

## “Church 101” // Exodus 17:8–18:27 // *Rescue:* *The Book of Exodus #9*<sup>1</sup>

### Bumper/ Introduction

**Exodus 17, if you have your Bibles ... We are following the children of Israel on their journey to the Promised Land, as God teaches them the basics--the 101 courses, if you will--of knowing and walking with him.** As we learned, God is not simply trying to take his people to the Promised Land; he’s trying to put the Promised Land into them.

Today we’re going to see God teach them 3 things about life in the redeemed community. BTW, it is **extremely significant that** in the foundational lessons God gives to them about walking with him--the 101 Courses--that he emphasizes the importance of playing their role in the redeemed community. This whole Exodus thing, you see, is not about gathering people around one charismatic leader, Moses; it’s about creating a body of people all of whom have a role in God’s Kingdom--a holy nation, a kingdom of priests.

In the Kingdom of God, everyone is important, but no one is *that* important--including Moses. It **reminds of the lady I heard about who came in a little late** to the church service and asked the usher if she could be seated on the front row. The usher said, “Well, ma’am, I’m happy to take you there, but I’ve got to tell you, you don’t want to sit on the front row, because our pastor is really boring, and for sure he will put you to sleep, and that might be embarrassing to you.” She said to him, “Young man, do you know who I am?” He responded,

“No ma’am, I don’t.” She said, “I... am **the pastor’s mother.**” The man dropped his head in embarrassment. But then he looked up at her and said, “Ma’am, do you know who I am?” And she said, “No, young man, I don’t.” He said, “Thank God” & turned around and walked off.

No one person, not even Moses, is that important in the Kingdom of God. **Listen, I love this portion of the Exodus story. At first it feels kind of random--we’ve gone** through these amazing, big picture faith lessons with the manna and the water from the rock, and then it’s like we detour to some random and practical lessons about life & leadership in Israel. But, like I said, God is showing us the importance of being in his family and playing their role in his family.

*(BTW, let me teach you something about Bible interpretation: Whenever you are trying to interpret a passage of Scripture, you’ve got to keep in mind when it was written down and for what purpose.*

*You see, these stories weren’t written down the moment they happened, as if Moses were live tweeting the events of the Exodus. They were written down a few years later, after Israel had started to settle into their life as a nation, and Moses is highlighting lessons to help them live as the people of God. Moses is not telling us every single thing that happened--no, he’s picking and choosing certain events, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and the filter he’s using is what is most helpful for life in the community now.*

*The Gospels (in the New Testament) are the same way. The Gospels are all about the life of Jesus, of course, but the Gospel writers, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, chose what to include from his life, based on what was most helpful for life in the church after he’d gone. There’s even a couple of places in the Gospels where the writer refers*

<sup>1</sup> Sources consulted: Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Exodus* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014); Jen Wilkin, “To Sinai”, Session of God of Deliverance Bible Study, February 28,

2022; Tony Evans, “[Jehovah Nissi](#)”, October 29, 2016, Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship; Skip Heitzig, “[Exodus 17-18 - 2011](#)”, accessed June 19, 2018, Calvary Church, Sidney Griedanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*. And others as noted throughout.

to “the church”--and the church obviously wasn’t even around until after Jesus left. The writers use things from the life of Jesus to guide the church.

Moses chose these 3 events to emphasize their ongoing role in God’s community, and by extension, ours too. We’ll call these “Church 101...” and the first lesson comes to us courtesy of **Miley Cyrus**:

### 1. “Put Your Hands Up” (17:8–13)

(You know, *they’re playing our song, the butterflies fly away...*)

17:8 Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. 9 So Moses said to Joshua (this is the first mention of Joshua, by the way), “Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek.

(Notice, we’re now at a stage where God empowers Israel to fight. No longer is it God doing it by himself, like in the Exodus, where they have only to stand and watch as he does it; he’s now empowering them to do it.)

And how is his power going to come? Vs 9, Moses says, “Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.” 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.

Now, watch this: 11 Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. When Moses’ hands are up in the air, they win; when they’re down, they lose. It makes you wonder what would have happened if Moses had started to do jumping jacks, right? (Win, lose. Win, lose.)

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.”

“What’s wrong with Moses? Other people are out there literally risking their lives in battle and he can’t even keep his hands up? I’m not sure you fully appreciate how difficult this is. So, I’m going to prove it by using a volunteer.

