

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, January 15, 2014 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

BUILDING, BUILDING, BUILDING **“Dropping Your Guard in Congregational Relationship”** **Digging Deeper, Risking Change – Part 2** *Exodus 13-14, Numbers 11-14*

It is the nature of the beast within all of us to resist change. The familiar draws us in and constrains us like a magnet to stay where we are... where we are comfortable, where everything is predictable and safe. This is especially true when the future may seem a little sketchy or unknown... “What’s going to happen?”.... or scary and uncertain... “I’m not sure we can handle this and survive.” Being creatures of habit, many would rather stay where they are, not move, not have to change, not have to face the uncomfortable idea of having to adapt to new and unfamiliar surrounds. And listen, what we do as individuals, we can also do as churches.

Many churches and, let’s face it, church members would rather stay small, stay comfortable, stay safe than stretch, really grow and face change. Change scares us to death and it scares churches too. What are some of the familiar sayings you hear around church that indicate this reluctance to change.

Top 5 Statements that Reflects a Reluctance to Change:

5. “I’m happy and content with the way things are... why change?”
4. “Why can’t things just stay the same?”
3. “How much will it cost?”
2. “I wish we could go back to the way things used to be!”
1. “We’ve never done it that way before!”

I. TESTS THAT TEMPT US TO RETREAT

Certain tests and certain human tendencies have not changed with time. Those who wish to dig deeper and risk change can see something of themselves in the Israelites, those people who lived under the painful horror of Egyptian slavery for four centuries and then were led by Moses into freedom. These men, women and children witnessed a steady string of miracles, including their escape from Egypt, their safe passage through the Red Sea, and their daily supply of manna from above. However, being creatures of habit, they struggled with their new life that was under God’s absolute control. Instead of appreciating their privileged condition, they wanted to retreat. Perhaps we can learn something about ourselves as we look back on their time and tests. What were those test?

5 Tests That Tempt Us To Retreat:

1. **Unfamiliar surprises (Ex. 13:17-22)** – The Lord went before the people of the Exodus in a pillar of cloud during the day and in a pillar of fire during the night. Their initial direction is of interest to us. The text says in verse 17, *“¹⁷ Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, ‘Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt.’”* When the Israelites were released from bondage, God did not send them the direct route to Canaan. From the travelers’ perspective, this leg of their journey seemed illogical. The other way would have been less arduous, and certainly nearer. However, God could see the danger contained in the easier way, while they could not. We often tend to ask ourselves why God doesn’t lead us in more simple and predictable ways. No man can really answer that question, although after we get there we can sometimes see God’s purposes. However, in this instance, the reason for the indirect route is given, *“Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return...”* Perhaps God often sees similar dangers ahead in the paths which may seem to us to be more direct.
2. **Unwanted fears (Ex. 14:10-31)** – At the Red Sea, the people of God were forced to stop and wait for the next move. Behind the traveling mass was a rapidly approaching Egyptian army pursuing the Israelites because Pharaoh had changed his mind about freeing the people. The surrounding geography suggested an impossible situation. The text tells us that people *“... were very afraid...”* in verse 10. The same people who had observed God’s miraculous acts in the plagues, the Passover, and the deliverance from Egypt were not afraid at the Red Sea. Note their words to Moses in verses 11-12, *“¹¹ Then they said to Moses, ‘Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? ¹² Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness.’”*

We’d have been no different. When faced with the impossible, the first words to cross our lips are, “What do we do now?” In their minds fear had silenced God’s promise of direction and protection. They saw the sea before them, the desert to the right, a mountain range to the left, and the dust rising from the Egyptian army pursuing them from behind. Moses, confidently told them in verses 13-14, *“¹³ And Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.’”* The people were unconvinced until Moses stretched out his staff over the sea and they saw a passage etched into it from shore to shore. When on the opposite side, they saw Moses’ promise fulfilled: the water flowed together, drowning Pharaoh’s army. **Comment:** Moses, an 80 year old man, wasn’t making up his own game-plan; he was following God’s leading, just as a leader representing God should do. Moses had never opened a passage through the sea before, but he did as God told him. There’s a valuable lesson in this. We want everything to be secure

and familiar, but God often faces us toward the opposite. Instead of believing He can overcome the barriers, we want to retreat. In the case of the Israelite people, they were willing to return to the slavery they had hated.

