recognizes his right to the latest well he has dug. But it is not permanent.

So, God arranged for them to go to Egypt and be under the protection of the Pharaoh of Egypt. During most of their time in Egypt, they are safe and multiply, becoming a great number of people. That is, until there is a major change. Another people enter and conquer Egypt and set up a new line of Pharaohs. This line does not have the same history with the people of Israel and so treats them as enemies, making them slaves. Because of the size of the population of Israel, there is the fear that they will rebel, and so the oppression increases. It increased to the point that the people began to cry to be freed. The problem with that is that they have been slaves for so long, they really don't know what freedom is.

They think it means not being slaves and so living as they wish. Such a thing will not be possible if they stay in Egypt. They will always be treated as foreigners and not trusted. Being trusted is a key aspect of being free. I learned to trust myself, something I didn't have to do before because I was not allowed to think for myself. To learn to trust others. Again, not a concept that is part of daily life. You don't trust the slave masters because their only purpose is to control your life, and any action not seen as appropriate is punished. In fact, anything could result in such punishment. Fear of losing control resulted in the death of the male children and other forms of severe treatment. Inability to trust the gods. This was a significant issue for the gods of Egypt, who had one focus: to control the people of Egypt and support only that behavior that maintained their worship. How does one trust any god when all one sees is how such trust results in the Egyptians enslaving one to carry out those purposes?

All this means that they don't really know what freedom is. They will have to be taught that, and they will not learn the lessons easily. To gain their physical freedom requires ten incredible judgments on the people of Egypt before that is possible. The next steps are even more challenging. They must learn what it means to be free to trust others.

The first person they have to learn to trust is Moses. He has led the process of freeing them from physical slavery, but they are still slaves. They don't know how to trust others. Why would this be true? Consider how many times they complain against the one who has been leading them. Instead of simply asking if Moses could present the concern for water and food to the God who provided their freedom, they complain. On a few occasions, they are so angry that they are ready to attack Moses and Aaron. It is interesting how quickly this happens. Part of what is happening is they are listening to others who are willing to lead them, even lead them back to the old slavery. Consider Dathan and Abiram (Nu 16) or the ten spies (Nu 13-14). This even affected Miriam and Aaron, who sought a reason to complain and gain greater control (Nu 12). God's response is severe; all those who followed Dathan and Abiram are punished. All those who heeded the words of the 10 spies, all but the families of Joshua and Caleb, are destined to die in the wilderness (everyone over 21 years of age). Miriam is punished for her and Aaron's actions.

So what is happening? Why do people who have been slaves so readily consider going back into that slavery in one form or another? What are the basic forms that this may take or reveal itself?

1. Others – This is at the top of the list because man is so willing to listen to others. In the garden, Eve and then Adam heeded the serpent and not God. Many are ready to support Dathan and Abiram. Almost all of the people are ready to follow the 10 spies and not the 2 who preferred to follow God and the one chosen by God. Why? Mainly in the hopes of gaining what they wanted or once had.
2. Enemies – This may be surprising, but it actually happened. Balaam was not able to curse the people of Israel, but he found a way to involve them in false worship. According to Rev 2:14, he enticed the people into sexual immorality with the hope of gaining the prize offered him (2 Pet 2:15). God's response to this is found in Nu 25:1-10.
3. Our desires – when we are lacking something we desire or enjoyed in the past, it can easily become a focal point that will lead us into actions and decisions that are contrary to what is good and right. (Reread the section on the golden calf in a previous chapter on this.)
4. Power - This was a key issue behind the rise of Dathan and Abiram. They thought Moses and Aaron had too much and wanted more. (Read God's response in Nu 16.)
5. Basic needs – this became a central issue over and over. At one point, it created such frustration in Moses and Aaron that they overstepped their authority in providing water (Nu 20:1-12).