So, XXXX, come on up here--you’re a young, in-shape guy. Keep in mind that Moses at this point was almost 80. I’m going to have Aaron and Hur at the ready... Now, church, when he sags at all, audience, you point it out... (I’m gonna put up a **Count-up timer**; “Good luck, go with God”).

(I’m gonna leave them up here--but I’m gonna need you to pay attention to me....) So, what’s being taught here? **More important than the guys out on the field fighting is the one up on the mountain praying.** It’s not the skill of the fighters, or even the leadership of Moses that wins the battle, it’s the power of God, and that power flows through Moses’ hands raised in intercession, which makes Aaron and Hur this day’s “players of the game.”

**So, I have two main applications: A Jesus application and a practical application.** First, the Jesus application. Look up here on stage: *How do we not see in this a picture of Calvary?* A man on top of a mountain with his hands raised and two people on either side of him?

**Jesus is the ultimate intercessor for the church.** He prays for the church based on his finished work. And, unlike Moses, he never drops his hands. **It’s his intercession** that we tap into when we pray “*in Jesus’ name.*” BTW, most Christians conclude their prayers with the words, “in Jesus’ name,” but many aren’t quite sure why. They think it’s like a signal to God that we’re about done, letting the tower know you’re bringing the plane in for a landing. They use the phrase “in Jesus’ name” like you’d use “sincerely” to close a letter.

But when you pray “In Jesus’ name,” what you’re saying is “God, I’m asking you to grant this because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross, and his expressed intentions for the world.

Praying in his name means **literally asking as his representative**. It means you imagine what Jesus would pray like if he was in the situation you’re in--to consider what he would ask the Father for, and then pray it in his name, as his representative.

And if that’s the case, btw, **you’ll understand that the problem with our prayers** are not usually that they are too big, they are too small. Because, see, if you’ve really tapped into the heart of Jesus, there is so much you can ask for.

Years ago I encouraged you to meditate on this phrase before you prayed--it was part of a 4-part Gospel Prayer I wrote in my first book, *Gospel*. The final part of the prayer was this, **“As I pray, I’ll measure your willingness to save by the cross and your power to save by the resurrection.”** As I pray, I want to remind myself of the compassion you showed at the cross and the power you showed at the resurrection, and pray according to that!

John Newton, writer of Amazing Grace, said it this way: **“Thou art coming to a King, so with thee LARGE petitions bring. For his grace and power are such, that none can ever ask too much.”**<sup>2</sup>

This is what it means to pray in his name. Jesus is the main intercessor for the church. *His intercession from the cross stands as the constant hope of the church, and we now pray in his name.*<sup>3</sup>

**That said, it’s obvious that we’re being shown something** through the labor of Aaron and Hur, right? Their labor in keeping Moses’ hands raised is the deciding factor in the battle! They’re the players of the game!

You can argue that **the main work of the people of God** in the Bible is intercession, and that’s not me exaggerating to make a point. Jesus said, **“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.”** (Mark 11:17)

- BTW, that’s really important phrasing--“my house shall be called.” That’s passive. This is not what the church calls itself, it’s how others describe the church. It’s not so much about our aspirations, but our reputation.
- **So, we should ask, is this our reputation, Summit Church?** When people think about our church, what do they bring up? Is it our preaching or our worship or our ministries--or do they say, “Man, those people over there, they talk to God. That’s the main thing that happens over there.”

The **Apostles fully embraced this and lived it out**. And so, at every major turning point in the book of Acts, you see them praying. In fact, it’s quite amazing--all the major things that happen in Acts happen out of prayer meetings, not out of church leadership initiatives.

- Think about it. At the birth of the church, Acts 1, Jesus gives the Great Commission to the Apostles: the Great Commission: to carry the gospel to every nation on earth. And he gave that to a bunch of blue collar workers with no formal education.
- *Never in the history of the world had a more important and more urgent and more difficult assignment been given to a less qualified group of people.* What did they do? Instinctively, Acts 1, they ran to the Upper Room to pray. No one told them, they just went.

<sup>2</sup> John Newton, “Come, My Soul, Thy Suit Prepare,” The Lutheran Hymnal (St. Louis: Concordia, 1941), 459.

<sup>3</sup> I owe this great insight to Jen Wilkin!

