

WARM UP - Choose one or two

1. What's the most expensive gift someone has ever given you? What's the most meaningful gift you've been given? Why is that gift so meaningful to you?
2. How do you personally measure value? What makes something or someone valuable to you? *(could be a monetary cost, emotional attachment, the 'why' behind the activity, person, or item).*
3. If you were given the gift of time, what would you do? For example, you suddenly have 2-4 spare hours to yourself with no responsibilities to take care of, what would you do?

WORD

Today we are going to explore giving. The act of giving gifts includes (at least) two people a giver and a receiver. What does the Bible have to say about gift and promise giving relationships? What does the Bible say about how attached our own hearts can become to the 'stuff' we are given in comparison to our attachment with the person who gave it to us?

In the book of Exodus, we find God gave Moses a promise while Moses prepared to head into the land God had previously promised to give them. We read in Exodus, chapter 33, verses 1-3:

*Then the Lord said to Moses, "Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and **go up to the land I promised** on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' **I will send** an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way." - Exodus 33:1-3 (NIV)*

Can we think of some stubborn (or stiff-necked) people in our pool of family and friends? How many times have we personally been determined to for something to be a specific way, and someone else called us stubborn because we would not change our mind?

This was the situation with the Israelites. God delivered them out of slavery from Egypt, freeing them. Great, yes? It should have been. Time and time again the Israelites dishonoured God by worshipping false Gods, by rebelling against their leaders, and by not trusting in God to fulfil His promise to provide their basic needs (food, clothing, shelter). God did not want to get upset and destroy his people along the way because of their immense disobedience, so He said He would complete his promise of getting them into the land (v1), but he would not go with them (v.3).

This brings us to point one of the lesson:

1: Waiting on Promises

God promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the land that Moses was on the brink of entering. How long did that family of Abraham (now called Israelites) have to wait for this promise's fulfillment?

Almost 700 years. Let's track it.

Abram in Genesis 12, left Heran at the age of 75 with God's promise of provision, offspring, land, and God's presence. His son Isaac was born 25 years later. When Isaac was forty he married Rebekah (Gen 25:20), and at 60 they had twin boys (Gen 25:26), the younger of which is Jacob. (If you're counting we're at 85 years since the original promise.) God passes Abraham's promises to Isaac at the beginning of Genesis chapter 26. Once the twins are grown and Jacob is on the run from Esau, his twin, Jacob has a dream where God promises to give him what he has promised to Abraham and his father Isaac, which includes the land he is currently sleeping on and children. God states:

"Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." – Gen 28:15

God promises **to be with** Jacob. As we continue counting, Isaac lives to be 180 (Gen 35:28); therefore Jacob is 120 when his dad passes. Jacob dies in Egypt at the age of 147, after a huge family drama with Joseph, which results in the preservation of both Egypt and the whole family of Jacob (now Israel). Israel lives in Egypt 17 before dying (Gen 47:28). It's now been 232 years of awaiting God's promise.

Once Moses comes on the scene, we learn from Exodus 12:40 that the Israelites lived in Egypt for 430 years. Add that to our waiting period and we've reached 645 (because we subtract 17 year overlap when Jacob lived in Egypt). But wait, there's more! The Israelites spend 40 years in the wilderness to take a 14-day journey. We arrive at 685 years between the time of God's first promise Abraham and our initial Exodus 33 passage. That's a long time.

Today, we can barely stand to wait to have our 2 minute noodles cook. We stood in long queues at supermarkets to get food during level 4 and 3 lockdowns. God waited 685 (human) years to fulfil his promise to a stiff-necked and stubborn people. After 685 years of giving promises and care to a people who, for the most part, did not return the affection, it is no wonder God did not want to go with them into the land he had promised. In Jacob's dream, promise God promised not the leave Jacob (and his descendants) until he completed what he'd promised about land, children and provisions. God was coming to the end of his promise since they were about to enter the land.

How long are we willing to wait for a promise from someone we care about? How easy or difficult is it to wait for something you're really looking forward to? How many of us have given up hope in the midst of waiting because we're not seeing a plan or a promise actually happen?

God, in his timing, waited 685 years to complete a promise to the Israelites, and in the process turned Abraham's chosen family from 2 people (Abram and Sarai) into 2 million. What is God wanting to multiply within our lives before fulfilling a promise? Are we happy to just have that promise fulfilled and get on with life? Moses was not. This bring us to point 2

2: The Promise of Presence

We read later in Exodus chapter 33, from verse 12:

*One day Moses said to the Lord, "You have been telling me, 'Take these people up to the Promised Land.' **But you haven't told me whom you will send with me.** You have told me, 'I know you by name, and I look favourably on you.' If it is true that you look favourably on me, let me know your ways so I may understand you more fully and continue to enjoy your favour. And remember that this nation is your very own people."*

*The Lord replied, "I will personally go with you, Moses, and I will give you rest—everything will be fine **for you.**"*

*Then Moses said, "If you don't personally go **with us**, don't make **us** leave this place. How will anyone know that you look favourably on me—on me **and** on your people—if you don't go **with us**? For **your presence among us** sets your people and me apart from all other people on the earth."*

The Lord replied to Moses, "I will indeed do what you have asked, for I look favourably on you, and I know you by name."