I am sure we can think of other things that will encourage us, tempt us to be willing to submit to those who we think can

supply what we want, instead of considering what God has done and is willing to provide. We all too quickly return to being slaves to people and things that really have no concern for our well-being but only the opportunity to exert control over our lives.

This is a temptation that all who work in missions will face. It will take two forms. The temptation on the part of the worker to take control and provide what they think is needed. This happens over and over and creates not dependency on God but dependency on a person or group. I know of a person in a country who has done this and taught many churches under his care and influence to depend on visitors to provide for their needs and more. They have become both spiritual and physical slaves. Spiritual because they do not depend on God but on others. Physical, because instead of caring for their own needs, they wait for others to provide material goods and finances.

I saw it in another country, where basically a foreign worker bribed people to leave one church to join his church so he could have a good report for his superiors. This worked for a while, and the people submitted, at least until the supplies ran out. The problem was that these people did not trust in God nor in those whom God would send to them to teach the truth. Fortunately, the pastors of the church who were losing people to bribery remained faithful, and slowly, the people saw the difference and began to return.

Keep in mind, we are called to care for those in need. The key is not to turn them into slaves again but to help them learn how to trust God and become servants, true citizens of heaven,

based on the love they experience and not on the things that they may receive.

Bible Study – Read Ph 1:15-18. Consider what selfish ambition means and reflect on how the motives of those who serve in this way could affect the development of the church.

Read Ro 16:17-18 and Ph 2:3. Now explain the importance of what Paul says in 1 Co 13:3-4.

Personal Reflection – We all want to be appreciated and honored. The problem is that all too often it leads to slavery, ours and those we want to appreciate. Why is this true?

Mission thought – Consider carefully the risks of people learning to depend on you as an outsider and not on God. Why is this a risky action? What will happen when you leave because your time of service is over, and it is time to return home?

Pentateuch 27 –The Reality of Resistance – Pharaoh

Ex 1-14

Tell me, have you always been willing to do what you were told to do? Have your parents ever talked about you having a temper tantrum as a child? You know that activity that involves shouting, stamping, lying on the ground, and just

putting on as nasty a show as you can because you didn't get what you wanted?

I saw another one the other day. The child just fell to the ground and started screaming about what they wanted, and the parent had refused to give them. I have seen others where the child actually begins to hit or kick their parent in anger over not getting what they want. Oh, and I need to mention a favorite of many, and this one is used well into adulthood: the Sulk. You know what I mean: the ugly face, the refusal to respond to any comment, the rejection of contact, even turning one's back on the person who denied them what they wanted. In fact, it is often carried to the point of stomping away, locking oneself in another room, turning up music, TV, or some device so that any comments cannot be heard, and making their dissatisfaction as noticeable as possible.

Don't tell me you have never done such a thing, never had a tantrum. Adults have often taken tantrums to new levels of expression. Adults become pros at the Sulk, the isolation act, the cross words tactic, and the maneuver of being uncooperative. The phone disconnect technique has evolved from simply ending a call to slamming the phone down to create a painful noise. Should I go on? I am sure each of us has our own technique on how to react when we don't get what we want.

The other side of this is when we decide we don't want to do what we are being told to do. We react the same way, throwing a tantrum to express our feelings and using any number of tactics to avoid doing what we have been told to

do. Most famous of these is pretending we didn't hear what was being said.

Well, Pharaoh shows all of the signs of having a tantrum. He is both not getting what he wants and does not want to do what he is being told to do. He lets people suffer or waits for things to get so bad that he cannot avoid giving in, only to once again start pouting and preparing to throw another tantrum. He doesn't want to listen to God. He doesn't want to give up his slave force. He doesn't care if his personal desires affect and hurt others.

He lets the water become blood, he lets the frogs come and die, he lets them spoil and produce gnats. Then there are the flies, a disease that kills cows, and boils. When those don't work, then it is the hailstones, the locusts, and darkness. One tantrum after another and one more bad situation after another. The question always is, to those watching, when will it end and who will win? In the end, Pharaoh loses twice over. He loses his firstborn along with the rest of Egypt, then loses the army that has conquered the world and made Egypt great.

