

# Focus upon What Is Important

Ex 16: 2-4, 9-15 John 6: 24-35 Pastor Lentz  
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The Hebrew people were complaining that God hadn't done things the way they wanted them done. They wanted more meat. They wanted more to eat and they wanted God to provide it for them. They were complaining. Notice the response of God. God doesn't ignore their complaints. God actually goes one better for them. In addition to feeding them God sets it up so that they will learn more about their relationship with God. He is teaching them. Manna is to be for just one day except for the Sabbath. On that day Manna will last two days so that no one has to gather Manna on the Sabbath.

When we use intercessory prayer we are complaining. We are saying in effect, "God things are not what I want please fix them." I love it that God heard their need and actually did something to let them know that he was hearing them and that he cared about their lives. It lets us know that we too can ask and receive. It lets us know that even if we are complaining God will respect us. It lets us know that no matter how trivial what we are asking for we are likely to receive even more than we ask for. If we notice there will also be a lesson for us involved. It is part of the relationship with God. God is going to teach us. God is going to lead us and guide us to green pastures, as well as beside still waters. God being who God is wants to teach us, and help us to grow so that we can be happier and more help to each other. It seems to be a part of the reason we are here.

However, about the time we think we know something we get a realization that we have a lot to learn, still. Has that happened to you recently? It has to me about Biblical studies as well as psychological ones. Having been a minister now for a long time and preaching passages from the Lectionary also for a long time, I thought that I was

getting to the point that I knew a lot about the Bible and about those passages. In fact, I have two sets of serious commentaries as well as many others that ministers use for understanding the Bible and the text. I have more than a fair idea of what is in them. Besides that I participate in on line Bible studies, as well as personal Bible study on a routine basis. So at some point I felt pretty smug about what I knew. Then I realized that Talmudic Scholars study just the Tanak, or the Old Testament for their entire lives. They study the passages as well as the commentaries on the commentaries on the commentaries and form their own thoughts about them as well. They debate them for hours on end causing them all to have even more understanding and more insight into the text. At some point it hit me that I am only a beginner. I have only begun to understand the Bible. Ideally that happens almost any time that I participate in a Bible study, because someone will offer a perspective that is one I haven't considered. It opens my eyes. That sort of eye opening is what makes Bible Study fun.

I remember reading a book about a particular Bible Study that didn't have any great learned person teaching but had a group of very ordinary and yet different backgrounds, and different professions involved in the Bible Study. The author was studying Bible Study while the group studied the Bible and what he discovered was that having folks whose perspectives are different discussing the Bible creates a mindset that learns even better. Being exposed to others perspectives on the Bible that are different from your own increases your ability to learn, grow and understand the Bible even more. If you just have an expert you don't learn as much. When you have a leader that is willing to learn, and who invites you to offer your perspective as well then you learn even more, because then everyone in the class is offering their perspective and so everyone wins.

The same sort of learning about how much I have to learn happened in Psychology. I have been studying Hypnosis for over 30 years. It is really a study that goes hand in hand with the Bible because it is all about language. Hypnosis is about implied language and so too is much of the

Bible. I am reasonably well versed and understand much of what Hypnosis is about and have taught it in one fashion or another also for a very long time. The more that I know the more that I know that I don't know. I continue to realize that I have only begun to scratch the surface of understanding. It is one of the reasons that I love to go to Hypnosis conventions because there will be people who have been studying for 30 or more years who know things that I don't. We teach each other. We freely share our knowledge with each other and come away knowing some of the things that we didn't know before. I know one 90 year old who demonstrates this perspective of willingness to learn in spades. He is an amazing man having used Hypnosis in his medical practice to do almost miraculous things for perhaps 60 years. He has a lot to teach and yet, he will be there learning and growing just like everyone else.

The point is that no matter how much we have studied we are still beginners. God gave Manna for one day. You couldn't store it up. You couldn't get enough to just cruise. It is about every day, learning what we don't know, and moving closer to God today.

Your life and walk with God is the very same way. Your experiences, faith, learning and beliefs come from your living. Just because you are not a spring chicken doesn't mean that you can simply cruise. You still are invited to learn, grow, change, and become closer to God every day. Sure you know things that you don't have to learn again, but there are also things of faith that you have to relearn and relearn again. There are things that you probably also learn from young people whether from teaching them or from the questions that they ask innocently while learning.

God provides for us, learning that continues because we need it. Every problem requires new thinking. Just recently I began reading a book about refreshing our faith. It was clear from the author that the way to do that is by our having personal discussions with God. At first I didn't realize that people didn't have a meaningful discussions with God all the time. And then it hit me. Not everyone does. Not everyone is willing

to have a personal discussion with God all the time. Oh sure people are often ready when they have a problem but they usually want to keep their old ways of thinking and get God to go along with it. Real dialog means being very open and willing to be understood, even to the point of being completely open. It means risking that you could be wrong. What if you were wrong about some of the foundational beliefs that you have? Recently I have had some of the foundational beliefs that I thought were secure, challenged in such a way as to break my old ways of thinking. It was good and not so good all at one moment. I can tell you that it meant I had to accept that God is in charge and that it is ok, in order to be at peace. Any other option would have caused distress. The truth is that everything that is a problem requires new thinking. For insistence when a marriage hits a snag, like an affair, a major loss, or some other major breach of trust, to solve the issue requires that both parties begin ultimately to think differently. Unfortunately, the average couple keeps thinking in the old way of thinking and defending that way. Usually at first both people want to defend what they have done and how they think. It is how we have arguments.

One way of thinking about arguments is that those are the times that we were defending our thinking and behaviors when we were needing to learn new ways of thinking. I have told many couples that x of the argument marks the spot where you can become closer. It requires both to think in different ways. It is how that couples come out of difficulties and actually have a stronger marriage. It is that they are then both thinking in new ways.

The research is clear that couples who work through the difficulty then become happier. I believe that one reason is that they were willing to continue to learn and grow. Ironically, it is only on the other side of thinking differently that the couple gets relief and the healing of their relationship. On the front side we usually can't see any other way of thinking. On the front side of any problem we simply can't see any other way of thinking than the way we have been using. When we are willing for that to be a prompt from God to discover and learn new

ways of thinking then we win. We win big. The truth is that divorce also brings new ways of thinking. It usually hurts more but it does tend to make folks think differently.

Jesus in this passage was also teaching his disciples some new ways of thinking. He purposely asked them a question that caused them to commit to how they had been thinking. It caused them to then really learn when he showed them another way. He was always causing them to think new thoughts and to understand the world differently. In some ways that is part of the bread of life. It is always causing us to learn and think in different ways. Manna is the bread of life, in that sense. Jesus said he was the bread of life, as well. What if he meant that through him you see things differently? What if he was trying to get everyone to be open to learning in the moment instead of relying on what they already know? That would require each of us to be willing to have such a profound relationship with God that we were willing to grow and learn all the time. In my mind that would be almost heaven, because that would mean that we all were trusting in God's ability to guide us and teach us, in the moment of our not knowing as well as those moments when we thought we knew. Amen