Moses responded, "Then show me your glorious presence."

The Lord replied, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will call out my name, Yahweh, before you. For I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose... - Exodus 33:12-19b (NLT)

Moses did not like the prospect of God giving them the promised land not going with the people into it. We learn from Numbers 20 due to a disobedient incident in the wilderness, Moses does not get to go into the promised land. He will die before it happens, and Joshua (his 2IC) will lead the people across. During Exodus 33, the nation is on the edge of the river, getting ready to cross it to the promised land, and Moses is negotiating to make sure the presence of God will go with the people. **He knew obtaining the promises of God could never satisfy the human heart like being in the presence of God can.** Most of his relatives did not know or believe this truth yet. God looked favourably on Moses and promised to stay with the nation of people he had created, even though God did not have to.

In this dialogue between God and Moses, God declares how He will show mercy to anyone He chooses. Mercy is **not giving** someone a punishment they deserve. Have you ever been spared a punishment for something you did wrong? Perhaps a traffic violation was voided? Or a relationship offense arose, yet the person you hurt treated you with unexpected kindness instead of retaliating?

Another author by the name of Isaiah describes God this way in the Bible:

"...the Lord longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you..." - Isaiah 30:18a

God's promise of presence goes beyond the time of Moses and the promised presents of land & children.

3: Presence for today

Isaiah also wrote about people remembering Moses's day & God's Spirit being in their midst (Is. 63:11). Jesus promised that God's Holy Spirit would come again to not simply live among us, but within us (John 16:13). Paul encouraged readers of his letters that God's Spirit can dwell inside us—God will be with us:

“...if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead **dwells in you**, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit **who dwells in you**. – Romans 8:11

Paul advised young Timothy:

*Guard, through the Holy Spirit **who dwells in us**, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.* -2 Tim. 1:14

How is this possible? Jesus said that if we know how to give good gifts, then “...*how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*” (Luke 11:13.) Jesus's half-brother, James, gives us a sober reminder though:

“...you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. ³ And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.” - James 4: 2b-3

What are our motives when we ask God for things (gifts)? Is it for our own pleasure, to get what we want—that promotion, that visa, that car, that house, that reputation, that new piece of technology? Do we desire God's presents (what He can give us) more than His presence (of just being with Him)? What would our lives be like if we stopped asking God for things, or to fix “stuff,” and simply asked Him for more of Himself in our lives? Can we come to God in prayerful conversation to listen and hear what is on His heart, rather than pouring out our list of requests for Him to move? How long will we wait to hear Him speak?

“they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” – Isaiah 40:31

The Hebrew word for “wait” comes from the root word “to bind;” so, the passage could read: they who bind themselves to the Lord. What are we binding ourselves to? Our stuff? Our career? Our entertainment? Our relationships? Our hopes, dreams, and fantasies? What has us all twisted and bound up on the inside: anxieties, financial pressures, relational rifts?

Will we be like Moses that was determined not to move on until the Lord promised to go with him and his people? That is a type of binding ourselves to the Lord, not out of a self-striving, but out of a peaceful place resting in God's presence. Let's explore what this could look like as we move into in the application portion of our lesson.

APPLICATION

1. Which of the rhetorical questions from today's lesson has made you ponder the most, and why?
2. It is easy to do stuff for and with God. This connect group is even helping us do something together for God. However, **what is it like to be with God**, rather than do something for him or participate in an activity that's about Him?
3. During His sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). What are the things or who are the people you deeply treasure? This could reveal who or what we are waiting on (or binding ourselves to). How can we wait on God more than waiting on these other things we highly value?

Prayer

Father, we are sorry for liking the stuff and people you put in our lives more than You, yourself. Change our hearts to desire being with you, since we are human beings and not human doings.

Thank you Jesus for the promise of your presence through the Holy Spirit. We are sorry for taking your presence for granted and acting like the Israelites, Abraham's family for those 685 years. You are so patient with us; please increase our patience so we can keep tying ourselves to you.

Holy Spirit, Jesus promised that you would guide us into all truth and remind us of what He taught. Would you teach us each day something new about yourself each day. Remind us of how awesome, mighty, loving, just, gracious, merciful, and holy God is. Would you also open our eyes to see anything in our life that offends you, and grant us the gift of repentance, so we can turn to you seeking forgiveness.

Thank you Father for sending the Son, Jesus, by the Holy Spirit so there could be hope of being adopted into the family of God. Thank you for restoring a broken relationship—for making it possible for stubborn people like us today to be reconciled to God, not counting our offenses, our trespassing, or wrong motivations against us, because of what you accomplish through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Lord, we humble ourselves today. Expose any lies we believe about you, so we can get to know the Real God, and not an illusion the God we think you are. Kill our pride. Dash our need to control. Bring your peaceful presence into our life; let us not be satisfied with anything else but You. Invade our connect group right now, and invade each one of our lives on a daily basis. Make us a people like Moses who refuse to move forward and run ahead unless we are certain you are with us. Amen.

*****Leaders offer to lead anyone through prayer of repentance as well as explain salvation after this group prayer.*****

Other scriptures from lesson:

Then His people remembered the days of old, of Moses. Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock? Where is He who put His Holy Spirit in the midst of them, Isaiah 63:11

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. – John 16:13