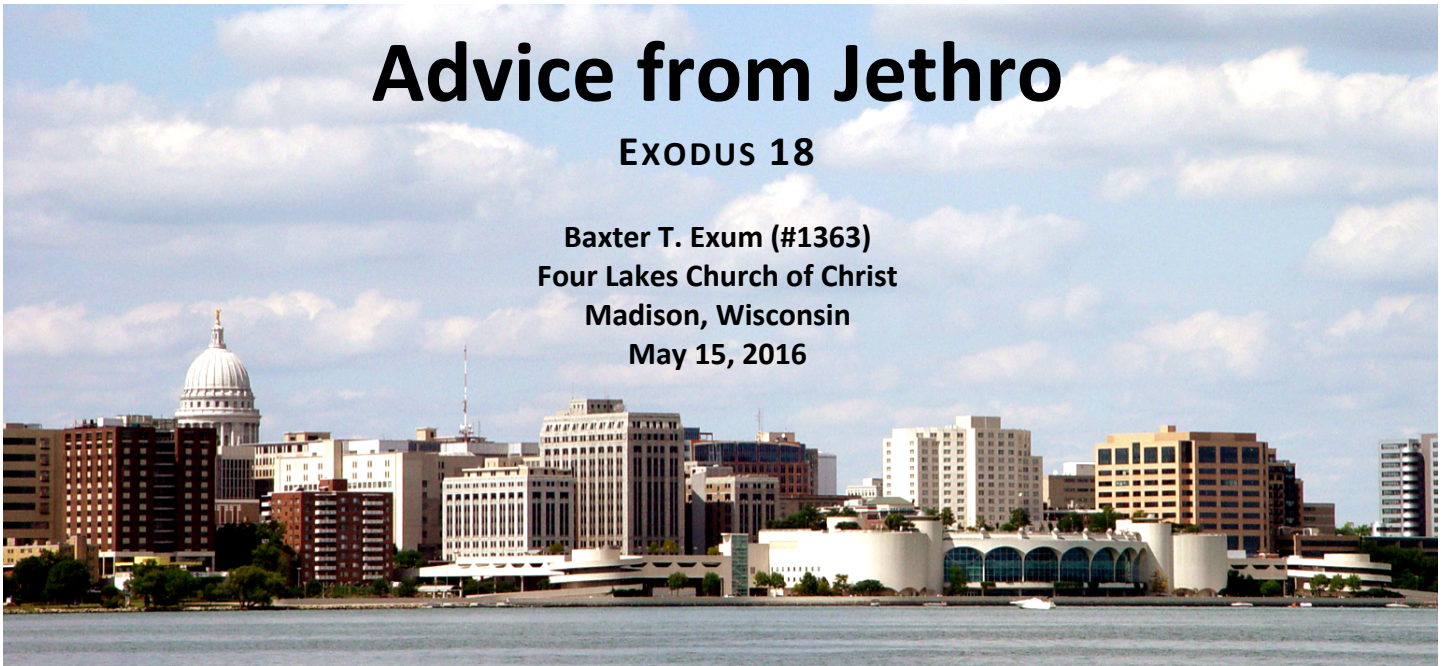


# Advice from Jethro

## EXODUS 18

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Just a few moments ago, Aaron read a passage from Hebrews 11, a passage summarizing the role of faith in the life of Moses. Moses, of course, is one of the most famous characters anywhere in the Bible. He was born into slavery in Egypt, under the threat of death by Pharaoh, but he was rescued from the Nile River by Pharaoh's daughter, and when he grew up he made a decision to serve the one true God, even though that decision would cost him the life of comfort he could have had in Pharaoh's household. Leaving Egypt at the age of 40, Moses traveled to the land of Midian, where he married Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro. This was not a pleasant marriage! What I love about the Bible is that even the greatest heroes have some struggles, and those struggles are not ignored, they are not hidden, and I personally believe that is done for our benefit. We look at Moses, one of the greatest leaders in the history of this world, and it appears he had an absolutely miserable home life. Moses meets Zipporah for the first time when he is about 40 years old and on the run into the wilderness for having murdered an Egyptian – not the greatest of circumstances! One of the first signs of trouble in the marriage comes in Exodus 4 when Moses is getting ready to go back to Egypt to lead God's people out of slavery. At the end of Exodus 4, Moses and his wife get in an argument. We don't have all of the details, but the argument is so bad that it ends with his wife throwing a bloody foreskin at his feet. It appears that Zipporah then goes back to live with her father in Midian as Moses heads to Egypt to confront Pharaoh. They do not reunite until Zipporah meets up with Moses in the wilderness – at some point after the crossing of the Red Sea and before the giving of the Ten Commandments, very early on in those 40 years in the wilderness. Those of us who have been married for any length of time have probably had some pretty good arguments and disagreements through the years, but I would suggest that very few of us could top what Moses and his wife Zipporah were able to accomplish!

