

## EXODUS, Chapter 18 1-21-18

### *Effective Leadership*

In our continuing journey thru the second book of Moses we come to chapter 18 in which we get to know something of the family of Moses. Moses remember, grew up in the palace of Egypt, but at the age of 40 he killed a man and fled that country out of fear for his life and spent the next forty years in the desert of Midian where he met a girl named Lady Bird. Her name in Hebrew is *Zipporah* and she was the daughter of Jethro. And, if you were around in the 60s you find both *Lady Bird* and *Jethro* to be comical names. Jethro is described as being the priest of Midian. We do not know what kind of priest. It is possible that he was a pagan priest. It is also possible that he was some kind of minister to the true and living God as well. The last we heard of him was when Moses left Midian to return to Egypt. **1-2** *Now Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt.* <sup>2</sup> *Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Moses' wife Zipporah, after he had sent her away.* Presumably, to protect his family, Moses had sent them back to Midian during the crisis in Egypt. Now, Jethro brings his daughter back to Moses **3-27** *And her two sons, of whom one was named Gershom, for Moses said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."* <sup>4</sup> *The other was named Eliezer, for he said, "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh."* <sup>5</sup> *Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was camped, at the mount of God.* <sup>6</sup> *He sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her."* <sup>7</sup> *Then Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and he bowed down and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent.* <sup>8</sup> *Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had befallen them on the journey, and how the LORD had delivered them.* <sup>9</sup> *Jethro rejoiced over all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, in delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians.* <sup>10</sup> *So Jethro said, "Blessed be the LORD who delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians."* <sup>11</sup> *Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people."* <sup>12</sup> *Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses' father-in-law before God.* <sup>13</sup> *It came about the next*

day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening. <sup>14</sup> Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?" <sup>15</sup> Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. <sup>16</sup> When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws." <sup>17</sup> Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you are doing is not good. <sup>18</sup> You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. <sup>19</sup> Now listen to me: I will give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people's representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, <sup>20</sup> then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do. <sup>21</sup> Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. <sup>22</sup> Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. <sup>23</sup> If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace." <sup>24</sup> So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said. <sup>25</sup> Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. <sup>26</sup> They judged the people at all times; the difficult dispute they would bring to Moses, but every minor dispute they themselves would judge. <sup>27</sup> Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way into his own land.

Go back to verse 14. Here was Moses, who used to be a shepherd for his father in-law, now he is the leader of a great nation. He had a chance to show Jethro what he had become. Here was his opportunity to impress Dad. Moses opens court there in the desert and sits as judge over the people all day long, probably thinking how pleased his father in-law must be to see what an important job he had. And so I expect the reaction of Jethro came as a surprise to Moses. 14 Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?" That sounds like something you would say to your kids. What are

you doing Moses? The question has the ring of disapproval doesn't it? Indeed Jethro did not approve. He appreciated the effort of Moses but not his smarts or his style. He basically tells him that he is going about his job all wrong. Jethro, you see, is the world's first management consultant. Not that he was hired to do this. He wasn't even asked to do this, but Jethro volunteered the information because he saw that Moses needed it.

May I suggest this is the kind of thing we all need. Whether you lead a nation, a church, an office, a family or even just your own life, one of the most helpful things you can experience is to have somebody take a critical look at what you are doing and how you are doing it. There are things you just cannot see from your perspective. I know that is true for me, and I have benefited from the input of others. Moses was so busy working hard he couldn't see his lack of efficiency. He needed this kind of advice desperately. But here is a fact—most of us never get it. We never get it, and the reason we never get it is that we either don't want it or don't think it's necessary. We get so wrapped up in doing our work the same way we always have that we don't even take time to think about increasing efficiency. Man, I'm just trying to get through today, don't talk to me about next year. We don't have time to examine and plan and adjust. At least that is what we think. Let me tell ya, I understand that. I sympathize with you. When you transition to a new style of working the transition takes lots of time and you get even farther behind than you were. But the fact is that, in the long run, we don't have time not to examine and plan and adjust. We need somebody to come along side us and say, "What are you doing?" We need to take time ourselves to step back and look critically at the way we are spending money and spending time and raising the kids. Part of that involves study. While I'm reading a book on effective parenting I'm not doing much direct parenting but it's probably the best way I can love my children. Hire a sitter if you need to but study what godly parenting is. When I'm reading a book on church leadership I'm not leading the church but it's probably the best thing I can do for the church. The fisherman who mends his nets isn't catching any fish, the lumberjack who sharpens his ax isn't cutting any trees but they are making themselves more effective. I'm saddened by how few husbands and wives and parents give careful thought to what they are doing. I'm saddened by how few church leaders attend to the words of the wise. And we excuse it by claiming to be too busy. Don't make that mistake.

