

When the Kids are Grown-ups Too

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[0 : 00] Have you ever heard of a God incident? It can be defined as a blessing that you don't even pray for. It's something good that happens that appears to be a coincidence, but is in fact orchestrated by God.

This is a really dramatic one, but it's the only one I could think of. So I remember lying in A&E;, looking down at my very swollen ankle, and two nurses about to push it into a cast. I was so scared. But just at that moment, this nurse popped their head around the door and said, do you need any help in here? And that nurse held my hand, helped me to stay calm, and gave me a lot of gas and air.

I believe that this nurse was a gift from God, that God gave to me as really, really practical help. Not merely a coincidence, but a God incident. Have you ever just randomly bumped into someone in the street, and they say exactly what you need to hear that day, just as like a passing comment?

[1 : 10] God incidents. Or when you can't get someone off your mind, so you just send them a quick text, and it turns out that they just really needed to hear from you that day? A God incident.

Today's passage can be seen as a God incident. Now, for those who are married, I'm not sure whether you see the in-laws coming to visit as a God incident. But God used Jethro's curiosity about Israel's deliverance, not only to show Jethro how great God was, but to give Moses just some really practical and wise advice.

To help us understand the first five verses of today's chapter in Exodus, we need a little bit of a rundown of Moses' family history. So years ago, Moses had run away to Egypt, when the Israelites, they were still there, kept in slavery.

He ended up living with Jethro in Midian, and married Jethro's daughter, Zipporah. This explains the names of Moses' children that we read in verse 4. God had saved him, and he was in a foreign land.

But after some time, God asked Moses to go back to Egypt and leave the whole of Israel out of slavery. And this included a lot of miraculous events, even parting the Red Sea so Israel could walk through on dry ground.

[2 : 31] No wonder Jethro wanted to come and visit Moses. I mean, I'm not married, but if I was, and my in-laws, I just suddenly heard that they'd parted the Red Sea, I'd be like, yeah, I'm coming for tea.

So... When I was reading this, I did get a little bit confused. I don't know if you did. When Moses, it said Moses sent his wife back to Jethro.

And if you are confused, you're in very, very good company, because so were all the commentaries that I read. The Bible doesn't tell us why or when Moses sent his wife back to Jethro.

A good guess is that she went back maybe to tell Jethro about everything that had happened in Israel and about all the deliverances. But either way, Jethro was very interested.

And so we went to go and see Moses. His curiosity was sparked. If you're following in your Bible, you don't need to, but if that helps you, we're at verses 6 to 12. We see the family come together and reunite.

[3 : 33] And once Moses had welcomed his father-in-law back, he told him everything that had happened about how God had rescued Israel. And Jethro praised God.

He said, I know that the Lord is greater than any other gods. So Jethro was a priest, a Midian. He probably believed in other gods, small g, and probably other things as well.

But here he's saying, actually, no, I see the God of Israel and he's greater. And he praises God with Moses and the other Israelite leaders. As if converting a Midian priest was not enough, God had not finished with this visit just yet.

In fact, for Moses, his God incident was just beginning. Verse 13, Jethro was hanging around. And he saw Moses was serving as judge. So this was a brand new community.

They'd just been saved from slavery. And they didn't really know how to live in all this new freedom that they had. And so they needed Moses to tell them. They wanted his guidance. They wanted him to decide, you know, whose sheep is whose, what fence goes where.

[4 : 42] He was deciding on cases of justice between them. The line was long and it was making everybody really tired. It is like one cachet trying to serve the whole of Asda.

It does actually sometimes feel like that. The people were getting grumpy and tired. That's me and Asda. And not mentioning Moses, who was working some very long hours.

It was just not a fun situation. So Jethro points it out. Moses, what you're doing is not good. Verse 17, you and all these people who come to you, you're only going to wear yourselves out.

If Jethro was being just critical, he would have stopped there. But then he did something really loving and in fact really wise. He affirmed Moses' role and Moses' leadership.

Verses 19 to 20, Jethro says, Moses, you must teach all these people. Be their representative before God. Bring their disputes to him.

[5 : 44] Teach them his degrees and instructions. Show them the way they are to live and the way they are to behave. Jethro affirmed Moses before he jumped in and gave any advice.

I wonder how much really good, wise advice just falls on deaf ears because it is not given tactfully. Having affirmed Moses, Jethro then offers his own advice.

Verse 21 to 22, Moses, this is your job, but maybe you could do it a bit differently. He's really specific as well about the solution. Even going into details about the type of people that Moses is to choose.

And how to set up Israel in tens and fifties and hundreds. And for Moses just to have the harder cases. Jethro's clearly done this before.