This morning, as we prepare to appoint deacons here at this congregation, I would like for us to look at the passage in Exodus 18 as Moses and Zipporah reunite, and as Jethro (Moses' father-in-law) steps forward with some amazing advice that certainly applies to the appointment of deacons in the church (p. 117). This morning, I would like for us to look at Exodus 18, and then I'd like to make several observations concerning the problem they faced, the solution that is proposed, and then the benefits of that solution and how it applies to our situation today. First of all, though, let us look together at all 27 verses of Exodus 18,

***<sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>3</sup> 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.

I. **As we think about what happens here, we see the problem right away, and the problem is: MOSES IS DOING TOO MUCH!**

In fact, Moses is completely overwhelmed. And I don't know whether we can really understand how bad it is. We are now three months in. Moses is pretty new at this. At the beginning, we know that there were more than 600,000 men who were old enough and not too old to serve in war. So if a group of people have 600,000 who are military-ready, how big is the whole group? We don't have that figure by inspiration, but it seems to me that when we add the women, and the children, and the elderly, we are probably looking at a group here of somewhere between 2-3 million! I think of 2-3 million people, and I think of the City of Chicago. Now imagine having only one person responsible for every aspect of government in the City of Chicago! Moses handled everything! And adding to this problem is the fact that the people didn't even have the Ten Commandments yet! They had no written law! Moses could check on things with God on a case-by-case basis, but there was no formal law yet. So, we have 2-3 million former slaves wandering in the wilderness, and Moses is handling everything. Every dispute lands with Moses.

Now, as a leader, think about how hard this must have been on Moses' family! He had already sent them away to Jethro, but now they are back. And did you notice something a little bit strange back up in verse 7? Zipporah and Moses' two sons had been away for some time, Jethro (the father-in-law) brings them back, and Moses goes out and greets his father-in-law! I want to ask you: How would that go over in your family? I haven't seen my wife and kids for several months, and when they finally come back I go up and bow down before and kiss my father-in-law??? There's no wonder why Moses is having trouble at home! Not only are his priorities messed up, but there is apparently no time for even a greeting!

But secondly, beyond the effect this is having on his family, we can also imagine the effect all of this work was having on Moses himself. In verse 13, we find that when Moses sits down to judge the people, he dealt with these issues from the morning until the evening. This happens day after day. And we can hardly imagine the stress. According to verse 16, these are ***"disputes."*** Dealing with disputes between neighbors and families is hard work. I think of my sister who is a mental health professional, and I think of all of the therapy she provides. She has worked her way up through the years to where now she is responsible for managing other therapists, in addition to counseling people on her own. But a while back, she happened to mention to me that most of her therapists need therapists! Helping people with their issues is hard work. And that is exactly what Moses is doing here. He is doing it by himself, solving every issue in a group of 2-3 million people out in the middle of nowhere, and he is doing it from sunup to sundown. What Jethro said in verse 18 is true, ***"You will surely wear out."***

So, this arrangement was taking its toll on Moses' family, it was taking its toll on Moses himself, but we also know that it was taking its toll on the people. In verse 13, we find that ***"the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening."*** Don't most of us hate standing in a line? If it gets more than two or three deep at the grocery store or the post office, most of us start getting a little irritated. This was going on for hours if not days. On top of that, though, these were people who had a beef with each other! So, I get in a fight with my neighbor, and I need to go stand in line next to him for a few days before I can work it out? Not only that (and we will get to more about this in a few minutes), but by taking all of this on by himself, Moses was also cheating others out of a chance to learn, and help, and grow. You know that out of 2-3 million people, there were many who could have handled some of these responsibilities quite well – perhaps even better than Moses himself. So, this situation was not good for Moses, his family, or the people.

## II. Thankfully, Jethro sees what is happening here, and he steps forward with a SOLUTION.

And I love that the father-in-law is not just whining and complaining (“Oh, my dirty, low-down, good-for-nothing son-in-law!”), but he actually comes up with a plan! And the plan is: Delegate! Share the work! And really, this idea of sharing the load is something that comes up over and over again in the Bible.

As most of us know, however, there is more to sharing the work than just dumping something on somebody! John Maxwell has done a lot of research and writing in the area of leadership, and he says that many leaders “...either hold onto as much as they can and only give away what they absolutely cannot do themselves, or they try to dump everything on unprepared and unsuspecting followers.” The result, he says, is either burnout or a train wreck! And it seems to me that Jethro understands this. Jethro, then, puts a plan out there.