Now you are wondering if this is about a tantrum? Yes, it is. Pharaoh wants what he wants and is unwilling to let go and submit to a greater authority. Just like the child throwing a tantrum does not submit to the authority of the greater authority, the parent. Just like people pouting and such do not want to give in to another person, who may or may not be in the right, but that is not the point. It is a refusal on a serious

level to submit and obey the directions of another person. Also, the consequences of such actions can escalate as well.

When it comes to childish tantrums, it is a challenge to deal with. Sometimes the parent just lets the tantrum run its course; often the child finally gives up. It is hard to maintain a tantrum. It takes a lot of energy to make noise, lie on the ground and act out, and of course, energy to resist the parent pulling them along. In an adult, tantrums in the form of pouting and moping, avoiding people, and being difficult also require energy, a lot of emotional energy that is draining on both parties. In both forms, there is little concern for how one's behavior affects others.

The key idea in each of these is about resistance. I want what I want, and I will resist any effort to make me conform to what someone else may want. If the parent yields, then there will be more tantrums, and they will become more embarrassing and applied to more and more settings. The child gains control, and until they cross a particular line, it will continue escalating.

In this case, Pharaoh keeps pushing for what he wants. He gives in, but thinks he will try again. Each time the situation escalates, and it gets worse and worse.

Now, what does this have to do with missions?

Consider this. We want people to listen to us. If they don't, we could become like adults who pout, mope, isolate, or take any other action to avoid those who are resistant to their words and actions. Instead of dealing with the resistance, we

may look for someone who is more open, more receptive. Now, how many parents and others would prefer to do the same thing? Instead of dealing with the resistance that a tantrum represents, just ignore it and move on, in the false hope that it will go away.

Truthfully, we all want it to work this way. We treat those who are resistant as if they are throwing a tantrum or being childish. The wise parent knows that ignoring what is happening will not resolve anything. It must be dealt with. Why? It is because the issues involved are critical for the ongoing development of the parent-child relationship or the adult-adult relationship. If not, then the consequences are serious in terms of emotional development and maturity.

Now consider Pharaoh again. Imagine what would have happened if, in fact, he had chosen to listen. His people would not have suffered. His land would not have suffered. He would not have lost his son. I realize that we are told that God had hardened his heart, and that was not going to happen. Yet, you don't harden someone's heart if there is not already a basis for that. Even so, what we have is God using that to reveal the depth of Pharaoh's problem and to reveal how far God was ready to go to reveal himself and his concern for the people of Israel.

Now consider what happens if you let that person remain resistant and don't do what is necessary to help them know God and his love. They can become an example to others around them that what we have to say is not that important. Especially if we look for the easy win. While they do need

the truth, there may be something in the easy win that, though they respond, will not allow those sharing the truth to reach beyond them. These people may not be recognized by others as a viable source of information, for any number of reasons.

But if we are faithful to pursue the resistant, like the parent who handles the tantrum of their child correctly, doors will open. People will be watching to see how we do in handling those who are resistant. We need to deal with the issues because. The situation is like the parent with the child throwing a tantrum, there are other children watching, their own and those of other parents. They are watching to see what happens. If the child wins, then those watching may try the same tactic to get what they want.

Those watching how we handle those who are resistant are watching as well. How we handled them and if we are persistent in showing our love and sharing God's love with them will determine how others respond as well. The hope is that it will not go the way of Pharaoh, and they won't yield to God's love. It will happen yet; others will respond because we have been faithful in caring about them and trying to help them see the truth. In Egypt, there were those who watched and instead of remaining true to their pharaoh and their past beliefs chose to leave and follow the people of Israel into the desert and learn about the one true God.

