

**Christ Presbyterian Church
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Moses: Moses & Jethro | Exodus 18**

Hi everyone! How are we doing this morning? Good, fine. When we run into a friend at Target or when we run into a colleague at the gym we normally ask that question, right? “How are you?” And if you’re a true Minnesotan (or a Scandinavian Minnesotan I suppose in my family), what generally is your response? “Fine! I’m fine. I’m fine, how are you?” But I think pretty close on the tails of “fine” is this other word that we say when someone asks how we’re doing . . . busy! We say, “I’m so busy! I’m busy! I’m so busy, got to run!” We are busy, and if I ask you to give an account of how you spend your time, how you spend your days, do you remember all that you do? Do you think you’d be surprised by anything that you would recall? The Wall Street Journal conducted a study on how Americans spend their day and found that it has definitely changed over the past decade. FlowingData actually has an interactive graph to show us how their sample of Americans spends their day. It shows we go from sleeping to work to eating to traveling to shopping to leisure. I watched this for about 20 minutes yesterday because it’s just so mesmerizing. So, how do we decide to spend our days? Maybe you’ve heard this Annie Dillard quote before. She says, “How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.” What might be comforting to hear is that this question has actually perplexed people for centuries. We are actually not the first nation, not the first people group to struggle, and wrestle, and answer the question of “How are you doing?” with the word “busy.”

Last week John explained that we have been journeying with the Israelites through their story and we now find ourselves learning lessons in the wilderness with them. We’ve walked with them through slavery, then leaving Egypt and crossing the Red Sea, and now we find them wandering in the desert, not just for 40 minutes or 40 days, but for 40 years.

Last week we looked at the entire Israelite community and how they were handling their wandering, their time in the wilderness. This week we’re going to specifically zero in just on Moses because even though Moses was one of the great leaders in the Bible, and of all time, Moses still had a lesson or two to learn when he was in the wilderness. Let’s pray as we dive into Scripture.

God, thank You that five hundred years ago Scripture was put into our hands and that we can sit in Your word no matter where we are. No matter what’s going on in our lives we have access to You through Your word. I pray Father that this morning You would be the loudest voice in this room. And I pray Lord, that You would speak truth, and life, and grace into our lives and that we would clearly hear from You this morning. In Your name we pray, Amen.

If you want to pull out your Bibles, we're going to be in Exodus 18 this morning. We have a lot of Scripture to cover this morning so stick with me.

¹ Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, heard about everything God had done for Moses and his people, the Israelites. He heard especially about how the LORD had rescued them from Egypt. ² Earlier, Moses had sent his wife, Zipporah, and his two sons back to Jethro, who had taken them in. ⁵ Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, now came to visit Moses in the wilderness. He brought Moses' wife and his two sons with him, and they arrived while Moses and the people of Israel were camped near the mountain of God. ⁶ Jethro had sent a message to Moses, saying, "I, Jethro, your father-in-law, am coming to see you and your wife and your two sons." ⁷ So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law. He bowed low and kissed him. They asked each other about each other's welfare and then went into Moses' tent. [Exodus 18:1-7]

Moses and Jethro had a really good relationship. When Moses ran away from Pharaoh, it was to Jethro that he ran. Jethro gave him one of his daughters to marry and flocks of his to tend to. Jethro and Moses had a good relationship and Jethro held a front row seat as he watched God work in Moses's life.

⁸ Moses told his father-in-law everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and Egypt on behalf of Israel. He also told about the hardships they had experienced along the way and how the LORD had rescued His people from all their troubles. ⁹ Jethro was delighted when he heard about all the good things the LORD had done for Israel as He rescued them from the hands of Egypt. ¹⁰ "Praise the LORD," Jethro said, "for He has rescued you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh. Yes, He has rescued Israel from the powerful hand of Egypt! ¹¹ I now know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, because He rescued his people from the proud Egyptians." ¹² Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God. Aaron and all the elders of Israel came around him in a sacrificial meal in God's presence. [Exodus 18:8-12]

Moses and Jethro got to have some time together, time where Moses could just truly let himself go. Moses had time to be authentic and vulnerable, and to talk openly with this man who was so close to him. Do you have anyone in your life that you can be truly authentic with? I have a handful of people who I can truly be myself with and I love it when I get to spend time with them. I plopped myself on the couch in Debbie Manning's office a week or two ago and said, "Ummm, do you have about an hour-and-a-half?" Debbie is one of those people who speaks truth into my life, listens to me, and lets me be totally who I am. She accepts me for who I am; she embraces all of me. I sat in her office, no joke, for an hour-and-a-half and I talked the whole time, because sometimes you just need those people. Debbie is a Jethro-type person in my life.

