

Ex. 17:8-18:27  
(The Wise father-in-law)

Preamble:

Announce college lunch today

Prayer for illumination:

Sermon introduction:

Over the years, I have been involved in at least ten churches...

The Roman Catholic church  
King's community church  
South Hill Bible Church  
Christ Church in Moscow Idaho  
GLPC in Green Lake  
Covenant Presbyterian Church  
First Evangelical Free Church  
Covenant Life Church in Md.  
Fairfax Covenant Church in Fairfax Va.  
GCF for the last 19 years.

Some of these churches were very healthy, and some of them, looking back, were very unhealthy. I'm sure in a group this size, many of you have been involved in some very healthy churches and some very unhealthy churches. Which raises the question, what are the ingredients for a healthy community of faith?

This brings us to Exodus 17-18. God has delivered his people, and he is now forming a covenant community through the hardships of the wilderness. They have been in the desert for roughly 6-7 weeks. They just learned how to rely on God for food and water. Now they are going to learn a few key principals necessary for a healthy community of faith.

These passages do not describe the church, since the church was birthed at Pentecost, but they do provide several key principals for a healthy community of faith. Furthermore, these are not the only key principals, but they are a good start. These principals have direct application to the church of Jesus Christ today. So, what are they?

A healthy community of faith...

***Prays***

***Witnesses***

***Delegates***

**First, a healthy community of faith prays.**

**Exodus 17:8-13 (ESV) — 8 Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim.**

Again, it is roughly 6-7 weeks after the exodus from Egypt. The Israelites are in the wilderness. They are being harassed by the Amalekites, who will be a thorn in their side for centuries.

**9** So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.”

This is the first time we are introduced to Joshua, who eventually replaces Moses. He proves to be a very godly and a very courageous leader.

Joshua is told to choose some men to fight the Amalekites. More than likely these are untrained men, with little military experience.

We don't know for sure, but I bet Joshua thought, “Moses, let me get this straight, you want me to attack this army with a few untrained men, while you go up on that hill and raise a stick?”

**10** So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. **11** Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. **12** But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. **13** And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

Whenever Moses lifted the staff in his hands, his army prevailed, but when he grew weary and lowered the staff his enemies prevailed, and his men died. Eventually, he grew so weary, that he had to sit on a stone and his friends had to hold up his hands. Imagine, holding up your hands all day long!!!

This reminds me of Mr. Beast—he is currently the most popular influencer on you tube with 240 million subscribers. He decided to give away a 2.5-million-dollar jet. He chose eleven contestants. All they had to do was be the last one to take their hand off the plane. The winner held his hand on the plane for 18 hours.

Moses had a lot more at stake.

Although the text does not say that Moses prayed, all the indicators are there. How do we know?

Moses lifts his hands, appealing to God's mighty power. Raising one's arms is often a sign of dependent prayer in the Scriptures.

**Psalm 63:3–4 (ESV) — 3** Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. **4** So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.

**Psalm 141:2 (ESV) — 2** Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!

**1 Timothy 2:8 (ESV) — 8** I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;

**Illustration:**

I recently reread the biography of D. Martyn Lloyd Jones; the promising medical doctor turned pastor. Before he became a pastor, he was on track to be the official physician of the royal family. In other words, he was a very good doctor. He turned medicine down to pastor a small struggling church in Wales that could barely pay him enough to feed his family.

To make a long story short, he ended up being one of the most powerful and influential preachers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

John Stott writes, he was “the most powerful persuasive voice in Britain for 30 years.” (Iain Murray, TLOMLJ, back cover)

Jl Packer writes, he was “the greatest man I have ever known.” (Iain Murray, TLOMLJ, back cover)

Mark Dever writes, he “had a more profound spiritual vision than anyone else I have known.” (Iain Murray, TLOMLJ, back cover)

John MacArthur writes, “No preacher had a greater influence on me in my formative years than David Martyn Lloyd Jones.” (Iain Murray, TLOMLJ, back cover)

People often said that when he preached, the sense of God’s presence was so thick that no one moved, blinked, coughed, or fidgeted for 40 minutes.

His preaching converted thousands and send droves into full time Christian ministry all around the world.

Why was his preaching so incredibly powerful? Sure, he was gifted, but his secret was secret prayer.

Bethan Lloyd Jones wrote,

“No one will ever understand my husband until they realize that he is first of all a man of prayer and then an evangelist.” (Iain Murray, TLOMLJ, back cover)

When I read about men and women that were used mightily by God, because they prayed, I get convicted (for a season). Then I grow apathetic.

Trying to do effective ministry without prayer is like sailing without wind.

Grilling without a flame...

Or driving a car without gas...

It is impossible.

### **Application:**

We need to pray, because just like Israel, we have mighty enemies.

Who are our enemies? Not Amalek, but Satan himself (Eph. 5:8-14; 6:12). How much more do we need to pray. How much more does our community of faith need to pray.