Bible Study

Read 2 Ki 5 and the story of Naaman. What instructions was he given if he wanted to be healed? What did it take for him

to heed the instructions? Now read Jesus comment about Naaman in Lk 4:7. Why did Jesus make this comment?

Read Lk 11:29-32. How does this passage relate to the concept of dealing with the resistant?

Personal Reflection – Do you require people to go through a process of actions before you will respond to them? Why do you do that? How do you respond to those who say no to your requests?

Mission thought – Man is by nature resistant to the truth. Why is this true? Evaluate all that God has done to overcome this resistance in pursuing the lost. How will this knowledge change how you treat those who are fleeing God and need to learn about his love and forgiveness?

Pentateuch 28 – blinded by fear - Ten Spies

Nu 13, 14

As I read this story, I see three things that are of importance to take note of. They are, in no particular order of importance, past experience, potential benefit, and risks involved. These three things affect almost every decision we make in our lives. Probably all of them. Some to a greater extent than others.

Past experience is that which informs us about many areas. Past experience covers the successes and failures that have been part of life. These will either cause us to be afraid because of what has happened when we fail. This may lead to a desire to avoid trying in order to avoid another failure and its negative consequences. At the same time, it can lead us to be willing to try more and different activities because of the benefits that come from our past success. There is also another aspect, and that is that none of our past experience relates to what is currently happening in our lives. With no correlation, we find ourselves a bit adrift and struggling to know how to proceed.

Still, even with success in our past, we can find it difficult to move forward. The ten spies had been part of many success stories. They had seen how God could defeat the Amalekites in spite of their lack of knowledge of how to conduct war and their lack of training in the various skills involved in war. Remember, they were used to hoes, hammers, and the tools related to farming, making bricks, and hauling materials. No chance to practice how to use a spear and sword. Even if they had time, they had no access to such items. Of course, what child doesn't pick up a stick and make believe? I guarantee that playing with a stick and a real weapon are not the same. Two sticks banging together is nothing like two swords of steel clanging. Also, if you get hit with a stick, at worst, you will have a nasty bruise. That cannot be had from getting hit with a sword or spear.

They had also seen God bring all the plagues. They had seen water come from a rock, manna appear in the morning, and

uncountable numbers of quail land in their midst, all so they could be satisfied and stop complaining. Yet for some reason, this past experience wasn't enough. Even though they confronted a much less fearsome enemy compared to the army of Egypt. Maybe they expected God to just remove them even as they spied out the land.

Now apply this to mission work. For the most part, our past experience, while incredible, doesn't compare to what we will be facing as we enter another culture. As we learn another language. As we realize that we are far from any support we normally would expect from friends, family, and colleagues. We have never fought this battle to gain approval at this level. Not just from those who are already leaning our way and on our side. You know the people, parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, friends, teachers, and so on. Not that they aren't available. They pray, they write notes, and maybe we can talk. (actually, that has become a lot easier. Sadly, though, this is more often used as an escape. We check out for a period of time to chat, talk, and share videos of stuff. We run away.)

Everything looks great, but there are challenges. There are giants. Our food, housing, and other normal aspects of life exist. The problem is that there are giants. It's not the same food, it's not the same kind of house and neighborhood. It is not the same climate, transportation, and so on. And those are the small giants. In all of this, we are not even dealing with the culture and language, only what we perceive from afar.

Just like the spies, we all too quickly abandon and forget the successes of past experience and run.

Potential benefits – of these, there were many. First and foremost, though not mentioned, there was enough land for everyone to have a place and space, unlike Egypt, where they were probably confined to specific places with limited space to do much beyond care for themselves in a minimalist manner. Not by choice, as has been promoted. Things like the tiny homes, basic diet from your own garden, and other ways of living a simpler life. Being slaves means little space, little privacy, actually little of everything that would make life nicer, easier.