3. **Unpleasant adversities (Num. 11:1-6)** – On the way to Canaan, after the Exodus, the people became tired. They were no longer thrilled at the newness of the journey. They became a people who constantly complained and according to Numbers 11:1, “...it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard it, and His anger was aroused.” They’d been provided a steady supply of manna, which Psalm 78 calls “the bread of angels” (v.25). But the travelers did what was humanly natural, they longed for the familiar. Weeping, they said in verses 4-6, “⁴ Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: ‘Who will give us meat to eat?’ ⁵ We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; ⁶ but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!’” By the way of application, what manna was for the Hebrews, people are for us. Often God places them plentifully about us, wanting us to partake of their lives, giving them ours in return. Instead of enjoying them, we begin to see them as commonplace, taking the blessing of others for granted, and our appetite for involvement diminishes. Whether it is people or anything else that we begin to view adversely, we are prone to run from them, heading toward places or times which weren’t really that pleasant, but seem to us to be convenient escape. The people failed to see the blessing of their freedom because of the attitude that crept in regarding the manna. Incidentally, part of the reason manna becomes tasteless is that we forget who sends it. A heavenly appetite is required to enjoy heavenly food.
4. **Unfair accusations (Num. 11:26-30, 12:1-15)** – As the months passed, Moses found himself with the increased burden of leading a thankless crowd. His leadership was attacked even by his brother and sister; Aaron and Miriam questioned his capability because of the woman he’d chosen to be his wife. They wondered how a man who would marry a Cushite (an Ethiopian) could be used by God to lead His people. At the same time, they believed that God was speaking through them in the same way, and to the same extent, that He was speaking through Moses. They felt that they should be held in the same regard. Thinking in terms of our own lives, if you are in a position of leadership, regardless of the level, it’s only a matter of time before someone will criticize you or your leadership style. Such criticism makes for an uncomfortable test. Subjected to it, many of us want to retreat.
5. **Unexpected resistance (Num. 13:1-3, 25-33)** – As the people came to the southern edge of the promised land, they pushed God to His limit. The whole purpose of the journey had been to travel from a place of slavery to a home of promise. At Kadesh-Barnea, God instructed Moses to select and dispatch twelve tribal representatives to spy out Canaan. Once inside, the spies found giants, and fortified cities. They also discovered food in abundant supply, and in their own words in Numbers 13:27, “... We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.” In spite of God’s promise to go before them, the spies’ first fears overruled. Ten of them were intimidated by the things they saw and gave a discouraging report in verses 32-33, “³² And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, ‘The land through which we have

gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. ³³ *There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.’*” They swayed the crowd to accept their own fears, and the travelers chose not to go into Canaan. And God’s anger burned against them.

Comment: All of these were perfect opportunities to teach God’s people to walk by faith. They were designed to make them look up in confidence and trust... to wait in Jehovah God. Interestingly, however, as they faced each difficulty they longed to go back to the secure, the familiar, even though God was obviously leading them in their journey. When faced with the same kind of tests, are there things that will keep us from going back to the places that appear to be safe... places which, in fact are not?

II. **TENETS (views or beliefs) THAT TRIGGER US FROM RETURNING**

It is important to make the connection between the past and the present. We need to see how the experiences of Moses and the ancient Hebrews applies to us now. We must risk new horizons in our thinking while trusting God to free us from our “Egypt” and help us discover our “Canaan.” What can keep us from running back... from wanting to retreat rather than advance for His Kingdom... from sitting, settling and stagnating? What are the belief and tenets of our own faith that may inspire and trigger us from wanting to move backward rather than forward for Him.

