

Strengthening the Soul Your Faith

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Exodus 18

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our summer series, Strengthening the Soul of Your Faith, seeing that our individual souls are strengthened most effectively when our communal souls are strengthened.

II. Connecting with One Another

What was your favorite subject in school? Why?

How did you like geometry, where you had to "solve for x"?

III. Study the Text

a. Read Exodus 18.1-4.

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law and Midianite priest, reemerges in the Exodus account here in chapter 18. Recall that Moses met Jethro after fleeing from Egypt, and, after marrying his daughter Zipporah, Moses remained in Midian as a shepherd for 40 years.

Imagine you're writing the account of the Exodus: Why would it be important to reintroduce Jethro? In other words, why not just keep the action on Moses and the Israelites? What purpose does recounting this interaction with Jethro serve?

b. Notice the names of Moses' sons in verses 3-4. How do they illustrate different chapters in Moses' life? Why is it important to recognize and "name" the seasons of life?

c. Read Exodus 18.5-8.

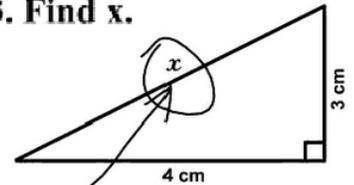
We don't know for sure why Moses' wife and sons were living with Jethro, though it is at least possible that Moses' leadership of the Israelites during this time was not healthy for a family. Ruth Haley Barton writes, "evidently his lifestyle was not sane enough to include a wife and children."

We will engage this possibility more below, but, for now, think through this possibility. What does it say about Moses' spiritual life, if indeed he was unable to care for his family in addition to leading God's people? Does this fulfill God's intention for Moses' life of leadership? Why – or why not?

d. Read Exodus 18.9-12.

Some see Moses' recounting of God's rescue and Jethro's response as the first conversion recorded in Scripture. What do you think? Has Jethro been converted here?

3. Find x.



Here it is

Notice verse 12, where we read that Jethro offers sacrifices and eats with Moses in God's presence: the word used for God is the general word for the divine, Elohim, (as opposed to the LORD, Yahweh, the specific name of God revealed at the burning bush in Exodus 3).

- e. The "gods" alluded to in verse 11 may sound strange to us (since many in our culture either believe in God or not), though it does reflect a common understanding of ancient cultures – that the LORD ("Yahweh" in Hebrew) is the God above all other gods.

Though our culture predominantly believes there is a singular God (or not), what other "gods" exist? To ask it another way, what other things do people bow down to in our culture?

- f. Read Exodus 18.13-16.

Imagine, for a moment, that you're in Jethro's position: What would you say to Moses? Would you affirm his hard work? Would you question his control over God's people?

What do these verses say about Moses' personality?

What does your hypothetical response to Moses say about *your* personality?

- g. Read Exodus 18.17-27.

Here we see Jethro's response to his son-in-law. What do you think? Do you agree or disagree with his advice?

- h. If Jethro wasn't fully converted to Yahweh, is his advice still important? Why or why not?

Brevard Childs writes, "Ancient Israel did not fall into the theological trap of polarizing the accidental and the eternal. Jethro's advice was deemed expedient at that moment in Israel's history and, therefore, from God." Do you agree with this statement?

- i. Ruth Haley Barton writes, "The individuals who would bear this burden with Moses could not be just anyone. They needed to be people who feared God – people who were spiritual and had a vibrant relationship with God – not just people who demonstrated competence in a particular area. They needed to be trustworthy in every way, living their lives honestly before God and others. There was no ambiguity in Jethro's counsel: sharing the load with other spiritual people was *the only way* Moses would be able to remain faithful to his calling to leadership over the long haul."

Why is the role of *others* so important to *Moses'* faithfulness?

- j. Read Deuteronomy 30.11-14. What could these verses teach us about learning to live within our God-ordained limits?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. We read how Moses recounted the actions of God for Jethro. How have you shared God's movement in your life with others?

- b. What seasons of your life stand out? How does that make you more aware of God's work in your life now? (Think back to Pastor Paul's sermon last week - click <http://gspc.org/recent-messages/sermon/2014-06-29/on-the-road-always> if you missed it!)
- c. What "gods" are you most in danger of bowing down to?
- d. How has God used "secular" advice - perhaps from a nonbeliever - to help reveal His will in your life?
- e. Ruth Haley Barton writes, "Moses learned a lesson that we must all learn: that to be human is to have limits." How have you learned your limits? How has that been difficult? How has it set you free?
- f. We're calling this series Strengthening the Soul of Your Faith, but to have our individual souls strengthened, perhaps we need to subtract the Y (which would then read, "Strengthening the Soul of *Our* Faith").

How could others subtract the Y to help you? How could you subtract the Y in order to help others?

V. Pray

- a. Ask God reveal the area where you could "subtract the Y" to serve others,
- b. Pray for our ongoing dismissal from the PC(USA) (learn about the current status of this process at <http://www.gspc.org/blog/post/pastors-note-saturday-july-5th>)
- c. Lift up our High School students who will be on a houseboat trip this week.