They prayed on their faces for 10 days and then the power of God fell on them.

- I often ask myself, “What would I have done if I’d been in that situation?” Jesus has just given us our assignment. You know what most of us would have done? We would’ve gotten out a whiteboard and started to plan. Organize. Raise money. They got on their faces and prayed. For 10 days.
- At the end of 10 days, the power of God fell. Then Peter stood up (Acts 2) and preached for about 10 minutes and 3000 people got saved.
- They prayed for 10 days, preached for 10 minutes, and 3000 people got saved. Today we plan for 10 days, pray for 10 minutes, and 3 people get saved. You see, it’s all about where you place the zeroes.

The Apostles didn’t see prayer as something they did around the margins of their ministry, they saw it as the center of their ministry. In Acts 6, when the Apostles urge the church to appoint deacons to assist in meeting some of the needs in the church, explaining that they didn’t have time to do it, they said, “Appoint these deacons to meet these needs...*“But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”*”

- What’s interesting about what they said is they put “prayer” and “the ministry of the word” on equal footing.
- You see, you can’t see this in English, but there’s a definite article in Greek before prayer, so that what it says is “*We will devote ourselves to the prayer and the ministry of the word.*” Which means they are equal. Both are the ministries they are dedicating themselves to.
- And the reason I point that out is because (watch this), for most of us, we see “prayer” is simply the preparation for the ministry--the preaching of the Word is the real ministry and prayer is what you do to get ready for it. But, see, in the early church, prayer was not just preparation for the ministry, it was itself the ministry.

- Let me say that again. *“In the early church, prayer is not just preparation for this ministry. Prayer IS the ministry.”*

It’s arguably the most important thing we can do as a people. **This church should be known as a house of prayer for all nations.** That shouldn’t be just our aspiration, it should be our reputation. **Here’s how we’re trying to do this here, Summit:**

- **In our Sunday services, we often take time to pray.** Church growth experts would tell us not to do it because it makes new people feel weird, but we don’t care. This is to be a house of prayer, and you might as well learn that right from the start.
- **We often say that the time at the end that we provide for prayer might be the most important part of our service.** It’s not that I’m devaluing the importance of what I do up here, or what the worship teams do. It’s that during prayer you can connect with God, which is the point of this place. It’s one thing to sit here and listen to me talk about God; that’s a moment where you actually engage with him. *(And I know some of you say, “Yeah, I don’t ever go down there to pray because I can do that on my own at home.” True, but you know there’s something special about doing it with the gathered people of God. You say, “But I don’t want people looking at me. I’m self-conscious.” See, that’s your problem. You’re more concerned about your image than you are humbling yourself before God and that’s why his power is missing from your life.)*
- **Here’s something else: One of our most important ministries on the weekend is what we call the “boiler room” prayer hour.** We have a group of volunteers who pray through the whole service while I or whomever else is up here preaching. We take the name “boiler room” from a story told about Charles Spurgeon: he was asked the secret to his great power in preaching and he walked the person asking the question down to a big basement room under the church, called “the boiler room” (where they kept all the boilers that provided the building’s heat), and there was this mass of people on their faces praying throughout the whole service. We have that: Ours is not a literal boiler room (we don’t

have those), but it's one of our most important ministries--many of you should think about joining it.

- **In your small groups**, we try to provide you with an outline each week that can really help you make prayer a central component of your gathering, not just something to open and close the meeting. That's one of my biggest pet peeves—just using prayer as a way to open and close meetings; or in a church service, as a way to get people to close their eyes so we can change the set up here. Prayer is supposed to be the core of what we do.
- **In your personal quiet times**--on our Daily Revival on our app, which I hope you use, we provide daily prayer prompts that give you specific things we can pray together for our church. It's one of my favorite things to do every day. Use it!

**Summit, I want us to be called “a house of prayer for all nations.”** I want that to be our *reputation*; I want it to be that when people talk about Summit, they don't just talk about the worship or the preaching, but they say, *“Over there, at that church, you can connect with God.”*

**So, it's no accident that almost from the outset in the Exodus**, God establishes that his people will be a community whose power is found in intercession. God's people won't be famous for their fighting skill or for Moses' oratory skills—remember, Moses had a speech impediment and at this point they have no organized army—God's people will be famous for the power they access when their hands are lifted in prayer.