The spies see this and see the productivity of the land. They also see that it provides options for all the different lifestyles. There are cities where those with skills in crafts can settle and work. There are open areas that are perfect for people with sheep and cattle. The land is incredibly productive. It takes two men to carry one bunch of grapes. Now that is one big bunch of grapes. Really, how could they turn all that down after having to eat manna every day, cry for water because there was always a shortage in the desert, and if you were yearning for meat? Well, you can't kill all your livestock because you have a hankering for meat. If you did that, then it doesn't matter how good the pastureland will be; you will have no animals to raise on it.

But there are giants. They are used to planting leeks and onions. They are used to receiving grain and other supplies from the slave masters. Why? Because what slave has

enough time to plant a wheat field or cornfield, then take care of it when every moment of the day you are a slave doing what the master wants. Actually, you may plant a crop, but it's not yours.

Now there is enough land that everyone can plant what they want. But there are giants. Truthfully, they may not have any idea of the seasons and so may worry about what to plant and when to plant it. Remember, in Egypt, planting and harvest did not have to do with local climate but with the flooding of the Nile to provide the water needed. There is no Nile River along with its system of canals for watering. This land has mountains and only a few rivers. So, the climate and the lack of understanding of it and what can be grown are giants. Did they think of this? It is not mentioned, but I can imagine it was a concern for many. That and the fact that in this journey, they are not getting lessons on agriculture and free-range feeding of animals. It is a desert, and you take what you get.

When we enter a new place, it is with this concept in mind that our work will be fruitful. That the seeds we plant will grow and produce. That is what we hope and plan for. That is how we see things in a spyglass from far away. Then we face reality. We don't know how or where to plant and work. The process is more complicated than we anticipated. There is limited access to those we want to work with.

A case in point is the many ministries among Muslims that are talking about how open Muslims are. They tell us stories about people responding in numbers and how open the door

is. Then you find yourself face-to-face with a Muslim and learn the cost and time involved in seeing the production of such fruit.

The truth is that no matter where you go, it will be the same. The way you shared the gospel and lived your life in your home culture will not be the same in your host culture. There may be great possibilities, but you will have to learn how to plant and cultivate the seed in new ways and maybe foreign ways to your past experience. That can become a giant if your focus is on your abilities and not what God can do through one who is obedient and willing.

Then there are the risks. That this would even be an issue is rather amazing. Keep in mind all that has happened. The slave masters have not just been defeated but destroyed as they looked on. So serious was the destruction that there was no chance that Egypt would recover soon enough to be a threat to them. In fact, it would be a very long time indeed before Egypt reappears on the international scene. There is no reference to them until the time of Solomon. Here we find a reference to him marrying a daughter of Pharaoh in order to seal a treaty between them (1 Ki 3:1).

They have been given power over those who sought to attack them as they journeyed through the wilderness. An example of this was the defeat of the Amalekites (Ex 17:10-13). Take note that this occurred between the crossing of the Red Sea and the arrival at Mt Sinai. A time when they were ill-prepared for such a conflict, but God gave them the victory.

They have also seen how God could provide all they needed in a hostile and desolate environment. So why be afraid of a few giants? Why worry about a few walled cities? Why should you worry about such minor groups of people? Minor in comparison to the nation of Egypt. Yet all they could see was themselves. A huge number of people (quite possibly in the millions), the number of fighting men listed in the census was over 600,000 [Nu 1:46], traveling without opposition or hindrance in the desert. So how could they see themselves as grasshoppers by comparison?

But that is how we feel. We, instead of remembering God and all He has done, choose instead to look at ourselves and what we can do, or more often, what we cannot do. We see ourselves as limited in ability, strength, and resources. To be honest, this is the true way to think about oneself. Honestly, we are limited in ability, strength, and resources. We do not have ‘what it takes’ to carry out the task given to us of carrying the gospel to the world. We too quickly forget all that has been done by God and his Son, as well as the promise that the Holy Spirit will provide the power and resources we need.

A foreign country is just that, foreign. That is probably what causes us to forget all that God has done and promised. We also lose sight of the blessings that will be available as we accept the risks and learn about all the blessings that are visible from afar and can become a reality once we accept the risks and go where we are sent.

Biblical study

Read Dt 2:25 and consider what God promised to do. Can you apply this promise to where God has called you to go? This promise is repeated in Dt 11:25 and 25:18. Why do you think Moses repeated this promise?

Read Ps 91. Consider what God promises to those who are his children. Is there anything that God is not prepared to do so that we will experience the blessings He has prepared for those who are willing to go where He sends them?

Personal reflection

Have you ever been afraid of something and then found an excuse to avoid doing it?

Moses was afraid to do what God asked him to do. What was his excuse? What did God promise to do for him? Ex 3.

Have there been others in the Bible who were afraid to do what God asked? Find one and read their story, and what God did to help them overcome their fear.

Mission Thought

It is never easy to enter the world of another culture. Think about what could be the giants that cause fear in the hearts of those being called. Read Jn 14 and 15 and consider what God has promised to do for those who are his children.

Pentateuch 29 – 40 times 2 – Moses

Ex 24:18; Ex 36:28

What is the longest time you have ever gone without food? A day, two days, what about a week? Did you also go without water? I suspect that you didn't. Skipping a meal happens, often without planning. You know what I mean. You got so busy that there was no time. You got so focused on what you were doing and did not want to stop. You wanted to finish while everything was going well. The people you are with did not stop for a meal. Or the culture where you may be living doesn't eat three meals a day, so if you are with them, you end up skipping whatever meal they don't eat.

Why do you willingly skip a meal? I have mentioned a couple above. Busy, focused, influence of others. In many religious structures, skipping meals is called fasting. It is usually done for key reasons: participating in a religious practice, to seek an encounter with whatever spiritual reality is part of your belief structure, to develop a better understanding of who you are, as part of a spiritual experience like focused meditation on a key area of life or concern.

Now, let us consider what Moses experienced. From what I can see from the information, Moses was not planning on a forty-day period of fasting. God called him to come into the mountain, and we are simply told that he was there for forty days and nights without food (Ex 24:18, Dt 9:9). During this time, he received the instructions for the construction of the

tabernacle, various laws, and the first copy of the ten commandments etched in stone. In anger over the sin of the people, he destroyed this set. At this point, he tells the people he will return to the Lord to beseech his forgiveness for the people, whereupon he spends another forty days and nights fasting before the Lord (Dt 9:18-20) and receives the second copy of the ten commandments.

What was the point of this time alone? Alone in the sense that there were no other people present, just him and God. Did Moses know what to expect? Or did he simply obey God's call for him to come up into the mountain? This is the key concept. God called him to come before Him, and Moses went. It says that by the end of the second time, we are told that Moses face was radiant because he had spoken to the Lord and been in the Lord's presence (Ex 34:29-30). This became a pattern for Moses. After each time he spent time before the Lord in the Tabernacle, we are told that his face shone (Ex 34:34-35), and when he came out, he would put a veil over his face.

We know of only two other occasions where this happened. The most significant was during the transfiguration when Jesus met with Moses and Elijah (Mt 17:2; Mk 9:2-3; Lk 9:29-31). The other was the face of the Lord in the revelation of John (Re 1:16). Paul does mention seeing a light whose brilliance blinded him. A brilliance tied to the voice of the Lord when he had his encounter on the road to Damascus (Ac 9:3-8; 22:6-11).

This idea of the light of God shining in us is highlighted in a number of the teachings of Jesus. We are told to let our light shine so that men can see the source of our good deeds and praise God (Mt 5:16). Jesus talking about the end times tells us that the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of God (Mt 13:41). John the Baptist is described as a light shining in the darkness for all to see (Jn 5:35). Paul tells us that as children of God we are to shine like stars as we hold out the world of life (Ph 2:15-16).

