

Sunday 30th August 2020, PRBC, Delegated Leadership
Exodus 18: 13 – 27

Who benefits when a leader has too much to do?

Who benefits when a leader learns the art, the skill, the gift of delegation?

Over the past few weeks, thinking about leadership we've touched on various skills and gifts that enable GOOD, healthy, Godly leadership. Today we're thinking about Moses, way back in the Old Testament, and the skill of delegated leadership and the benefits it brings to a community of God's people.

Exodus, chapter 18, verses 1 – 12

How this came about, if we can start with verse 2 instead of verse 1 – it says that Moses had sent his wife, Zipporah, and their two sons, back home to her father Jethro. There's no record of anything about this in the Bible other than here. There's no suggestion that Moses had cast his family out as in a divorce or something like that, he would have kept the sons if he had done that anyway.

It is suggested that Moses, in his confrontation with Pharaoh and getting the freedom of the Israelites, had sent his family home to Jethro in order to keep them safe, to protect them, so that Pharaoh didn't take his wrath out on the family of Moses.

So, Zipporah and the two sons get sent home. Jethro gets his stuff together and journeys out, into the desert, with his daughter and grandsons, and comes to find Moses, probably to find out what's going on. There is deep respect in their greeting of one another so we guess Zipporah has told him the story so far!!

In verse 8 Moses fills Jethro in on the rest of the story of God's saving grace and so Jethro, not an Israelite, praised the Lord. Jethro didn't become converted to the One Lord of Heaven and Earth, but he did proclaim that God was the greatest out of all the gods!! It's a start eh?!

Exodus 18: 13 – 27

Then, after the family reunion and the explanation to his father-in-law, Moses gets back to work. When there is a dispute among the people they come to Moses and ask for a judgement as they seek the will of God in their disputes. The problem that was evident was that there were so many people, bringing so many situations to Moses for judgement, that they were there from morning till night and there were still big queues.

The best equivalent I can think of, to help us grasp how this was for the Israelites, is when you've had to phone a Government department and then you get 50 messages about press this for that and press something else for the other, until finally, just as one of our operators is ready to speak to you, you get cut off. Ever been in that situation?! It is so frustrating because you are waiting, it is important to you, and you don't get a resolution. Imagine being one of the Israelites, coming to Moses to hear what God says about your situation, and you wait from morning till night, and then you are too far back in the queue.

Jethro and Moses have a chat. This is no good. Justice in this culture was traditionally dispensed by the elder of the tribe. But Israel was not a tribe, it was a collection of tribes, there were too many people. Moses is overworked and cannot cope with the demand. So, a solution is suggested.... Choose some capable people,

teach them God's laws and decrees, they must have specific skills, make them judges over thousands, then hundreds, then 50s, then 10s. Let them hear the simple cases and pass up the line the harder cases and then the task of Moses is to only hear the most complex cases, the others being dealt with in a speedy and efficient manner. Everyone is a winner.

As things were Moses was going to be burned out. No one person should or could be doing everything. It is Biblical to share the load, here in the Old Testament. It is Biblical to share the load in the Gospels where Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs to preach and heal. It is Biblical to share the load in Acts 6 which Shagufta opened up for us. One man ministry/one woman ministry, is a construct of controlling, fearful humans who have not listened to God. It is Biblical to share the load.

Not only is Moses overworked here, but also the people themselves are being deprived of wisdom and justice because of the delays and this must have been so frustrating. Delays in justice are bad for everyone.

Allowing and enabling others to use gifts and develop skills means that others exercise their ministries (women for instance as Jonathan suggested last week?) in this case, in this patriarchal culture, only men could have been chosen without a scandal – but not any men, they had to be men with God's moral qualities.

What kind of men?

- An aptitude for learning about God's laws and rules in order to dispense God's judgement. It wasn't about the new leader being promoted or putting themselves at the front to be proud. It was about listening to God and learning from God and being accountable to God, Moses and the people.
- These had to be leaders who feared God. It is a sad fact that many leaders in life, in church but not just in church, are so puffed up with their own importance that they cease to fear God and begin to feel that God and God's church are just lucky to have them. There are people who DESIRE leadership because they honestly believe that they could do such a good job of leading if those in their way would just step aside! People who think they should be leading are often NOT those chosen by God, humble people who submit to God and God's other leaders.
- Those chosen had to be people of truth (trustworthy people). Oh how often so many of us can be one person indoors and a different person in public! How often can we present our game face for our own advancement but in fact have no truth in us. So sad and yet so common I'm sorry to say
- The fourth quality that is named is that these leaders, judges of the people, must be those who hate all dishonest gain. They are going to judge. They must be immune to favours, bribes, dishonest gain. Contracts and judgements cannot be bought or sold or given to relatives or mates, let those with ears hear the ancient and truly modern and living word of the Lord .

So, competent individuals, people of God, need to be identified and taught/trained and put to work for the benefit of all the people, under the leadership of other leaders and Moses, in order to share God's justice with all of God's people.

When the history of God's people is being written in Deuteronomy, Moses himself relays some of these events. He doesn't mention Jethro but here in Exodus we find

that he hears the advice of his father in law (not one of God's own people notice) and he respects him, he sees the wisdom of it, and he carries it out. The consequence is that the people receive speedy justice, those with gifts are exercising their ministry and Moses is not overwhelmed by over work.

Then Jethro goes home. It seems he leaves Zipporah and the two sons with Moses, which does make me think that the idea that he sent them home to keep them safe from Pharaoh is the right idea. Then the Israelites journeyed on and came to Sinai.

We are seeking God's minister for the church and while we do that it is so vitally important that we find ways for each and every person in the church to find their own particular ministry, their avenue(s) of service that God has equipped them for.

When we think of the word "ministry" for so many people it conjours up images of being out at the front. Ministry is much deeper and broader than that. The desire to be at the front always makes me somewhat suspicious of someone of faith. God calls us to SERVICE. The Bible does say that those who believe they are called to teach/lead need to remember that God will judge them more severely than others. Look back to Acts 6, "choose people who are known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom", criteria for leadership ministries
Look back to 1 Timothy 3:1-7, If anyone sets their heart on being a leader, they desire a noble task. The leader must be above reproach, faithful in marriage, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, sober, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. They must be a good parent, a good reputation with unbelievers as well as believers.

Who do we select as leaders in our Baptist setting? Those who are humble servants? Or those who are good at putting themselves forward?
Are we so desperate for someone to lead that we'll let anyone who offers in? There are times when I fear this has been the case in many of our churches.

There are three areas for us to pray into our situation here at Park Road arising from this passage I feel,

- We should come to God in prayer about how we each offer our gifts, skills, time, with humility, in the service of God here and now as we move forward. It is not for us to choose leadership, Jonathan last week reminded us of 1 Peter 5:5, to clothe ourselves in humility. It is for us to offer service and see which service God, in God's wisdom, lays before us. How can I as an individual before God, offer my service to the people of God in and through this church I belong to?
- We should come to God in prayer for those we have appointed as leaders and we need to pray for wisdom for them, and for ourselves. How can I, before God, respond when our leaders suggest to me, or ask me, how I can serve God and the Gospel in this church at this time?
- Together, most particularly, we should be praying with passion for our next minister, resolved that they will not be a sole leader but that we will give of ourselves and our time and our gifts to engage in the work of God together as we seek to be a light for our city.