**By the way, before we move on to the other couple things--notice we are introduced to a new name of God here in vs. 15** And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, “The Lord Is My Banner.” Or, “Jehovah Nissi,” and what it means is, *“the Lord's name is the power we march under.”* **THIS** is the flag we wave when we are people of prayer. When we are people of preaching, we wave the power of the preacher. When we are people of worship excellence, we wave the

power of the musicians and singers. But when we pray, literally, our hands are up in the air like a flag saying that what makes us special is not our strength or skill but that we have a God who answers prayer.

**So, thank you for putting words to this, Miley Cyrus:** *Put your hands up, they're playing our song: prayer. The butterflies (and the Amalekites and the demons) fly away.* I'm pretty sure that's not what Miley was thinking about when she wrote those words; of course, I'm not really sure what she's thinking about these days... We miss you, Miley, come back to us... but these words are a good way to sum up that first point. Put your hands up!

The second event title comes to us courtesy of Billy Joel:

## 2. “Tell Her About It” (18:1–12)

(This one should really be “tell *him* about it,” but I couldn't find a good song specifically by that name that I liked. Lauryn Hill and Celine Dion have them, but I don't like them that much. So, Billy Joel it is.)

Chapter 18, the children of Israel are pretty deep into the wilderness. But remember, this is a wilderness that Moses knew pretty well because it was where he'd fled from Pharaoh after he'd killed that Egyptian some 40 years before this. And one of the first people he met in that wilderness was a man named Jethro who had a pretty daughter named Zipporah that Moses ended up marrying. Moses then moved onto Jethro's compound and kept his sheep for 40 years.

Moses hasn't seen Jethro since he'd gone back to Egypt to lead the Exodus, and his wife hadn't gone with him to Egypt, so Jethro comes out to see him--a little family reunion here. And, vs 7 **Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. And they asked each other of their welfare (How's it going? How's the rest of the fam...)** and went into the tent. 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.

11 And Jethro said, "...**Now** I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, because in this affair [the Egyptians] dealt arrogantly with the people (and the Lord delivered them)." 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."

Moses shares with his father-in-law personal stories of how God has worked in his life, and Jethro becomes, after that conversation, a follower, a worshiper, of Yahweh. (If you recall, when Moses was in the wilderness for 40 years, he hadn't really been walking with God. That didn't happen for Moses until he met God at the burning bush. And then, after the burning bush, he immediately left for Egypt. So, Jethro doesn't really know the "walking with God" side of Moses. Plus, Jethro is a Midianite, who were closely related to the Amalekites, who were considered to be Israel's enemies.)

**So, what we're witnessing is basically a conversion. In vs 11**, Jethro gives a statement of faith, "Now I see that your God is above all gods;" **then, vs 12**, Jethro makes a burnt offering to atone for his past sins, and then he participates in a covenant meal with other Yahweh followers to show he is in. This is basically an Old Testament ceremony of conversion.

**So what are we seeing here about life in the community?** An important role you have in God's community is giving personal testimony to God's power in your life to others. Telling your family and friends about how God has changed you. Think about it: It wasn't Moses' preaching or his books that brought Jethro to faith, it was sitting down over a meal and telling him personally how he'd met God.

The church grows best not through my preaching but through your personal testimony with others about how God is changing you. And that happens right from the beginning. There's a mistake that new Christians often make; they think that bringing others to Jesus is something you do only after you've grown for a while in the Christian life like it's a 401 level of Christianity. **Here's what I've learned, after 20 years of being a pastor:** the most evangelistically contagious time of your life is usually the first 6 months to a year after your conversion. (It's like how they say you're most contagious with a cold virus in the first day or two after you catch it, even before you're showing all the symptoms.) You're the most contagious for Jesus when you first come down with him.

Listen: We've had 785 of you baptized in the last year and a bunch more profess faith in Christ. To all of you, I want to say, *"This is the most evangelistically fertile time of your life! Don't waste it."*

Jesus always encouraged people to do this immediately.

