

# Exodus 18:1-27 // Life Hacks with Jethro (How to Live as a Rescued People)

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[ 0 : 00 ] One son was named Gershom, for Moses said, I have become a foreigner in a foreign land. And the other was named Eliezer, for he said, my father's God was my helper.

He saved me from the sword of Pharaoh. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, together with Moses' son and wife, came to him in the wilderness, where he was camped near the mountain of God.

Jethro had said word to him, I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons. So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him.

They greeted each other and then went into the tent. Moses told his father-in-law about everything the Lord had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake, and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the Lord had saved them.

Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the Lord had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians. He said, praise be to the Lord who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians.

[ 1 : 15 ] Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly. Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God.

And Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God. The next day, Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning to evening.

When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge while all these people stand around you from morning to evening?

Moses answered him, Because the people come to me to seek God's will. Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and instructions.

Moses' father-in-law replied, What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you.

[ 2 : 28 ] You cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me, and I will give you some advice. And may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him.

Teach them his decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave. But select capable men from all the people, men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain, and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.

Let them serve as judges for the people at all times. But let them bring every difficult case to you, the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you.

If you do this, and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied. Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said.

He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of all of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. They served as judges for the people at all times.

[ 3 : 42 ] The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves. Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country.

Thanks so much, Joanne, for reading for us. It's great to see you this evening.

Let me encourage you to keep your Bibles open at chapter 18 of Exodus. As Safir said, God is a God who hears the prayers of his people.

So let's bow our heads and ask God for his help as we come to this passage. O Lord, our God, we thank you for the richness of your word.

We thank you that it is God-breathed and useful for our instruction, and useful to equip us for every good work.

[ 4 : 43 ] So Lord God, we pray that you would instruct us by it, that you would train us in it, encourage us, and build us up through it. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, what happens when you become a Christian? What next? What are you meant to do? Are you supposed to rush out and buy a pair of sandals, or perhaps a pair of Crocs if you're feeling a little bit more subversive, and start drinking Schler?

What happens when you become a Christian? How are you supposed to live? If you're here for Tri-Church, or just sort of exploring the Christian faith from the outside in, it's worth thinking about what happens if you take those steps to become a Christian.

And maybe you are a Christian already, and you know that God loves you, that Jesus died for you, died for your sins. But then what?

Does God just leave it like that? You just left to your own devices sort of thing. How are we to live as a rescued people? Well, in September, the UK government released hundreds of prisoners as part of an emergency measures to ease overcrowding in the jails.

[ 6 : 15 ] Now there was some controversy about that, as news outlets showed photographs of prisoners being picked up in fancy cars and quaffing champagne and stuff like that.

Some people were wondering, quite reasonably, is that sensible? Is it a good idea to let a whole bunch of prisoners loose like that on the streets, set free?

What next? What are they going to do? Where are they going to live? And among the first batch of the 1,700 prisoners that were released, one was interviewed.

You might appear on the screen there. There he is standing in front of the Bentley that he was picked up in. And he'd apparently kidnapped somebody who'd owed his mate some money.

He admitted it was bad, but not as bad as they made out on a scov. Well, he was asked how he felt to be released early.

[ 7 : 15 ] He said, I'm delighted to be released early. I'm delighted. And asked about what his plans were going to be for the next steps, what he was going to do next. He said, McDonald's.

I can't wait to go to McDonald's. That's where we're all going now. I'm free and can go wherever I want to. It's amazing. I'm off to McDonald's, off for a Big Mac.

Now, not 1,700, but 600,000 men plus women and children, approximately 2 million by conservative estimates of the people of Israel, were set free from Egyptian captivity.

Set free from oppression and slavery in Egypt. But left to their own devices, the people of Israel were a disaster.

And they're on their way, not to McDonald's, of course, but to the promised land, that land of milk and honey, not cheeseburgers and McFlurries. But whenever they encounter hardships, they just start grumbling.

[ 8 : 21 ] That's what we heard of these past few chapters. It's been whinging and moaning and complaining all the way. Chapter 18, enter Jethro, the priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moses, a no-nonsense type of man, blessed with a healthy dose of common sense.

And it turns out that Moses' father-in-law is a bit of a legend. Now, the first readers of the book of Exodus, the first readers were on the cusp of entering the promised land.

And they needed to know how to live as God's people, how to live as God's rescued people. And we, too, can learn a lot from Jethro about how we're to live as a rescued people.

About how we're to respond to God and how we're to relate to him and to one another. So that's our two main headings in the notice sheet this evening.

Jethro shows us, firstly, how to respond rightly to the God who saves us. So first 12 verses. And then, secondly, Jethro shows us how to relate rightly to the God who is with us.

[ 9 : 39 ] So firstly, then, responding rightly to the God who saves. The first bit is this. Jethro's at home in Midian when he gets wind of some incredible news.

Verse 1. So Jethro heard of everything God had done for Moses and for his people Israel and how the Lord God had brought Israel out of Egypt. He hears the news that the God of his son-in-law,

Moses, has pulled off the most spectacular rescue.

If you're going to respond rightly to God's salvation, then the first thing you need to do is to hear the good news of what God's done. And it's basically the same as what Paul says in the New Testament.

He's writing in his letter to the Roman church. