

Welcome to the Creek everyone! My name is Emerson. I'm the life groups minister here.

You may hardly ever, if at all ever, enter their doors and you may not know the difference between a tall, a Grande, and a venti (what are you even doing??), but I can bet good money that you all have heard of Starbucks. In a matter of years Starbucks rose to great prominence. They have made a TON of money over the years because of their yummy drinks (I even looked up the most expensive one...it's called the Sexagintuple Vanilla Bean Mocha Frappuccino - PIC).

What's interesting about the Starbucks story, however, is that things weren't always so great for them. Howard Schultz, the chain's CEO, after building such a high-grossing franchise, handed the reins over to a successor. And after a while things weren't going so well – they were losing profits, fading in relevance, busying themselves but not really going anywhere. Eventually, Schultz took back over and he had to figure out...okay...**how in the world do I turn this ship around?** In Schultz' mind, he was asking himself basically this question: **“How do I help get the greatest coffee shop in the world to actually be the greatest coffee shop in the world?”**

What I find interesting is how Schultz framed the issue at hand. He, in his mind, didn't have to make Starbucks something it wasn't. All he had to do was figure out a way to help Starbucks live up to the Starbucks name. His job was to help them live into what it means to be Starbucks!

We have, for the past eight weeks, been journeying through Exodus. Today we are diving into **Exodus 18** and just as Schultz was faced with trying to have Starbucks grow into the company he knew they could be, Moses' job was to help the people of God actually live as the people of God! The only question in both of these scenarios is **how??**

For Moses, this would be no easy task...by *any* stretch of the imagination. Think about it: The Israelites had just come out of Egypt and faced one problem after another. So, in order to shepherd God's people well, Moses gets a little help from his father-in-law. **Exodus 18** begins with Moses reuniting with his father-in-law, Jethro, who was also a Midianite, his wife, and two kids Gershom and Eliezer (Someone please name your kid Gershom...it's biblical!)

Exodus 18:13, “The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening.” Notice the first words in this passage = **“The next day.”** Moses had just spent time recounting God's work of salvation in their lives and this phrase connects that to what happens next. The people were saved. But they didn't know how to practically live that out. This is an important point because the two coincide. Right *believing* goes along with right *living*. Many people like to get their “get-into-Heaven-free card” and let that be the extent of their faith journey. BUT as Pastor **Brian Zahnd says, “Salvation is not a one-night stand. Salvation is not a ticket to heaven. Salvation is not a sinner's prayer prayed once upon a time. Salvation is what happens as the story of Jesus intersects and becomes *enfolded* into our own story.”**

This is what Moses was helping the people do as he sat and judged them. He was trying to help them enfold the story of God, God's character, God's ways...into their lives. His role was to help them learn who God is and live as God's people. Obviously, no easy task. And, as we see in this passage, it was clearly too big a job for one person.

Exodus 18:14, "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?" Jethro comes onto the scene and sees what Moses is doing. And he's like, "Moses...um, I don't mean to just throw unwarranted advice out there, but *what are you doing man?* Why are you doing this all by yourself? (Like the DMV line!)

Exodus 18:15-16, "And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God; 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." Moses explains what his job is to Jethro = "Well, man, I'm just trying to mediate between God and His people as they come to inquire of Him of His statutes, His laws, and His rules for how they ought to live as God's people, especially when it comes to how they are to treat one another. Check verse 17+18.

Exodus 18:17-18, "Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. 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." = Jethro is like, "I get it, man. It's a tough job. You've got to mediate between God and His people as they come to inquire of Him of His statues, His laws, and His rules for how they ought to live as God's people...but...it is *not good* for you to do it alone. You'll burn out!

Exodus 18:19-20, "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, 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." So Jethro throws his advice out to Moses saying that Moses ought to make his role be the guy who informs everyone of God's laws and rules and then to delegate out the responsibility of the on-the-ground discernment of that role.

Exodus 18:21, "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. Basically Jethro is saying, "Moses, listen, if you want to know how to form these people into godly people...*you. need. other. godly. people. to help shepherd these people!*" And what do God's leaders look like?