- If you know the story of the woman at the well in John 4. She'd just gotten saved and immediately she goes out and starts to testify to Jesus.. In fact, she hadn't even officially dissolved the adulterous relationship she's been in--that will come soon, but she's already going through town telling people, "You've got to come meet Jesus! He told me all that I've ever done and saved me!"
- Or, Mark 5:19, Jesus cast out a bunch of demons from a guy--not one, but a bunch, and after Jesus delivers him from all those demons, the guy says, "Let me follow you now, Jesus, and Jesus says, *No, first...* "Go home to your friends and tell them how great things the Lord has done for you, and has had mercy on you." *Go home* is the first assignment. "But Jesus, don't I need some training or seminary to do that?" And Jesus says, "Training will come in time, but outreach starts right away."

So, at our church we encourage every follower of Jesus to have a “1” that you are committed to praying for, sharing Christ with, telling them about the great things God has done for you and how he’s had mercy on you, and we encourage you to invite them to events at our church like Easter or BY1 Sundays. We call it our “Who’s Your One?” strategy--it is the most basic form of outreach possible, and we believe EVERYONE should have one, whether you’ve been a Christian for 10 years or 10 minutes. For most of you, this “1” will not be some random guy you met at a gas station--although if you’re here, *random guy from the gas station*, we love you, too--but for most of you that “one,” as we see with Moses, will be a member of your family or a close friend. So, what about you? **Do you have a “1”?** Someone who popped into your head just now?

And you don’t have to be scared about doing this. A lot of people get really nervous when we talk about “evangelism” because they think of it as this big scary thing where you show up on somebody’s doorstep asking questions like, “*If you died tonight do you know for sure you’d go to heaven?*” My favorite definition of evangelism is “*two very nervous people talking to each other.*” Or maybe you think of evangelism as awkwardly working evangelistic questions into everyday encounters,

- “I’ve got your name on our mailing list, but the more important question is, “Is your name in the Lamb’s book of life?”
- If you work at Chick-fil-A, “Here’s your spicy chicken sandwich... have you thought about how to avoid a spicy eternity?”

Stuff like that. You’re like, “That doesn’t sit right with me. I don’t think I could do that.” Listen: The most common form of evangelism in the Bible is sharing a meal with someone and telling them how God

has been at work in your life and offering to pray for them. This was Jesus’ style of evangelism.

In fact, scholars point out that the whole narrative of Luke is organized around meals. One scholar says that **Jesus basically ate his way through the Gospel of Luke!**<sup>4</sup> Honestly, Summit, that’s my kind of Savior. Amen? **One scholar points out that Luke uses the phrase “The Son of Man came to...” twice in his Gospel.** Once Luke says, “*The Son of Man came... to seek and save the lost.*” This gives us Jesus’ mission, seeking and saving the lost. The other place we see the phrase is Luke 7:34,, “*The Son of Man came... eating and drinking.*” This gives us the *method* for that mission, eating and drinking with people.<sup>5</sup> **This (Luke 19:10) is the mission. This (Luke 7:34) is the method.**

*((This is what the Bible calls hospitality, simply opening up your meal times to share with unbelievers. BTW, I’m just going to say this, because we’re in the South: Most of us have the wrong definition of hospitality. You think of hospitality as making your kitchen and living room look like something out of Ballard Designs and then inviting over your small group. That’s great, but biblically, that’s called fellowship. Hospitality in Greek means literally “welcoming in the stranger.” **Philoxenia: (phileo--family-like love; xenos--the stranger).** The foreigner. The non-Christian. Hospitality is showing family-like love to the stranger.<sup>6</sup>))*

So, here’s my challenge for you this week: Share a meal with someone who is not a Christian and tell them how ‘great things God

<sup>4</sup> Robert J. Karris, *Eating Your Way Through Luke’s Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> John Mark Comer, *Practicing the Way*, 145.

<sup>6</sup> Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Eerdmans, 1999), 31

has done for you.’ The average person eats around 1,095 meals every year, and let’s be honest, for some of you it’s a lot more than that. Why not eat 24 of those 1,000+ meals with someone you can tell about Jesus?

So, invite that relative or that friend or that co-worker over for a meal and “tell her about it.” You say, “Well, what do I say?” Well, first I say you should have gone to our Witness 101 classes that just concluded. **But!!** You can still access all of that on our website ([summitchurch.com/witness](http://summitchurch.com/witness)).