Years down the road I bet Moses looked back on this insight from Jethro as an absolute life-saver, as a turning point in his life. It was so important to him that he included it in his book. It

really doesn't fit. There are no miracles in chapter 18. There are no military victories and no commandments from God. But Moses and the Spirit that led him thought this was important. Question: the stuff Jethro taught Moses about how to manage the people, was this a spiritual lesson? Huh? Was Jethro even a spiritual man? I mean, Jethro had never met with God like Moses what could he tell Moses? And Jethro doesn't quote the Bible one time. So, why should Moses listen to him? Because he spoke from sincere concern and vast experience and common grace insight. As a Christian leader there is a lot I can learn from a Jim Collins or a Seth Godin. I would not read their books uncritically but God can teach important lessons through all kinds of instruments. Even, get this, even through a relative. I mean it says a lot for the character and humility of Moses that he was open to instruction from an in-law. Some of you would refuse to take good counsel just because it came from a relative, or a similar source. 24 *Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said.* Again, this is Moses, who had met with God at the burning bush and carried on these running conversations with the Almighty. I expect there is some temptation in that to put yourself above others. But Moses does not. There is a teachableness in Moses that is one of his greatest qualities.

Alright, let's look at the substance of Jethro's counsel. What's he saying? He is saying that Moses needs to adjust his leadership style. Moses was doing something unwise. He was trying to do the job all by himself. He was taking the one-man show approach and Jethro said, "uh-uh. This has got to go. You must adjust your priorities and get some help." 18 *You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.* As the work gets larger the wise leader doesn't just put in more hours he calls for help and adjusts his style. Moses was undergoing a change in leadership philosophy that moved him from being a one-man show to a leader-equipper. This leadership style looks to the chief to do two or three things primarily. These are the priorities. #1 is teaching. Jethro told Moses 20 *Then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do.* Instead of just addressing problems that arise, do a little preventive instruction. Take the God-given wisdom you have and teach it diligently. This is the directive to pastors as well. Paul told Timothy over and over again, "Teach these things. Prescribe these things." I Timothy 4:13 *Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and*

teaching. **16** *Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching.* Faithfully declaring the whole counsel of God. That was job one for Moses, as the head shepherd in Israel.

Job two is given in verse **21** *Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens.* We call this the mobilization of the laity. We call it equipping others to serve. You commonly refer to it as delegation of responsibility and authority. In our membership class I teach a lot from Ephesians 4 where Paul says the role of the pastor/teacher is to equip the saints, the believers, for ministry. He's not supposed to do it all. He's supposed to equip others to do it, thus multiplying his own efforts. Do you see that? It takes time to equip someone, to train someone but it's time well spent in the long run. Paul advises Timothy in II Timothy 2:**2** *The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.* Paul teaches Timothy, Timothy teaches Linus, Linus teaches Philip and you can share the burdens of leadership. That's the idea. That's the model. When we look to hire people to come on our pastoral staff we don't want those who are gifted and energetic and can contribute to the work - only. We want those who can train and mobilize many to get the job done. I was trained as a Christian leader by a man named Jimmy Young who selected me and a few others to be his co-workers in our youth outreach program. He taught us how and he sent us forth and together we did what he could never have done by himself. What is more, all three of the men on that team became pastors. The model of the leader/equiper, or the manager/equiper is the most efficient and effective style of leadership.