Moses labored in prayer.  
Moses grew weary in prayer.  
Yet he kept on praying...  
Why? The stakes were high.  
The stakes are just as high, if not higher for us. Eternal souls are at stake.  
Plus, we have a mighty enemy.

How can we persist in prayer? Come to our Sunday morning prayer meeting at 8am. Our small band is growing.

Consider turning off your radio, podcast, or audiobook on your commute and pray instead, out loud the whole way to work.

Pray with your spouse before you go to bed.

We can't do anything apart from God's power.

Sure, we can organize a few things, have a good worship service, but we can't do anything of eternal value, until God moves. And God moves when we pray.

We must pray!

Israel had an intercessor on the mountain. But Moses grew tired and weary. When he did, his men died. But we have a far better intercessor. We have Jesus.

He went up on another mountain and defeated our enemies, suffering and dying for us. And now he prays for us all the time. In fact, he never ceases to pray for us!

**Hebrews 7:25 (ESV) — 25** Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

His prayers, and our prayers, sustain us in our battles against the flesh, the world, and the devil.

First, *a healthy community of faith prays. But that is not all...*

## **Second, a healthy community of faith witnesses.**

In 18:1-6, Moses is reunited with his wife, sons, and his father-in-law Jethro. As Moses talks with Jethro, he recounts God's victories. In doing so, he provides us with a wonderful example of effective witness. Let me ask a few questions...

**How does Moses witness? With gentleness and respect!**

**Exodus 18:5-7 (ESV) — 5** Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was encamped at the mountain of God. **6** And when he sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her," **7** Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. And they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent.

This is a great model of gentleness and respect. Moses is not a jerk!

**1 Peter 3:15 (ESV) — 15** but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

When talking with a non-Christian be gracious, don't interrupt, listen carefully, and be respectful. This is hard to do. I was recently talking with someone converting to EO. When he explained the EO conception of justification, I said "that is ridiculous." Don't do that!

*How does Moses witness? With gentleness and respect.*

**How else does Moses witness? By sharing his testimony.**

**Exodus 18:8-9 (ESV) — 8** Then 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 come upon them in the way, and how the LORD had delivered them. **9** And Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the LORD had done to Israel, in that he had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians.

Moses simply shares what God did for Israel and himself.

There are different styles of evangelism. Moses merely shares his testimony of what God has done. Every Christian can do this. We simply share what life was like before we met Christ and what life has been like after we met Christ. God has delivered you from an enemy far worse than Pharaoh. Surely, you can talk about it!

Some people don't care about proofs for God's existence, they just want to know if Christianity works. Does God change people? Yes...

Plus, it is harder to argue with someone's story or experience of what happened, especially these days, when expressive individualism has run rampant.

**How does Jethro respond to Moses witness? With faith and worship!**

**Exodus 18:10-12 (ESV) — 10** Jethro said, "Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. **11** Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people."

This really is an amazing story. Jethro is the priest of Midian. In other words, he is a pagan priest. He is not from Israel; therefore, he did not grow up believing in YHWH. The Midianites were a wicked people group.

Yet, God saved him through the testimony of Moses. Wow! How do we know that God saved him? He blesses YHWH's name and then says, "now I know that YHWH is greater than all gods..." Then, in verse 12, he worships YHWH in the customs of Israel by offering sacrifices and sharing a meal.

This conversion is a direct fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham.

**Genesis 12:3 (ESV) — 3** I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

And the miracles performed in Egypt.

**Exodus 9:16 (ESV) — 16** But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

Then notice what happens next.

**Exodus 18:12 (ESV) — 12** And Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses’ father-in-law before God.

Notice the order of events.

God saves Jethro the Midianite priest, a non-Jew, through the testimony of Moses. Then, Jethro, Moses, Aaron, and all the elders of Israel sit down for a feast.

Doesn’t this point us to the end of the age?

One scholar writes,

“Don’t rush past this moment. This is the climax of the exodus. So far in the story we’ve had people treading on holy ground. We’ve had spectacular plagues of blood, frogs, gnats and hail. We’ve seen the death of every firstborn Egyptian. We’ve had pillars of cloud and fire connecting earth and sky. We’ve seen a road through the sea with walls of water on either side. We’ve had manna appearing from heaven. But the climax of all this astonishing drama is a meal—a meal in the presence of God (see also 24:8-11) to which the nations are invited. The exodus is a pointer to a greater exodus, a greater act of deliverance from sin and death through the death and resurrection of God’s own Son. And the climax of that great exodus is an eternal banquet. People from every nation will be brought together by the blood of Christ to eat in the presence of God. And that moment will continue forever.” (Chester, GWFY, Exodus)

### **Application:**

Here is the exciting news.

You and I will be at that great feast someday, with people from every tribe, and tongue, and nation.

In the meantime, we have the incredible privilege of telling our friends our testimony, in the hopes that they will participate in the eternal feast.

Who can you tell this week?