OK, thank you Miley Cyrus and Billy Joel for our first two points. We have one more important dimension of God’s covenant community, and this one comes to us courtesy of *High School Musical*:

### 3. We’re All In This Together (18:13–26)

This next story is such a great one--I’m just going to read it to you and then I’ll draw just a couple of quick lessons and we’ll be done. While Jethro is there... he notices, vs 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, “Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?... “What you are doing is not good. 18 You will certainly wear yourself out... 19 Now obey my voice; I will give you advice (I’ve been a Christian for about 10 minutes, but I’ve got some advice for you), 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.

At this point, the nation of Israel is 600,000 big, and Moses basically serves as the police, the judge, the crossing guard, the family therapist, the pastor and the DMV all in one, all by himself! And Jethro, his father-in-law, a brand new believer, says, “Moses, you’re going to kill yourself. And that will make my daughter sad, so let me help you out here. God never intended for you to do this all by yourself. I know you had the whole “burning bush” experience and you think you’re really special. But what you need to do is subdivide the people, he tells them, into groups of thousands, hundreds, and fifties, and tens. Moses, you should still serve as the visionary and the teaching pastor and even the Supreme Court, but let other leaders handle everything else.”

God is showing us that in his community, leadership (and ministry) is supposed to happen at all levels. The church is never supposed to be a ministry built around one person. Every believer has a role in the ministry. We’re a holy nation, a Kingdom of Priests.

Summit, we, like Israel, are one body of people, several thousand big--but we’re divided into **groups of hundreds** (that’s on the campus level, and that’s under the direction of a campus pastor and their staff and shepherding elders--which are biblically qualified lay pastors in the church); then you have **groups of fifties** (those shepherding elders and ministry leaders each watch over *about* 50ish people. Each campus elder usually oversees around 5 or 6 small groups. In addition



to that, we have small group leaders, **who are over “10s.”** We always say that this, the small group, is the first and best unit of care in our congregation. (BTW, one of the things that is most encouraging to me are all the stories I hear of how well people take care of each other on the small group level. I can’t tell you how much it thrills my heart when I hear about somebody in our church going through a rough time and I give them a call and ask them if they need anything and they tell me (and I hear this a lot), “Oh, pastor, it’s been a tough time, but the body of Christ has been awesome. We’ve got meals and people helping with our kids and they have a prayer chain going.” And I usually hang up the phone and bow my head and say, *“Thank you, God, for letting me serve among a people so committed to loving and caring for each other.”*)

Let me say something I hope you won’t hear as defensive. Sometimes people look at a big church like ours, especially a multi-site one--we have 14 campuses in the Triangle--and they’ll say, “This is just a production and a big show,” or “Oh, that’s just a cult of personality” because I’m on the screen or whatever. But think about it: the definition of a cult of personality is when the ministry is centered around one person--and that’s the exact opposite of what we are doing here.

Listen, I would say without any caveat that our church is better pastored now than it was when we were only about 1000 and we were all meeting at the same location and everybody considered me their primary pastor. We’ve now got more pastors and elders and ministry leaders and small group leaders and higher ratios of leaders to people than we ever have. **People say, “Well, I don’t want to be at a church where I’m not personally connected to the pastor.”** I’ll be

honest with you: *THAT* feels like a cult of personality to me. If you’re in a place where everybody has to know the pastor and has to be ministered to directly by him--that feels like an overemphasis on one person. I often say to people when they request a meeting with me and I can’t do it for whatever reason and they object, I say, “Do you want help, or do you want me? Because if you want pastor help, we can supply that. In a church our size it can’t always be and it usually shouldn’t always need to be me.” I may not be the one that walks into your hospital room. In fact, you don’t want me walking in your hospital room--if I walk in your hospital room, that’s bad news--it means whatever you have is much worse than they thought and I’m here for your final moments. If you’re sick in the hospital, pray that I do not walk through that door. But you will have someone, because we’ve done what Moses and Jethro did here--organized by 1000s and 100s and 50s and 10s.

Again, my point is not to be defensive or make excuses--it’s to say that a big church, a big congregation, doesn’t have to be an impersonal one, or one where people aren’t taken care of, and it certainly does not have to be (and should not be) a cult of personality.

That’s what we see happening here in Exodus 18: God is showing Moses that his people shouldn’t be like that. God’s solution is not to bust up the children of Israel into a bunch of smaller nations. It’s to multiply leaders at all levels. At this church, we fight hard to keep it from being like that. So, we have multiple pastors and leaders at all levels; multiple teachers who teach from this pulpit; I don’t make all the decisions around here. I sit as 1 on a team of 10 what we call “directional elders,” and I lose votes sometimes on that team.