So what is the connection between all of this and fasting? Especially when the only time it appears to be connected is related to Moses' time of fasting twice for 40 days, and as a result of his being in the presence of God when in the tabernacle (in which fasting was not mentioned as part of this).

The point is that the people could easily see that Moses had been in the presence of God by the fact that his face shone or glowed. This unsettled the people. If it hadn't, there would have been no need for Moses to wear a veil in their presence. Being in God's presence had a notable impact on the physical state of Moses. An Impact that was readily visible to others. Covering his face did not hide the fact that Moses had been in God's presence. It actually made it even more evident. So, whether they saw the veil or saw his face, they knew he was spending time with God, and it changed his physical appearance. It seems sad that they were so affected by this. Instead of rejoicing in the fact that God was near, it created fear and a desire to have such evidence of God's presence hidden. If such a thing were even possible.

Consider now our lives and how we are to reveal Christ. First, keep in mind that Jesus told us that He is the light of the world both in Jn 8:12 and 9:5. He then states that those who follow Him will have the light of life within them. So if we are truly following Christ and he dwells in us as he promised (Jn 14:23), then His light should shine in us. If that is so, then His statement that we are the light of the world makes sense. In Mt 5:14, Jesus says that we are the light of the world. In Mt 6:22 He states that if our eyes are good and full of light then our body will be full of the light of God.

We are to be the visible presence of God. Our light, which is God in us, is supposed to be evident for all to see. God created us for this purpose, 2 Cor 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

So, Moses presents us with a clear idea of how this is made possible. It is as we spend time with God that God is able to work in our hearts and lives and so change us, or rather restores us to the original state in which we were created, his image. This means we have the ability to shine, to reveal God to those around us.

Our lives should be just that, a visible reflection of God. A light that those around us can see and which will allow them to see, and so know, the reality of a God who loves us and wants to be a part of our lives. It should be evident in our words, our actions, in every aspect of our lives. People should see and realize that there is something different about

who we are, and little by little, have the darkness of their own hearts pushed aside so they can see God.

Paul calls us to be blameless so that we can shine like stars as we hold out the word of truth (Ph 2:15). This was the work of John the Baptist to testify of the light (Jn 1:6-9). In the same way, we are the proof of the light. The key difference is that Jesus had not come yet. With His coming, we are not to testify to the light but to that light dwelling in us.

Am I repeating myself? Good because we need to hear this. We need to be like Moses. We need to be so much in God's presence and his light in us that we can truly be a light for others to see. Unlike Moses, we should not veil the light but be vigilant in allowing it to shine for all to see. To be as Jesus said, a light for all to see (Mt 5:14-16).

Bible Study

Read Mt 6:22-23 and Lk 11:34-35 – Consider what causes a person to be filled with darkness. How does our being filled with light overcome that darkness?

Read Jn 1:5-8 – Consider what it means to shine in the darkness. What is the danger of a person trying to be light in their own strength?

Personal Reflection –

Do you know what darkness is really like? Have you ever been to a place where there is absolutely no light, like a cave? How does that feel? Now look at the people around

you, the ones who don't know Christ, and reflect on what it means for them to be in spiritual darkness. How does fasting and being in God's presence affect your ability to be light in the darkness?

Mission Thought

The religions and false beliefs of the world are what create darkness in the world. They work hard to eliminate any light that may shine. What form of darkness do you encounter in your world? Do you know how to respond to that darkness and bring light?

Pentateuch 30 – unpayable - Passover: The Cost

Ex 12; Nu 9

So, what is the most expensive surgery that is being performed today? Is it a heart transplant, kidney transplant, liver transplant, or some other replacement of a body part? Could it be related to trying to remove cancerous tissue from a difficult location? Is it based on the technology needed, the number of people involved, the location of what is being done, or how long it will take to complete the procedures involved?

Switch gears. What is the most expensive item available for purchase? I am not talking about collector's items, which can have values unrelated to the real value of the item. Could it be

a massive piece of equipment, an oil tanker, a cruise ship, a rocket, or maybe some incredibly delicate and intricate piece of space equipment?