¹³ The next day, Moses took his seat to hear the people's disputes against each other. They waited before him from morning till evening. ¹⁴ When Moses' father-

in-law saw what Moses was doing for the people, he asked, “What are you doing? Why are you trying to do all this alone while everyone stands around you from morning till evening?”¹⁵ Moses replied to him, “Because the people come to me to get a ruling from God.¹⁶ When a dispute arises, they come to me, and I am the one who settles the cause between the quarreling parties. I inform the people of God’s decrees and give them his instructions.”¹⁷ “This is not good!” Moses’ father-in-law exclaimed. (And Jethro looked at Moses probably with these loving, embracing eyes and said),¹⁸ “You’re going to wear yourself out—and the people, too. This job is too heavy a burden for you to handle all by yourself.¹⁹ Now listen to me, and let me give you a word of advice, and may God be with you. You should continue to be the people’s representative before God, bringing their disputes to him.²⁰ Teach them God’s decrees, and give them his instructions. Show them how to conduct their lives.²¹ But select from all the people some capable, honest men who fear God and hate bribes. Appoint them as leaders over the groups.²² They should always be available to solve the people’s common disputes, but have them bring the major cases to you. Let the leaders decide the smaller matters themselves. They will help you carry the load, making the task easier for you.²³ If you follow the advice, and if God commands you to do so, then you will be able to endure the pressures, and all the people will go home in peace.”²⁴ Moses listened to his father-in-law’s advice and followed his suggestions. [Exodus 18:13-24]

Charles Swindoll says that this specific lesson in Moses’s life applies to everyone: the Christian business person, the Christian professional, the Christian teacher, the Christian student, all of us who have areas of responsibility, and especially those who tend to do more than they should to accomplish those responsibilities. So... basically all of us.

Jethro was a really good mentor to Moses. I love what it says in verse 1—that Jethro had heard about everything that God had done for Moses—but what does it say in verse 8? It says that Moses told Jethro all that had happened to him. When we have these types of people in our lives, like Moses had Jethro, means that we get to have mentors who listen to us even if they already know everything that’s going on. After Moses told Jethro everything, Jethro took time to praise God and offer sacrifices. He continued to be a mentor to Moses by bringing him back to his relationship with God. I love the process that Jethro goes through with Moses. He was present with him, he praised God with him, and then as we see in the end of the story, Jethro pushed Moses. Jethro saw what was happening, what Moses was doing, how Moses was carrying everything on his own, and he stepped in. Moses was caught up in this *doing* everything. Have you ever said to yourself, *If this is going to get done, I have to be the one to do it?*

When I first started in youth ministry fifteen years ago, I was a volunteer for a Youth for Christ club at Lincoln East High School. I had no idea what I was doing with high

schoolers, even though I was only two years out of high school myself, because all my other ministry experience and volunteering experience growing up here at CPC was with Kids' Ministry and middle schoolers. But, I got into this realm where I was working with high schoolers and at first I had no idea what to do with them. Pretty soon I learned what to do with them and then I started to love with being with them and ministry began to control all areas of my life. I was a college student so I was studying for classes, I was actively involved in my sorority, I was going to multiple sporting events at Lincoln East every week, I was planning and going to club, I was having lunch with students, I was talking to students on the phone—because texting didn't exist back then—at night about their problems. By the time my senior year rolled around my sorority sisters had noticed where I chose to spend all my time, so my senior award at my senior banquet was "Soccer Mom", and it was true. I had spent all of myself out lovingly because I love my work, but I had a Moses complex, and if I was truly honest with you, I would say that I **have** a Moses complex: *The only way this is going to get done is if I do it myself.*

I believe that Moses had a great level of trust in God, but he was doing too much, carrying it all. He was swept up in being everything for other people and he was too caught up in trying to please God so much. As I was listening to John [Crosby] talk last week, I was nodding along because I've frequently seen the parallels of my own life and the Israelites. It hit home for me because I wander, I constantly forget about what God has done in my life, I complain, I want what I want when I want it, but it wasn't until this week when I sat in Exodus 18, that I said to myself, *Ohhh. I have a lot in common with Moses too* because how many times have I said, "But they need me", "But I need to carry this", "But I need to do this." How often are you so depleted with everything you have to do? And whatever your motivation is for carrying it, it doesn't matter, but doing all of that stuff and trying to carry it all on your own will start to take a deep and potentially very dark toll on your life. And it's not like we generally ever get a different message from our culture, is it? Our culture gets really excited about people who are killing themselves to get ahead and juggling too many things.

