

Message Reflections

a little something extra to keep you connected to Jesus this week

Message Reflections accompany the [weekly message](#).

In Exodus 24, we learn that while God was talking to Moses up on Mt. Sinai and writing the 10 Commandments on tablets, the Israelites had become anxious and impatient. In their fretting, they decided the best thing to do was to make an idol for themselves and revert back to their old methods of worship.

Those silly Israelites...right? How dumb are they? Can you believe those guys?! God had just sent the 10 plagues, freed them from slavery, parted the Red Sea and killed their enemies, fed them manna from heaven, guided them in a pillar of cloud by day (providing shade in the scorching desert sun) and a pillar of fire by night (providing light and heat during the cold desert nights) and still their faith wavered. How could they ever doubt their magnificent and faithful God?

I do the very same thing more often than I'd like to admit. I forget that God showed up in my life in times where I didn't see any other way. I forget that He rescued me from bondage when no one or nothing else could. I forget that He has never abandoned me. He has never let me down. He has never failed me, EVER. But...I get anxious and impatient. I want answers NOW not in His "perfect timing" because I happen to think MY timing is pretty darn perfect. If we could just do things my way, things would really be great. My prayers start to sound more like entries into a suggestion box than supplications.

Years ago my husband and I were living our way as opposed to God's way. We "believed" in God but didn't involve Him in our plans or our daily comings and goings. I found myself with everything I ever wanted: an education, a career I loved, travel, a comfortable lifestyle, a husband who adored me, beautiful and healthy children, a beautiful home. I was checking things off my list left and right, baby! Everything I thought would make me happy I had achieved by my own careful planning and skill. I did it my way...like the old Sinatra song goes. In reality, I was so depressed and angry, I could hardly enjoy any of it. We were in tens of thousands of dollars in debt that would drown us in two years' time. There were sins in our life that were threatening to devour our marriage. We were so lost and didn't even know it. Slowly we began to turn to God and He began to reveal His character to us.

“Yahweh! The Lord! The god of **compassion** and **mercy**! I am **slow to anger** and **filled with unfailing love** and **faithfulness**. I **lavish love** to a thousand generations. I **forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin**. But I do not excuse the guilty. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children and grandchildren; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations.” (Exodus 34:6-7). He is always ready to welcome us back and forgive us.

I recently heard that God loves us deeply but that He is our father in heaven NOT our grandfather in heaven. He’s not there to make us happy like a good grandpa with candy and late bedtimes. He loves us and forgives us but He fully expects our obedience out of our love for Him. He expects us to act right. Our rebellion has very deep consequences not only for our relationship with God and others but for generations to come. I’ve seen it in my own family. I have an aunt and uncle who have strayed from the faith. Their children and their children’s children have all suffered the consequences of their choices over and over again. I don’t necessarily believe that God is punishing them, though He would have the right to do so, but that this is just the reality of sin. The consequence of sin is death just like a terrible cancer or uncontrolled addiction. Nothing good or lasting will ever come from it. Since sin leads to death, God saw to it to leave us instructions on how to obey (the 10 commandments) and an example of how to love (through Jesus). John 15 reads,

*“I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. **2** He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. **3** You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. **4** Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.*

***5** “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. **6** Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. **7** But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! **8** When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.*

***9** “I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. **10** When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. **11** I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! **12** This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. **13** There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. **14** You are my friends if you*

*do what I command. **15** I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. **16** You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. **17** This is my command: Love each other."*

It's so simple. You want joy? Then love and obey God and love others. The end! The secret to life has been unveiled for us in scripture! Before I had placed the Lord in His rightful place in my life, I had placed other things there: my intellect, my abilities, my relationships, my control, my success. All of these were idols just like the golden calf the Israelites built for themselves. I loved and obeyed myself and yet I had NO JOY. There's only one way...Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

Questions for further discussion:

- 1) What are the miracles in your life that remind you of God's character in times when you get anxious and impatient?
- 2) Do you remember a time when God's way was shown to be better than your own way?
- 3) What are some idols in your life that try to take God's place?
- 4) Do you agree or disagree with the statement, "You want joy? Then love and obey God and love others. The end!" Why or why not?