We're a big congregation, Summit, and that's ok. Israel was big here, too. About 600,000 strong. And I know it creates some issues and some messiness and some growing pains and traffic problems (AMEN?), but our calling is to reach this city. I always say, "We don't have a megachurch, we have a megacity, and we're trying to do whatever it takes to reach that city."

When people complain to me about our growth, I say, "*Well, who do you want me to uninvite?*" You know who loves a growing church? I've learned this. Someone with a prodigal son or daughter. A grandparent who is concerned about their grandchild. They love our growing church. You know who doesn't like it, a lot of times? Those who like their comfortable seat and don't want to deal with traffic problems. We're just trying to reach one more person. And yes, it creates mess. But it's a good mess. People say, "But with all these people coming, they need to be disciplined." Yes, we're working hard on that, why don't you help us?" "Yeah, but when we do one of those big baptisms, I think some people slip in there who probably shouldn't be baptized." Yeah, I get that. We try to have good conversations with people and we end up telling a lot of them it might be best for them to hold off for a few weeks to figure this out more--but you know what? When Peter preached at Pentecost and 3000 people got saved and spontaneously baptized in a day, I'm sure that felt a little chaotic and I'm sure a few even slipped into the baptismal who weren't quite ready to be baptized.

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<sup>7</sup> I'm indebted in these preceding few paragraphs to Joby Martin, who helped me articulate the balance between pursuing church growth (*one more*

People say, "Well, J.D., you're all about numbers." Yes, I care about numbers of souls saved, number of marriages restored, numbers of prodigals brought home. And when it's your prodigal, you'll care, too. Each number represents someone precious to Jesus and so they're precious to us, too. Growth creates problems, but those problems are *worth* it.<sup>7</sup>

So, Summit, we are committed to growing--that's our evangelistic commission--but we are committed to doing so his way--in ways where leadership is shared and people are taken care of.

And, can I say this, before I close: I know we get things wrong--we do have growing pains. I know in many ways we're like a middle schooler, who grows in awkward, weird ways so that their clothes don't always fit. And maybe you've tried to get connected and it's been really hard. First, I'm genuinely sorry about that and it's definitely not our intention. So, could I ask? Would you give us another shot? Let your campus pastor know today that you are having trouble being connected, and give us another chance, ok? And, btw, you have to get involved. We can't know you or what's going on in your life if all you do is slip in, sit through church and then leave. You've got to become a part of a small group or join a ministry team. That's how you get known.

So, here's **2 applications** I want to end in:

1. **We need more leaders!** Some of you need to step up to be small group leaders and ministry leaders and elders. We need you. You

*person!*) and responsible pastoral care. Check out his interview with Josh Howerton here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=xrj6dZLO26Y>.

say, “Well, I’m not sure if I’m qualified.” Great, we’ll work with you to get you there. Let your campus pastor know so they can help you take the next step.

2. **Are you a member of the church?** All these lessons today point to being deeply involved in the community, knowing and being known. I say this all the time, church is not supposed to be an event you attend, it’s a family that you belong to. **(There’s so much more in the church for you to experience... (body))** So get off the sidelines and get involved. Go from being just a believer to being a believer. Membership puts you in covenant community-- it makes you an officially recognized part of the church; it allows you to have more of a voice in what happens here—to vote and to be considered for leadership positions. I know this sounds like I’m getting all up in your face. Some of you have been here for years and never joined. You’re what I always call “common law members,” you’re shacking up with us every week but you’ve never made it official. All I’m saying is, *if you like it, then you should put a ring on it.* (I mean, we did Miley and Billy and Zac Efron, why not bring in a little Beyoncé here?) . **Here’s how you can get that process started:** Our Explore the Summit class is the first step in our membership process. From there, you can engage w/ almost everything I’ve talked about today... how to join a small group, start serving, becoming a member, or being on a prayer team. Each of our campuses will be hosting an Explore the Summit class in just a few weeks on April 6. Visit our website today to register for a class at your campus!

I’ll say it one last time: It’s no accident that right after God teaches them the basics of faith in walking with him, he teaches them the

importance of belonging to the community and playing your role in intercession, evangelism, and care for the body.

So, Summit, let’s not just come to church, let’s *be* the church!