Or something very similar. And his advice solves the problem of long queues and weary people. You might even call it common sense. Verse 23, Jethro even has the confidence to say of his common sense.

[6 : 46] And God so commands. God's voice didn't boom from heaven. We don't read that anywhere in there. There was no twinkling on the keyboard or the guitar. But it was discerned that that was God's will.

Sometimes God's will is just really practical and displays a lot of common sense. Moses was new to leading. And Jethro had a lot of experience. As a priest in Midian, that's what his experience would have been in.

Leading people. His faith in the God of Israel may have been only a day old. But God did not. But that did not mean that all the practical experience from his life up to that point went to waste.

In fact, God used it to help Moses. I can say as a younger person, I don't know what younger it is. I'm 30. But I honestly really value wisdom for older people.

I love it when Russ and Clive come into college and speak to us about leadership and stuff. And I'm probably speaking for other younger people as well. Practical experience. It's not against the will of God.

[7 : 50] Even if it's gained in a secular environment. Teachers. Counselors. Doctors. Electricians. Motherhood. The church needs all of these vocations and the experience that they have to offer.

Just like God took Jethro's wisdom. Wisdom that came from experience. And used it to bless Moses and the people of God. A few weeks ago, Jay was preaching and he rightly told us about biblical wisdom.

And how that does not discriminate against age. But there's also wisdom gained from experience. And just living in this world. Practical wisdom. Common sense.

As long as it doesn't go against the godly wisdom that we read in the Bible. Wisdom from experience. Wisdom from fields. In other areas of vocations.

They're really valuable and they're gifts from God. Verse 24. Moses listened and did everything that Jethro said. Notice there are two sides to wisdom giving.

[8 : 53] Giving it and receiving it. Proverbs 19.20 says. Listen to advice and accept discipline. And at the end you will be counted among the wise.

Moses was wise because he listened to those who have more experience. Have you ever noticed that those who are really happy to receive wisdom. Even when they're older.

Those who are always teachable. Are the ones who people are really happy to receive wisdom from. The last verse is actually my favourite. Verse 27.

Jethro returned to his own country. Jethro didn't stick around to receive all the glory for his advice. And he allowed Moses to just get on with it. It appears that only people that knew about Jethro's advice was Moses and Jethro.

It doesn't even look like he stuck around long enough to see if it worked. Jethro didn't big himself up. Tell everybody. Rub it in Moses' face. Or try and do it for Moses.

[9 : 58] His heart forgiving wisdom. Just came because he wanted to benefit somebody else. Jethro was confident in his wisdom.

But he was humble in his delivery. And it's a humility that we see all over God's word. But most of all we see it in Jesus.

He left the glory of heaven and came amongst our mess to die on a cross. And that is true humility. All wisdom came from him. Even the practical experiential wisdom.

He's older than anybody in this room. And yet he did not think of leaving his throne in heaven for our benefit. He didn't think that that was too much. So maybe us not receiving the recognition for our wisdom is too much either.

Maybe just wanting to help somebody else is enough. James 3.13 says, Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life.

[11 : 01] By deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. In some ways, this story in Exodus 18, it's incredibly powerful.

Because we just see God at work all over it. And in other ways, it's just so normal. This was just the conversation that happened because Jethro visited Moses for a completely different reason.

Jethro didn't visit Moses to offer wisdom. He went initially because he was just plain curious. But God used it as an opportunity to establish good administration and leadership for Moses and his people.

A God incidence. God taking a conversation and using it to impart wisdom. I can't help but see God all over this conversation. Maybe this week we can pray for God incidences.

We can pray for God. Unexpected gifts of wisdom in the conversations that we have. Being alert to the gifts of wisdom God may have for us. Even if it's really practical stuff. In fact, especially if it's really practical stuff.

[12 : 08] Maybe we could also pray for God incidences where God uses us to pass on wisdom to somebody else. Let's ask God and look out for these God incidences.

Be alert to the Holy Spirit prompting us where we can give and receive wisdom just in the coming and going of our daily life. But let's be humble enough to not want the glory for it and acknowledge that the one really at work in all the God incidences, in all the wisdom that is ever exchanged on this planet, is God.

Let's pray. Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for wisdom and experience and common sense. Help us to be wise.

Wise like Moses who listened and wise like Jethro who was courageous enough to speak and didn't discount his experience as too worldly. Help us to be watching out for the God incidences where God may be speaking to us and for the prompts of God's Spirit where he might want us to speak, even if we think our experience is too secular.

We give back to you the experience and the life skills you have taught us, recognising that they are a gift from you and ask that you use them to build your church, not for our glory but for yours and out of love for each other.

[13 : 30] Amen.