Notice the characteristics of these people don't have anything to do with credentials. Nor do the qualifications for these leadership positions have anything to do with how the world typically qualifies people. Moses isn't told to look for the most popular, the person with the most connections, the person that's the smartest or the wealthiest. For Moses, it doesn't matter if you have your PhD or your GED. What he is told to look for are people who...

1. **“Fear God” = people who were devoted to God**
2. **“Trustworthy and hate bribes” = people who had integrity**
3. **“Able bodied” = “serve at all times” = people who would serve with diligence**

In God’s economy, what matters in leadership are *not* our *credentials*, but rather our *character*.

There’s a guy named **Henri Nouwen (pic)** who is one of the most internationally well-known Christian writers, thinkers, and pastors. In 1985, 11 years before his death, and despite the endless calls for speaking engagements, “he was called to join L’Arche in Trosly, France, the first of over 100 communities where people with developmental disabilities live with assistants.” He spent the rest of his days as one of these assistants.

He eventually wrote a book where he shared some of his experiences there. In one of his books, he writes this: “The first thing that struck me when I came to live at a house with mentally handicapped people was that their liking or disliking me had absolutely nothing to do with the many useful things I had done until then. Since nobody could read my books, the books could not impress anyone, and since most of them never went to school, my twenty years at Notre Dame, Yale, and Harvard did not provide a significant introduction.”

This is how things work in the Kingdom of God which is why Jethro encourages Moses to look for people devoted to God, people who have integrity, and people who will work diligently. Jethro continues...

Exodus 18:22, “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.” This is where this begins to get on the ground for you and for me. Many times people in the church have an expectation that it is up to the “pastors” of the church to minister to everyone. These are what are I’ll call **“Consumer Christians.”** These are the vacuum Christians, who come only ever to suck up a “spiritual” sensations and never contribute.

Think with me for a second about this...what stage of human development would you say someone is who always looks to their own wants, needs, desires, only ever consumes from others and can’t feed themselves at all, and cries when they don’t get their way? An infant! And we don’t want to be a church with spiritual infants! As Peter tells us, we must **“grow up into our salvation” (1 Peter 2:2).**

To do so, we need people to, as Mark Sayers writes in his book *Reappearing Church*, move from **“consumers to contenders.”** He writes, **“When we step into the posture of contending, we choose to stand in the place of transformation rather than accumulation. We no longer live to acquire a portfolio of possessions and cool experiences. Instead, the horizon we are heading for, which will shape our lives, is the meeting of heaven and earth at the end of the age.”**

So, what is Jethro's advice? Jethro tells Moses to find some contenders, to find people who will contribute. He urges Moses to find qualified people, split the people into groups (thousands, hundreds, fifties, tens) and have those people shepherded in order to help them walk according to God's laws and statutes at all times. And in the passage, people step up. But then we get to what I see as a real problem in the American church (and perhaps even a little more on the ground for you and for me): **DIY Christianity**.

What is DIY Christianity? **As one author says: "This is the mentality that I have the knowledge, resources and capacity to maintain and improve my own spiritual wellbeing without the help of others, and most certainly without the assistance of a "professional."**

If one sign of spiritual maturity is assuming roles of leadership and authority another sign of spiritual maturity is submitting to those with leadership and authority. Many times we, in our minds, think spiritual maturity is the ability to **question** authority. Many times, however, it's the ability to say "Not my will, but yours be done."

It's interesting our perspective on this because in many areas we are quite okay with having others help us. Wanna learn karate? Visit a dojo. Wanna learn piano? Get lessons. Want your kids to excel at football? Send them to a camp. Want to get fit? Get a trainer.

I recently entered a drawing at LA Fitness because I wanted some help with my fitness. I entered the drawing and lo, and behold, ya boy won the ONE free session. I was pretty excited because when I go, I don't really have a clue what I'm doing. I just hope by going, **THIS** gets better.