Notice, first of all (in verse 20), how Jethro tells Moses that he needs to TRAIN some people. He needs to get the law of God out there. He needs to communicate expectations, “This is the way it needs to be.” As a leader, Moses was to focus on teaching, “This is what the word of God says.” I have found over the past 25 years of Christian camping that if we slow down a little bit on the first night of camp and go through the rules and if we make things really clear, we usually have fewer issues during the week. In my early years, I would kind of rush through the rules on the first night almost as a formality, just to get it out of the way. But we learned: If we really make it clear, if we give prizes to those who know the rules, if we break up into groups and do little skits to act out some of the rules at camp on the first night, if we make it clear on the first night, then I usually don’t need to use quite so much of my time as a judge on the following nights. And that is what Jethro is suggesting here: First of all, train the people – communicate God’s law, make it clear.

Secondly, Jethro tells Moses to find able and qualified men to take on some sense of responsibility. These men, first and foremost, are to be able men who **“fear God.”** They need to respect God and God’s authority over the people. They are to be men who serve God with the utmost of reverence and respect. Secondly, these men are to be **“men of truth,”** Jethro says. They are to be trustworthy and honest. They must be men who keep their word. If they say they are going to do it, they do it. A talented guy is pretty much useless if you never know whether he will actually show up and get it done. And finally, in terms of qualifications, these men are to be **“those who hate dishonest gain.”** They are to be men of strong moral character. They are to be those who are bribe-proof! They are not to be swayed or persuaded by large sums of money. As you might have noticed, these qualifications actually overlap quite nicely with the qualifications given for deacons in 1 Timothy 3!

And these qualifications are important because of the position these men will hold. Basically, these men need to function as Moses. They need to “be Moses” to the people, so that Moses can get back to teaching and leading. Months ago, as we were scoping out men we wanted to see serving this congregation as deacons, we gave each of them a good book by Aubrey Johnson, *Dynamic Deacons: Champions of Christ’s Church*, and in that book, brother Johnson compared deacons to lieutenants in God’s army. I had never thought about this before, but the word lieutenant comes from French, and “lieu,” the first part of the word, means “place,” as in a position. Sometimes today we might say “in lieu of,” and we mean, “in place of.” The second part of the word, “tenant,” refers to “holding” something, just as the tenant in an apartment building is in a sense “holding” that apartment – it is his to hold for a time. Well, we put “lieutenant” together, and it literally refers to “holding a position in place of another.” In other words, when the guy in charge is not there, the lieutenant steps in and acts as if he were the guy in charge. And in a sense, that is the place of deacons in the church. Ideally, there is to be such a close relationship between the elders and deacons that the deacons know how the elders would like to have a situation handled in their absence. When the deacons face a dilemma of some

kind, they should be able to say, "I know what the elders would want to have done here." Of course, we are new at this and we have some learning to do and some relationships to continue to build, but that is the concept. So I think we see the importance of the qualifications Jethro gives to Moses. These are to be trustworthy men who will make some very important decisions as if they were Moses himself.

So, Moses is to delegate by training, he is to choose qualified men, and then, finally, he is to unleash these men to get the job done. He had to let these newly appointed judges judge. Moses had to step back! He was still available for those cases that were especially difficult, but for the most part, Moses is supposed to train, he was to choose qualified men, and then he is to let them get to work. And by doing that, Moses will be helping himself out over the long run, more could be accomplished by the nation as a whole, and more men would gain leadership experience for the future.

### **Conclusion:**

So, as we close, it seems to me that Jethro has some pretty good advice! This situation is no good – you are wearing yourself out – it's bad for you, your family, and the entire nation; therefore, do some teaching and training, pick out some qualified men, and let those men get to work!

This morning, as we transition into God's pattern of organization for his church with the appointment of deacons, I hope we can keep some of these ideas in mind. There is nothing new here, but we are thankful for Jethro's advice and for the pattern established here, the pattern of qualified men stepping up and taking on some of the responsibility for leading and serving God's people.

As our tradition is, we want to give everyone here this morning an opportunity to obey the gospel. Jesus died for our sins according to the scriptures, he was buried, he was raised up on the first day of the week. We respond to his sacrifice in awe of what he did for us, loving us when we were not loveable. We obey his command to repent of our sins and to be buried in water for the forgiveness of our sins. At that point, God adds us to his kingdom, the church. If you have any questions, let us know. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, we would be honored to help in any way we can. You can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing together...

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