In the time we have left I want to look at three things. From here on I will use the term *delegation* interchangeably with the term "shared leadership" and I want us to look at the benefits of delegation, the hindrances to delegation and the requirement for delegation. First then, look with me at the three benefits of delegation. Benefit #1 is that the chief will be less tired. That was a keen concern for Jethro. **18a** *You will surely wear out.* In verse 23 he says **23ab** *If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure.* If you have a key leader in a group like Moses certainly was, it is vital to keep that guy going and working effectively. When you get excessively weary on a consistent basis a breakdown is ahead. That is true for God's servants as it is for anyone. Servants of the Lord are not exempt from natural laws. Missionaries can get ulcers. Christian leaders can and often do wear out and blow up. We all need to be aware of our limitation

and recognize that we need rest, we need vacations, and we need assistance. Am I talking to any of you? You are doing nobody any favors by your overwork, especially if it cultivates in you a self-righteousness or a self-pity. Some guys want awards for their hustle when their hustle is misdirected. If you find that you cannot do everything you feel you must do in 24 hours a day then what's the problem? It's not lack of hard work. That's not it, the problem must be that you are doing the work improperly or you are taking jobs God doesn't want you to have. The will of God can be accomplished in 24 hour days. In the case of Moses, the solution to his problem was not longer hours. The solution was to get help, give away power and one great benefit would be a better Moses, less weary, sharper and longer-lasting.

Benefit #2 of delegation is that more will get done. Instead of having a million and a half people waiting on one guy you now had a whole network of rulers who could serve the people. More would be done and the people would be better served. This is what I mean when I talk about efficiency and effectiveness of leadership. Moses became more effective by doing two things. First, he concentrated his efforts on his area of specialization. He would focus on teaching God's law. That was his thing. What is yours? You can only do so much. Focus on priorities and do that which is most critical for you. That's key to effectiveness. And you are most effective when your schedule is weighted toward the tasks you perform best. Secondly, Moses gave away power and responsibility. He delegated his duties and shared them with dozens of other men. Efficiency often increases by relinquishing more, not doing more. Now, when you relinquish a job you still do some training, some equipping of the person who takes that job. You have to do some work to get out of work but that is the smart way to go. Many church leaders can't work any harder than they are. They can, however, work smarter. Delegation gets more work done.

Benefit #3 of delegation is that it uses and develops other leaders. Many years ago I took over as president of our local Youth Basketball Association. When I offered myself to the board as president I told them, "Hey, I'm willing to be president because I'm used to running meetings, but don't think I'm going to do all the work. I don't have a lot of time for this." And the reaction of the board was fascinating. They felt set free, because the previous president was a guy who tried to do everything by himself and drove them all crazy while at the same time making them feel useless. My style in that role was to delegate everything I didn't absolutely have to do. The result is that I wasn't overworked, the product was better, and the other leaders were happier. The do-it-all leader

is neglecting the God-given abilities of other qualified persons. But the equipping leader effectively taps those abilities and develops them.

Those are your three benefits of delegation. Now, let's talk about the hindrances to delegation. If an equipping style of leadership is so wonderful why doesn't everybody lead that way? Several reasons for this. Some people just aren't cut out to be leaders. They take directions well but don't give them well. Sometimes that is the case, but there are two reasons I see most often why a leader won't delegate. Reason #1 is that others aren't willing to let him. In some groups, especially churches, there is an understanding that the head guy is to do almost all the work himself. Why, he is the minister, we pay him to do the ministry. There is an expectation for many pastors that they will lead ineffectively and when the pastor tries anything else the people get upset. When I was in seminary in Jackson, Mississippi I was required to visit people in the hospital whom I didn't know and one lady I ran across told me how upset she was with her pastor because she had been in the hospital four days and he had not visited her. As we talked I learned that she came from a church with 5000 members and that she had been visited twice by one of the associate pastors at her church. Hers was the kind of attitude that can prevent effective leadership. We won't allow the pastor to be a leader-equipper. Compare that to what I experienced when I became a pastor. When I was considering taking the position as pastor in Florida, at age 24, the most important thing said to me came from the senior member of the elder board, who said, "we want someone to come train us how to be good elders." That was an invitation to an equipping ministry. Encouraging that kind of leadership is the course of wisdom.

