

Chapter 6: Freedom vs. Familiarity

Two great confrontations between God and man

A. Confronting our preference for the _____.

As much as we want freedom, we want _____ more.

“My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast- the breaker and destroyer of images...Jesus is the supreme example; he leaves all previous ideas of the Messiah in ruins.”

—C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

When you're ready to tackle the familiar, to get healthy:

It will get _____ before it gets _____.

Today's Equipping Point

Never leave a legacy of _____

Jesus said to another man, “Follow me!” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the people who are dead bury their own dead. You must go and tell about the kingdom of God.” Another man said, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go and say good-bye to my family.” Jesus said, “Anyone who begins to plow a field but keeps looking back is of no use in the kingdom of God.”

Luke 9:59-62

B. God confronts our notions of _____.

Six key leadership principles directly from the staff of Moses:

1. As a leader, _____ is not your responsibility.
2. Lead in the _____ God gives you.

3. Let God do the _____.
4. The conventional wisdom of a leadership community is often _____.
5. In a leadership role, God's _____ go way up.
6. Moses saw the absolute necessity of _____.

Discussion Questions

1. Were you left a backpack or a trunk?
2. What can you do specifically to combat a legacy of fear?
3. Which of these six leadership principles challenge you the most?

Teaching Script

Well, here we are...free at last. Delivered from Egypt and on our own.

God's deliverance of His people was astonishing. Supernatural plagues. Miraculous rescue through the Red Sea. A cloud by day. A pillar of fire by night. Water from the rock. Bread from heaven. Freedom.

God's people had known *about* God, but now they knew *Him*, and they weren't sure they liked what they saw. He wanted them to be more free than they wanted to be. They wanted their situation to change, but God had turned His attention toward changing them.

And isn't that the way it always is? We shop for the kind of God we prefer...the vending machine or divine ATM that gives us just what we ask for, the thing we want most. But God requires us to come to Him on His terms, to give us not what we want but precisely what we need. It's always an uneasy relationship between a God whose terms are non-negotiable and a people who stubbornly try to dictate those terms anyway.

In Chapter 6 of *The Story*, God's plan was clear: deliver His people through a series of miracles, defeat their enemies, give them a covenant and set of laws to make them a chosen nation, and provide them a land of promise. Simple, right? God speaks, the people listen. God delivers, the people believe. God provides, the people trust. Well, maybe not so much.

God always held up His end of the bargain: He always provided, always delivered, always kept His promises. It turns out the people were equally consistent: They always forgot, always questioned, always rebelled. Their lack-of-faith list was long. When daily bread fell from heaven, they craved a taste of Egypt. Even Moses' siblings, Miriam and Aaron, grew jealous and undermined their brother's leadership.

Then they reached Kadesh, and Moses sent twelve leaders to spy out the Promised Land of Canaan. Ten of the twelve said the cities were too strong, the people too big and God was too small. Only two, Caleb and Joshua, trusted God. They encouraged Israel to go and take what God had given them, but the people complained and failed to believe.

In fact, while evaluating the land, four times they wanted to go back (pp. 71, top 72, lower 72, top 76).

This short-term memory loss was not due to a senior moment. Not like story of the couple in their nineties who visited doctor who told them to start writing things down. So, the next morning, the husband is wandering around the kitchen, and finally he gets out a piece of paper and writes down, "Where's my toast?"

Failure always begins with unbelief. The journey that could have taken 11 days from deliverance to the Promised Land instead took 40 years. They spent that time wandering aimlessly in the wilderness. All those without faith would die out before they set foot on the other side of the land of promise. Only Caleb and Joshua would eventually cross over into their inheritance.

Forty years later, the story comes full circle again to Kadesh, the edge of the promised frontier—and little had changed. The people needed water, so they did what they do

best...they complained. And God did what He does best...He provided. The LORD pointed Moses to a rock. He told him to speak to the rock and water would pour out. Moses struck it with his staff instead. The water still gushed out, but Moses and Aaron had ignored God's instruction and lost their right of admission to the Promised Land.

Moses then commissioned Joshua as Israel's new leader before giving his farewell address. He reminded them of all that the LORD had done. He told them again about their special role as His chosen nation and how they would enjoy His blessings if they would simply love and obey Him. Then Moses died and was buried by the LORD.

The wilderness wanderings remind us that faith leads to life and unbelief leads to death.

In Chapter 6 of *The Story*, this tug-of-war between God and His people is relentless; and we see the true nature of Israel, as well as ourselves. It turns out their struggle mirrors ours to a "T". And we learn something very interesting about human nature.