*What are the ingredients for a healthy community of faith?*

*First, a healthy community of faith prays.  
Second, a healthy community of faith witnesses.*

### **Third, a healthy community of faith delegates.**

*What does this look like? For starters, we need to understand...*

#### **The problem Moses faced.**

**Exodus 18:13–18 (ESV) — 13** The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening. **14** When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?" **15** And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God; **16** when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make them know the statutes of God and his laws." **17** Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. **18** You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone.

Moses is overworked! He is trying to do everything himself. It is killing him.

#### **Illustration:**

One commentator writes,

As a pastor, I can sympathize with Moses. Sometimes people ask, "A 'Pastor'—is that a full-time job?"... I actually tried to think about what I do. Here are a few things: Sermons to prepare, worship services to prepare, vision to cast, mission to execute, meetings with elders to attend, people to counsel (some outside our church), bills to pay, phone calls to make, books to write, websites to monitor, funds to raise, outside speaking engagements to prepare for, groups to meet, classes to prepare for and teach, conflicts to resolve, reference letters to write, blogs to write, questions to answer, leaders to disciple, ministries to oversee, a building to work on, missionaries to send and support, people to pray for, visits to make, fellowships with other pastors to attend, social events to attend, weddings to officiate, funerals to lead—and more! (Merida, EJIE)

#### **Application:**

Sadly, many pastors try to be like Moses. They try to do it all.

One denomination actually lauds this approach.

They call their approach, "The Moses model of Leadership." By this they mean that the pastor pretty much calls all the shots. Ironically, the Moses model of leadership nearly killed Moses. The Moses model of leadership is bad!!!

*We see the problem Moses face. But fortunately, we also see...*

#### **The plan Jethro suggested.**

**Exodus 18:19–23 (ESV) — 19** Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God, **20** and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do.

**21** Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. **22** And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. **23** If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace.”

Let me make a few observations.

Notice, in verse 21, that godly character is the most important qualification for Christian leaders. This is the same for NT leaders (see Acts. 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:6–9). When we are looking for our next batch of elders, this is what matters most.

Church leaders must be chosen for their godly character, not primarily because they are leaders in the community or successful business owners.

In addition, notice that Moses delegates responsibility to others. He does not call all the shots. And he does not do all the work. Again, this is the same pattern we find in the NT. Local churches are governed by a plurality of godly elders (Acts 14:23) and served by a plurality of godly deacons, with every member serving in ministry (1 Cor. 12).

### **Illustration:**

The NFL draft just happened. There are seven rounds in the draft. Each team picks one player per round unless they make some trades. But it is very rare that a top pick changes an entire franchise. Why? Football is a team sport and NFL teams are massive organizations.

You have all the people in the front office.

The facilities staff.

The coaching staff.

The trainers

The film specialists

The PR people.

The sports psychologists.

Then you have all the players.

There are 53 players on a active roster.

Offense... Quarterbacks, running backs (fullback and tailbacks), receivers, tight ends, linemen.

Defense... Linebackers, safety's, DB, D-Lineman...

Special teams.... Long snapper, kicker, punter, etc...

There is simply no way that one man or two men can win the game, even if it is Patrick Mahomes or Brock Purdy.

### **Application:**



The church of Jesus Christ is no different. The elders must delegate ministry to every single member. Every member matters (from the nursery worker, to the security team member, to the slide operator).

In fact, according to Eph. 4:11 the elders are the ones called by God to equip the saints for the work of ministry. This means that the saints, the members, the non-elders, are the ones who are supposed to do the ministry.

Every Sunday we anywhere from 50-60 people are required to make this service happen. They serve on the worship team, the nursery team, the security team, the slides team, the sound team, the production team, the communion team, the coffee team. They are Sunday school teachers, ushers, and parking team members.

Sunday morning does not just happen.

During the week close to 21 C-groups meet and 27 D-groups meet. Plus, we have a skilled and faithful counseling team, an amazing young mom's ministry, and skilled youth group leaders.

This is why we often say, our goal is every member serving and every member involved in a discipling relationship.

Right now, we have big needs on the nursery team and the security team.

Here is the point... Church ministry is hard work. One person, me, or even a team of people (the elder board), can't do it all. I can't be at every hospital bed and every kids concert. I often tell people that a lead pastor has three primary responsibilities (preach good sermons, cast vision, and train leaders). This is what I try to focus on. The elders train the members for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:11).

Mention our shepherding plan...

What a privilege to be part of the body of Christ?  
Isn't God's plan amazing?

### **Conclusion:**

What are the ingredients for a healthy community of faith?

A thumping band?  
An amazing youth ministry?  
An amazing children's ministry?  
A great facility with theatre lighting and fog machines?  
A hip preacher with skinny jeans and tattoos?  
Really good coffee?  
A big parking lot?

None of these things ultimately matter. But a healthy community of faith does at least three things well.

They pray

They witness  
They delegate ministry

Let's pray....