One of my seminary books on mentoring says this, "We are busy, busy people. We are up to so many things, packing our schedules as tightly as we can. Sometimes we even wear our busyness as a badge of honor. Some of us mistakenly equate busyness with significance." Charles Swindoll says, "When you are overworked, drained, and exhausted because you have not designated your workload as you should, irritation sets in. And following closely on the heels of irritation comes confusion, loss of vision, burnout, and tragically, the loss of relationships."

We get intoxicated thinking that we can *do* everything and *be* everything to everyone. It causes us to posture ourselves as if **we** are God instead of posturing ourselves as if God is God. Sometimes it takes a Jethro, a person willing to speak truth into our lives, a person willing to ask us the question, "What is this you are doing? Why are you trying to

accomplish so much?” And when I looked a little deeper at those questions, I saw that the theme of the first question, “What are you doing?” is time and priorities. Where are your priorities? What are you giving your time to? And then the second question, “Why are you doing this alone?” That’s about relationships and the refusal to let people in and let people help us, and relationships are generally the first thing to suffer when we don’t let people in because we’ve created isolation.

Jethro knew that if Moses kept prioritizing the way that he was and denying relationships that he would wear himself out. In verse 18, the Hebrew word for “wear out” means to be withered with exhaustion. Jethro saw that Moses was literally going to fade away if he kept living how he was living, so he pushed Moses because he didn’t want him to wear out. He wanted Moses to be able to go the distance.

I want to share with you the story of my friend Jeff. Jeff had a Jethro moment in his life and listened to it.

[Jeff Dykstra Video]

<https://vimeo.com/240496529>

I don’t think Jeff is the only person who needs a Jethro in their life, because our fallen condition always leads us to play God, doesn’t it? We want our own control, our own significance, and if we were forced—and for some of us maybe it wouldn’t take that much force—we would admit that we like being our own god, too. We like striving for our own worth and our own significance. We like juggling all those balls. The statement that the serpent says to Eve in Genesis 3 so clearly appeals to our sense of control when he says, “The truth is that God knows the day that you eat from the tree you will awaken something powerful in you and become like Him, possessing knowledge of both good and evil.” You will awaken something powerful within you—and we crave that, don’t we? We get intoxicated by that and we run toward doing, toward being, toward busyness, toward juggling, toward all those false claims that this will provide significance or worth, that this will give us our identity.

Shauna Niequist refers to the hustle of life in her book, *Present Over Perfect*, and she says, “In a way it’s a drug, and I fall for the initial rush every time. If I push enough I’ll feel whole, I will feel proud, I will feel happy, and what I feel, though, is exhausted and resentful, but with a well-organized closet.” My favorite two words in Scripture, **but God**, show us that maybe there’s a different way. Because God sent us a Rescuer like he rescued Moses to liberate us from our own trying, from our own being, from our own doing so that we don’t actually have to carry it. He sent Jesus to us so that Jesus would carry it and through His death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus holds it for us so that we can walk in freedom. It doesn’t mean that we don’t work; it doesn’t mean we don’t care about things, but it means we do that with a different posture. I look at the interaction between Moses and Jethro and I see Jesus right in the middle of it. I hear Jeff’s story, and with his two friends and his lovely wife Molly, I see Jesus right in the middle of it. I

love that if you look back over this passage you'll see that Jethro says to Moses multiple times that God has rescued them. Rescued them from the hands of Pharaoh, rescued them from everything they went through in Egypt. God sent Jethro to speak truth to Moses in order to rescue him from his own fight for significance, because God's desire, His heart, is to rescue us. I will be the first person standing in line to receive that rescuing because I'm my own worst enemy—I want to make it on my own, I want to do it on my own, I want to be everything on my own, and at the end of the day when I try to do that I am exhausted and I think to myself, *this can't be the only way to live*. I know that intoxication provides some excitement, and meaning, and purpose for a little while, but it fades soon and I'm left tired again wanting something deeper, wanting something more. I wonder if you do, too?

My friend Lee pointed out to me one of the best lines in Exodus 18 is when Jethro says, "Now I know" in verse 11. "Now I know that your God is the one true God. Now I know that your God is the God who rescues." Jethro was saying that the God of Israel is the God who makes life worth living. Now I know. And for those of us who live on the other side of the New Testament, we can look to Jesus and say, "Now I know that Jesus saves me. That Jesus provides so much more significance, so much more of my identity, so much more of my value and worth that I could ever hope or try to accomplish on my own." Now we know that when we choose Christ we choose that freedom. The life that Jesus lived is the life that He invites you to step into, too--the fullness, the authenticity, the vulnerability, and the sharpening first with Him and then with others. Let's pray.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.