In this chapter we see at least two great confrontations between God and man. The first one is this:

A. Confronting our preference for the familiar.

Reading Chapter 6, we discover the sad fact that Pharaoh's grip on his nation of slaves wasn't nearly as tight as the Hebrews' desire for the status quo. They wanted God to fix their problem without messing with their paradigm. God's people would have chosen *familiarity over freedom*, but God would have none of that.

Israel had cried out for centuries, asking this God of their fathers to rescue them. The problem was, when He actually showed up, He was not what they'd expected. The sad truth was the whips of the taskmasters were no match for the shackles to which God's chosen people had fastened themselves.

They traded a golden opportunity for a golden calf. They doubted that God could really measure up, so they weighed out their gold, melted it down, and made it into a god they could see and touch. And party with. And feel good about. An image of their own making. Their stand-in god suited them just fine. It wouldn't descend on mountaintops in fire and smoke. It didn't make their knees weak or their hands tremble. Their god of gold wouldn't talk out loud or go beyond their boundaries of the predictable. They wanted a god they could control, a "preferred" god that never made them feel uncomfortable.

And guess what? As we see through the present day, nothing really changes. I would much prefer that God fix my problem without messing with my paradigm. Today we have built deities of affluence, power, adulation, busyness, and addiction. As much as we want freedom, we want familiarity more.

We talked about this last year in our character studies of Nicodemus, Jonah, and Hosea. God is a God of *dis*comfort, who cares far more about holiness than happiness. Who would never enable dysfunctional behavior, or tolerate it, but who instead would act more like a potter with a hardened, rocky lump of clay that has to be pounded, doused, swallowed by a fish—whatever it takes.

“My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast- the breaker and destroyer of images...Jesus is the supreme example; he leaves all previous ideas of the Messiah in ruins.”

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I just got a new pair of running shoes....

Why do people wear shoes that don't fit? Because they've become accustomed to them. Why do people return to the same lifeless job day after day? Because “the devil you know is better than the devil you don't.” Why do so many women leave and then return to abusive husbands? Because it's what they know.

I can't tell you how many people I've talked to that are afraid of freedom for precisely this reason: when you're ready to tackle the familiar, to get healthy:

It will get worse before it gets better. Before you can get sober you've got to detox. Before the cut will heal, the Bactine will sting. It will get worse before it gets better.

It was safer and more predictable to be slaves than face the uncertainties of freedom. In fact, we learn that the faithless generation who were too afraid to take the Promised Land, who were too chicken to trust Joshua and Caleb, passed their fear on to their children. Talk about leaving a lot of baggage...The Bible says only Joshua and Caleb would survive those 40 years of wandering, but after the 40 years had passed, someone was still whining about returning to Egypt! Who could this be but the children of those who whined 40 years ago?? Look at pages 78 and 80 of *The Story*....

All the survivors of Egypt had died off...the only people who could be saying this were the children of those delivered from Egypt. This has to be one of the saddest chapters in the Bible, because those parents left fear as their inheritance.

This leads us to today's Equipping Point:

**To lead your family well, to lead your family spiritually...
*Never leave a legacy of fear.***

Familiarity is the enemy of freedom—and we must have the courage to first lay aside our own baggage, our own resentments and bitterness, before we can fulfill our call to lead our families to health and freedom. Israel left an inheritance of doubt so that their children became convinced they were defeated before they even got started!

Some of us have a backpack and some of us have a trunk, but we all have baggage. And your job as the mentors of the next generation is to take a lesson from these sad, paranoid people who left a legacy of fear and *stop passing on your insecurities to your children.*

Listen to the words of Jesus about pressing on to what is ahead:

Jesus said to another man, "Follow me!" But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Let the people who are dead bury their own dead. You must go and tell about the kingdom of God." Another man said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go and say good-bye to my family." Jesus said, "Anyone who begins to plow a field but keeps looking back is of no use in the kingdom of God."

Luke 9:59-62

The problem was that they wanted to tend to a life they were supposed to have left behind. They were tending to past issues from an old life. What happens when you start to plow a field and look back? You plow a crooked field. And the greatest disservice we can do to our kids is burdening them with our baggage.

Jesus said focus on where you're going, not where you've been. A godly leader will lead where it's uncomfortable, for the sake of healing. A godly leader does not put his hand to the plow and look back. A godly leader refuses to let his past define him.

God first confronts our preference for the known, the familiar, the comfortable, the manageable. Our freedom requires us to grapple with our demons, because that freedom came at so great a cost.

Second:

B. God confronts our notions of leadership.

In my professional and pastoral career, I've read dozens of books on leadership...the nature of great leadership, the difference between leadership and management, etc.