Now, what would you be willing to sacrifice, pay, or exchange for any of the things listed above?

God was about to exact a price for the liberty of his people. Everyone was expected to pay, even the Hebrews. Yes, if they did not do exactly as directed, they would experience the same plague as the Egyptians. No one was excluded from the judgment to come. The cost for freeing the people, the life of the firstborn of everyone, yes, everyone living in Egypt. That is a pretty heavy price to pay for the freedom of an enslaved people.

There would only be one exception: those who followed the instructions exactly as related to the sacrifice of what came to be called the Passover lamb. Seems like a small price to pay for the life of the firstborn in your family. A family that could include a grandfather, father, and son who were all firstborn.

(Side note: I wonder how many Hebrews did not pay attention and so paid the higher price. I also wonder if any of the Egyptians learned of what was about to happen and how they could avoid the one price by paying the other. Remember, there was a group of Egyptians that joined the people of Israel as they left Egypt.)

Keep in mind that the price of this first event would be small in comparison to the expectation that this price was to be paid every year until God said enough. That is going to be a lot of

lambs when you count the years from the first Passover to the crucifixion of Jesus. Even with that, for the Jews who did not believe in that sacrifice, the Passover lamb continued to be sacrificed. It is called an act of remembrance, but in many ways, it is still a payment. By the time you reach the current year, a lot has been sacrificed to pay for the freedom, the continued freedom of the chosen people

Also, keep in mind that when they failed to fulfill this requirement, a requirement that was a central part of the Mosaic law, they were punished. They were subjugated to other nations and finally exiled. They were allowed to return but were once again banished from the land until recent history.

Oh, and if that is not enough of a payment, there are the annual sacrifices that were to be carried out. The key is the atonement sacrifice, which, like the Passover lamb, was to be made every year for the nation. Another huge number of sacrifices for the purpose of maintaining the relationship with the One who rescued them from slavery. Also, every time there was a sin identified, another sacrifice and again a multitude of sheep, goats, doves, cattle, and grain (for the poor).

That is a lot of payment. Payment to save a people and then keep them safe in the presence of a righteous and loving God. I emphasize loving because that was the reason behind all of this.

This rescue at the original event was going to be incredibly expensive. Sin is like that. The price is far beyond what we can even imagine or comprehend.

Now, if you think that was pricey, consider this. This was the price for just one people among the multitudes of tribes and people that have existed throughout human history. Jesus asked a couple of critical questions in Mark 8:36-37.

What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? 37 Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

How does one determine the value of a soul, a single person? Review what has been said about what God expected of the people of Israel, no, not the tribe as a whole, but of each individual in the tribe as payment. First, for their rescue from slavery. Second, for them to maintain a relationship that would keep them safe. Finally, what did that mean in terms of the impact of each sacrifice made on the following generations?

We don't involve ourselves in animal sacrifice anymore. That, in truth, was not completely successful. It had to be repeated over and over and over and over with no end in sight. We don't because a person, a perfect person, a holy person, a willing person, sacrificed himself for us. He paid the debt, and we are able to be freed from the horrible cycle of reminders and payment.

Because of that, if we are willing, we can perform our own sacrifice. We can sacrifice our rights and freedom so that others will be able to receive the blessing of the sacrifice of Jesus. Paul was glad to do this; he was willing to die for the sake of people hearing the gospel (Ph 1:21).

So, what is the value of your neighbor in terms of eternity? What price is worth paying to rescue even one from an eternity without God? An eternity in Hell?

Bible Study

Read Hebrews 11. What does it tell you about the importance of the sacrifice given for you?

Personal Reflection

Read Eph 5:2. Are you a fragrant sacrifice? What does it mean to live a life of love?

Mission thought

So, what is the price that must be paid if we are to reach the world and let them know that the debt they have has been paid?