So, upon winning, this dude at LA calls me. We schedule a time, and meet early on a Friday morning (at 11:00 a.m. actually). I get there. We sit down at his desk, and he has me fill out a form with my weight, body fat %, goals, exercise history, etc. And right off the bat I was like "Dang bro! There's a lot to this!" Then, he had me go and do this leg workout routine he had set up for me and in **25 minutes** I was out of breath, about to throw up, and ready to be done for the day! I actually needed him to get me a Gatorade so I wouldn't pass out!

After the session, we sat back down at his desk and he was like, "Do you see the benefits of having someone like me help you out?" "Yes." "Could you see yourself doing this 2-3 times a week?" I was like (still all woozy), "Yeah." He's like, "Well, how about you sign up for a year's worth of sessions right now???" What's funny is that right as my head was spinning, and I'm about to throw up, this dude tries to take advantage of me and get me to sign up for a YEAR'S worth of personal training sessions right there...at like \$55 a session! Luckily, I had enough wherewithal to get out of there without committing to anything! (Pro tip: If you're married and someone tries to get you to buy something just say, "Hey, sorry man, but gotta talk to the wife." That doesn't really work for me though since I'm not married...so I said, "Hey, sorry bro, but gotta run it by my mom!"...JK, I just referenced my budget!

So, in ALL these areas, we get help and we see the benefits of having an authority help us out! (Electrician, dealing with grief or trauma, etc.) BUT...when it comes to spirituality? "Nah...I'm good. Sure, we believe in the kingdom of darkness and its unceasing desire to see us capitulate

to our sinful ways and denounce Christ, BUT we don't really need God's gift of shepherds to help us out because our faith is just between us and God." I hear things like...

- **"I don't trust those in spiritual authority."** *Not all people in positions of authority shepherd well and I'm sorry (My family, along with friends, have been hurt personally)... but, just like we don't forsake all doctors because we went to one bad one, we don't also throw out spiritual authority because of the few who have mishandled their position.*
- **"Spiritual authority sounds a little cultic, doesn't it?"** *Maybe...until you realize that cults tend to gather power into the hands of one individual which is then used to manipulate rather than serve. That's not the church. The church is set up with a plurality of leaders, with checks and balances, whose purpose is not manipulation, but service. This is how our church works (members -> life group leaders -> staff -> ELT -> elders -> Trinity).*
- **"My faith is just between me and God."** *This misunderstands justification. At the same time we are brought into right relationship with God (justified), we are also brought into the family of God (familified). There is no Christ without His Church.*
- **"I simply don't need anyone else."** *Which is a very high, unrealistic view of humanity. And we don't actually live that way (i.e. blogs, YouTube, government, Google)*

As author Robert Mulholland writes, **"We can no more be conformed to the image of Christ outside corporate community than a coal continue to burn outside of the fire."**

And you know what? I totally get these! It feels just strange! Sociologist Robert Bellah writes that, in our culture, **"Anything that would violate our right to think for ourselves, judge for ourselves, make our own decisions, live our lives as we see fit, is not only morally wrong, it is sacrilegious."** And when you couple our bent towards individualism with what Biola University professor, Joseph Hellerman, says about our culture having a "hermeneutic of suspicion toward power and authority," it's no wonder why DIY Christianity has become so prevalent! I *feel* the pull of our culture to make the self, sacrosanct and to always be suspicious of authority and thus to hold any sort of spiritual authority at arm's length!

The only problem with this...is the Bible! That's why throughout the NT, we see a precedent of having spiritual authority in one's life. In the NT, we see that the churches are given elders and deacons to shepherd God's people.

Look with me at what Peter says to the elders in **1 Peter 5:1-5**, "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight...being examples to the flock. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders."

Or check out Paul in **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13**: "We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work."

Or even the writer of Hebrews who says in **Hebrews 13:7 and 17**, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith...Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls,

as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

Going through life in a DIY type of way without any tangible spiritual authority in your life is not a good idea. Trying to discern the will of God and grow into spiritual maturity all by yourself without Christ’s Church is like trying to solve a puzzle with no picture on the front of the box-oh and you’re missing pieces to the puzzle-oh, and every time you start fitting some pieces together, the enemy comes and whispers “are you sure that’s right?” “You can’t do it” and so on. We **need** shepherds in our lives. We can’t do it alone.