But in the account of Moses and his leadership of a ragtag band of ungrateful whiners, I think we see six key lessons of leadership that every single one of us either have confronted or will confront at some point in our lives.

You know it's easy to lead a bunch of people who agree with you. It's easy to lead people in an autocratic, dictatorial way where every challenge to your leadership is solved by expulsion or worse. It's easy to lead people when everything is going well and times are prosperous.

But let's take a poll: Anyone here ever try to lead a group of people who constantly questioned your authority? (*show of hands*)

Anyone here ever try to lead a group of volunteers who aren't motivated by a paycheck? (*show of hands*)

Anyone here ever try to lead a group of people through a time of chaos, uncertainty, or outright panic? (*show of hands*)

Then our chapter today is for you. **Here are six key leadership principles directly from the staff of Moses:**

1. As a leader, justice is not your responsibility.

Moses predictably gets fed up with the whining, fussing, and griping of the people. If this is my burden, just kill me, he says. But lesson #1 for leaders is that even when

you reach exasperation trying to “herd cats on linoleum,” trust that a) God gets no less fed up but never fails to apply mercy and b) He will often allow the consequences of the people’s misery to be visited upon them. Look at page 73 of *The Story*... (until it comes out of their nostrils.)

These people became their own punishment. God took care of that and will always do so. That way, you as a leader, can take justice off your plate and focus on *mercy* to the ones you lead.

2. Lead in the role God gives you.

Lesson #2 on leadership is about leading in the role God gives you. Aaron and Miriam were leaders, but did not have Moses’ mantle. Most of us will not be CEO. In fact, most of us will not be called to the leadership position we think we should occupy. In our chapter today, Aaron and Miriam begin to sound a lot like James, John, and their mother in the New Testament: “What about us?” Lesson #2 on leadership is to bloom where God plants you.

3. Let God do the defending.

Leadership Lesson #3 is contained in the same story: let God do the defending. Moses’ humility was the key, and as far as Scripture records, he let God do all the talking—in fact, p. 73 says after the Lord heard Miriam and Aaron, “at once” the Lord jumped in the fray. We must focus on humility and leave the defense to God. The insecurity of many leaders immediately requires them to defend themselves and justify actions they have deemed right. But a leader who is led by the voice of God need not mount a defense—he or she can focus on humility because God is calling the shots.

4. The conventional wisdom of a leadership community is often wrong.

It’s important to remember that the 12 spies were leaders from each tribe. These leaders were called together to collaboratively assess a situation and plan a course of action. But ten of them responded in fear and only two in faith. The “road less traveled”—an out-of-the-box approach—is especially applicable to those who have the responsibility of leading others. If the rest of the world is selling, you might want to think about buying. If the conventional wisdom is doubt, consider faith as your response. Good leaders don’t follow the hordes.

5. In a leadership role, God’s expectations go way up.

You’d think Moses’ striking the rock instead of speaking to it could have been explained by exuberance and maybe a little grandstanding...but as the leader of the people, his example sent a message that no other person’s disobedience would—and so he lost the capstone of the journey: crossing the goal line. In the New Testament, Jesus talks about servant leadership and James warns teachers (influencers) as well about the gravity of authority. As this story demonstrates, we dare not take our witness and our example lightly. Because of their responsibility, leaders have a higher standard than others—and if that troubles you, you probably should be a follower.

6. As a final tribute to his humility and leadership ability, Moses saw the absolute necessity of Succession Planning.

Bad leaders build systems that depend on them. Great leaders build self-sustaining systems that are collaborative, so if I'm gone, no one misses a beat.

Real leaders never fail to equip their people to do without them, and so his prayer on p. 83 is especially poignant: *"May the Lord, The God of every human spirit, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd."* He knew his work wasn't completed without ensuring sound leadership for his flock after his departure, even in the face of his punishment. No wonder God thought so much of him.

This week, resolve to never leave a legacy of fear, to your subordinates and to your children, by exercising these six lessons of leadership. Follow these principles and you'll start looking a lot like Moses: flawed and imperfect, but a spiritual leader that moves your family and your marketplace closer to the heart of God.

[Prayer]

Help us to break free of the familiar, the unhealthy—release us from our sin nature. We now see what Jesus meant about dying to self—the seed that falls to the ground and dies—because that fear-based nature must die before we are truly free.

Teach us about real leadership—there are so many bad examples today.

- *Help us to focus on mercy and leave judgment to you*
- *At same time, help us leave the defending to you as well*
- *Make us iconoclasts like Jesus, who break the mold of leadership and take the road less traveled*
- *Raise the standards we expect of ourselves that no one is led astray by our sin*
- *Raise leaders behind us to carry on your work*