The second hindrance to an effective equipping ministry is that often the leader doesn't really want it. The Israelites had to be open to change but so did Moses. You say, why wouldn't Moses want the change? It meant less work for him. Yeah, but what else would it mean? It would mean the people were less dependent on him too wouldn't it? You see, there is a certain ego satisfaction in being so desperately needed all the time. That is a fairly common thing, but comes from an emotionally unhealthy place. John Maxwell, who is a well-known pastor-author, tells about finding a tract in a church he visited which said on the front in big letters, "Call your minister." He opened it up and found this kind of approach. When you are facing a problem, call your minister, when you are ill call your minister, when someone dies call your minister, when someone wants to become a Christian call your minister, when you want to get married call your minister, when you

face a hard decision call your minister. You get the idea? Now some of those are good times to call your pastor but the thrust of the tract goes against what we are trying to teach. Much better to multiply leaders who can serve the people but an excessively busy life is often an ego trip some find hard to leave.

A major hindrance for some delegating leaders is that when you delegate you lose power and when you lose power you often have to watch the job get done by someone else who doesn't do it the way you like it done. Can you relate to that? I bet it happened to Moses. He heard of judges ruling in ways he wouldn't go for. Some days he probably thought of scraping the system. Some times we can delegate to others who do the job better than ourselves, other times we delegate to others who don't do as well as us. Both can be hard to watch. And they don't always do it like you would. And that's hard. I am one who struggles at times to relinquish control. Oversight is healthy and good; control, for the most part, is anti-productive. When you ask someone to do a job you have to allow them some freedom to do it their way. There is an application here for parents too. As kids get older they need increasing freedom and responsibility. We have to give them jobs to do and then stand by as they mess up. There is a price to pay for giving away power, but the price of keeping it is much higher. The point is you lead and let lead.

On to our final major point, we have seen the benefits of delegation and the hindrances to delegation, now the requirement for delegation. Jethro says to Moses, verse **21a** *You shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain.* Something you have to have if you are going to delegate is able men. Paul told Timothy to entrust what he knew to faithful men. Such men are the raw material needed for shared leadership. Notice, that not everyone is fit to be a leader. Watch out here! Many volunteer organizations have only one criteria for its leaders and that is willingness. The church with that notion is doomed. And many if not most operate exactly like that. One man in our church told me how he started going to a church when he was a very young and ignorant Christian and a two weeks later was approached about being an elder because they needed some young people on the board. No, no, no, no, no. Read I Timothy 3. There are required characteristics for elders and deacons in God's church which we ignore to our peril. The list in I Timothy is more detailed but is little different than what find in Exodus 18. Here we are given three character traits which qualify a man to share in leadership with Moses. First, it says he must fear God. To fear God means you care more about what he thinks than anything else.

You strive to gain his smile and avoid his frown. You are not a men pleaser but a God-pleaser. You are not an excuse maker but one with a conscience sensitive to God's word. The man who fears God will be attentive to His word and determined to go after His will. Secondly, the ruler must be a man of truth, a man who understands the value of honesty and faithfulness. What he says he will do. Such a man does not speak too quickly before making promises. He does not deal in little white lies or big dark ones. Thirdly, the ruler must hate dishonest gain. He can't just be against it he must hate it and there is a wise reason for this. Anyone who sits in the seat of power and influence and judgment will be tempted by dishonest gain. Power does corrupt. Power will corrupt unless you take steps to fight that corruption. A lot of fine men and women have gone to Washington or Harrisburg and been crushed by Satan because their gentlemanliness was short of godliness and not enough to withstand the pressure and the allurements of power. When you put ill-prepared men in positions of power you hurt the people and you hurt the man.

So, this is the sine-qua-non of delegation. You gotta have able, faithful men and women. The notion of shared leadership looks wonderful on paper. The philosophy of delegation sounds great in principle. I am committed to it, but I have seen over and over again that no people, no system, no organization is any better than the people in it. The church of Jesus Christ is crying out for leaders. We have tired chiefs who need to share the load. And like Moses we are on the hunt for able men, faithful women, godly servants. Is it time for you to quit counting on the few to do all the work? Is it time for you to step up and get in the game? *Rise up O men of God, have done with lesser things. Give heart and soul and mind and strength to serve the king of kings. Rise up Oh men of God! The church for you doth wait, her strength unequal to her task, rise up and make her great.* Let's pray. (Take time to contemplate what stepping up may look like for you...)