5 Tenets That Trigger Us From Returning or Resting:

1. **Clear direction from above (Ex. 13:21-22)** – If the people or their leader were tempted to return at any time, all they needed to do was look up to the pillar of cloud or fire. It was there day after day, and night after night. It was no guessing game that God wanted them released from bondage. He was going to give back to them the land once inhabited by their ancestors. **Comment:** Looking for Bible passages that refer to God direction in our lives? Here are a few samples...

4 Good Passage for God’s Direction:

- (1) Psalm 32:6-8, “⁶ *For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You in a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near him.* ⁷ *You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah* ⁸ *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.*”
- (2) Isaiah 41:10-13, “¹⁰ *Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.* ¹¹ *Behold, all those who were incensed against you shall be ashamed and disgraced; they shall be as nothing, and those who strive with you shall perish.* ¹² *You shall seek them and not find them— those who contended with you. Those who war against you shall be as nothing, as a nonexistent thing.* ¹³ *For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, ‘Fear not, I will help you.’”*

- (3) **Isaiah 49:15-16**, ¹⁵ *“Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. ¹⁶ See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me.”*
- (4) **Romans 8:31-37**, ³¹ *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ ³⁷ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”*
2. **Incredible deliverance from danger (Ex. 14:30-31)** – When God says to us in various ways, “Go through,” as He did to Moses when standing at the edge of the sea, then we must move. When God is in our circumstances and we come to a dangerous place, He delivers us right at the time it is needed.
3. **Timely relief from discouragement (Num. 12:3-8)** – When Moses was faced with opposition, even from those closest to him, God personally stepped in and dealt with his critics. Here is the record of God’s conversation with Miriam and Aaron, ³ *(Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.) ⁴ Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, “Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!” So the three came out. ⁵ Then the LORD came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward. ⁶ Then He said, “Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. ⁷ Not so with My servant Moses; he is faithful in all My house. ⁸ I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?”* It’s essential that we learn a timely principle... when faced with opposition, we must allow God to fight the battle for us.
4. **Internal fortification from attack (Num. 12:9-10)** – Never once do we find that Moses answered his siblings’ attack. In verse 3 of the same chapter, we read this parenthetical comment, “Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.” As God’s anger burned against the opposing couple, He inflicted Miriam with leprosy. Moses watched God intervene on his behalf. God used temporary leprosy to silence the critic, and what He did centuries ago He can also do today in various ways. Such intervention fortifies us against attacks that would cause us to retreat.
5. **Extreme discipline from God (Num. 14:30-36)** – This barrier is, without question, severe. But because the people refused to enter the land He had promised them, God

kept them from returning to Egypt by taking their lives over a forty-year period. Of the adults, only Joshua and Caleb (the two faithful spies) entered the land. Everyone twenty years and older died outside Canaan. Do you think God feels strongly about our going back to Egypt?

Perspective: *Let's relate these thoughts to our ministries and relationships in the church... our church. When the Lord is at work in our midst, His work is distinct... unlike what a human leader might orchestrate. When His Spirit moves and people's lives are changed, the Body of Christ grows and expands. Yet, not everyone is excited when such changes occur. Growth means change and flexibility for us. It can mean giving up the comforts fo the past to accommodate those in need of healing and encouragement. The temptation is to return to "Egypt" (i.e., the way things used to be). Selfishly we want to protect our space, our time, our realms of influence. But we need to learn that when God decides for us to move, grow, or expand, we dare not resist Him!*

III. THREE RESPONSES THAT KEEP US GOING FORWARD... DIGGING DEEPER, RISKING CHANGE

3 Responses That Keep us Going Forward:

1. When we see that it's God's desire to display His message to the world around us, we must respond, "*Lord, intensify Your distinctives in me.*"
2. When we discover that it's the uncertainty of our future that really strengthens our faith, we must respond, "*Lord, increase the risk.*"
3. When we understand that it's the mystery of it all that gives it the power, we must respond, "*Lord, enlarge the difference.*"