What does this look like? Well, for me I remember what it was like trying to figure out what to do after I graduated from college (#adulting). Everything up to that point is handed to you. Ok, I go to elementary school, middle school, high school, college, and I go to...wait...what’s next??? / **DECIDE THAT NOW?** Do I go get a job? Do I do *more* schooling? Do I do an internship? Do I go home and mooch? What do I do?!?

I remember having NO idea what to do. So, I consulted those with spiritual authority in my life to help. I talked with my pastor, my youth pastor, and some godly peers and through the process of conversation, questions, and prayer we discerned what my next best step would be. My *natural inclination* was to go out and get a job because I tend to have a scarcity mindset. *How am I going to live? How will I pay bills? Where will I live? Etc.* But through the discernment process with my spiritual leaders, it became clear that I was supposed to do an internship at a place called Indian Creek Christian Church...which has led to a job...which has led to some of the richest experiences I’ve ever had (Kenya where 20 kids got saved!)...which has led to some of the most treasured relationships I have in life (Tuckers, Harts, Lamkins)...which has led to my life group...which has led to a deeper understanding and love for God and His Word.

I don’t know where I’d be without me listening to the spiritual mentors in my life. And I think that in *all* areas (yes, I said all), we would be better off consulting and heeding the direction of the those whose job it is to shepherd us when making decisions concerning things like our **vocation** (What am I going to do with my life?), our **spouse** (Who am I going to spend my life with?), our **residence** (Where am I going to live?), and our **resources** (Where am I going to spend my resources?).

Imagine with me the kingdom *difference* that would be made IF, with our vocation, our spouse, our residence, and our resources, we sought counsel, NOT from whatever desires we had at the time of our decision (or blogs, Google, celebrities), but in conjunction with the godly shepherds in our lives. **It’s not about controlling individuals, it’s about advancing God’s kingdom.** All too often we make vocational, spousal, residential, and monetary decisions based on advancing *our* kingdom. But what if *the kingdom* was our first priority for every aspect of our lives? That’s what godly shepherds help us discern. This was the reasoning for Jethro’s advice to Moses. The people need shepherded to understand God and to understand godly living. And here’s what Jethro promises Moses if he heeds his advice:

Exodus 18:23, “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.” “If” = conditional. **IF** Moses follows his advice, Jethro promises him that God will direct him, he won’t burnout, and the people will be better off for it and they’ll be able to grow into the kind of people God intends for them to be. We won’t read the rest of the chapter, but it basically says that Moses humbly listens to his father-in-law and does what he told him to do. And then Jethro leaves. This is how God shepherds His people. He gives them leaders. He gives them shepherds!

You find folks to care for the bride of Christ. Just as a bride on her wedding day is made ready ever so carefully by her attendants, so too, is the bride of Christ made ready ever so carefully by her leaders.

In **Exodus 18**, the people of God had just come out of **slavery**, having experienced the **salvation** of the Lord. And the same is true for us. We were once enslaved to sin. **HOWEVER**, if we claim Jesus as our Lord and Savior, then we are free from Satan, Sin, and death! **BUT** if slavery and salvation were true for both Israel and us, so too is our solidarity with them in our need for **shepherding**. We need people who are willing to step up and disciple others. And we need to humbly receive guidance, direction, and discipleship. It’s in this symbiotic relationship, with Christ and His Spirit at the center, that we are able to become like Jesus – humble, loving, compassionate, missional, and impactful in our city and world.

Communion/Porch: Look...we know that no human shepherd is going to be perfect (we see this all too often unfortunately). Christian leaders have limited knowledge-they too, make mistakes, and they can’t always be there for you. That’s why we need Jesus – someone who knows all, who never makes mistakes, and who will never leave you nor forsake you!

As Jesus says in **John 10:11-15**, **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.**”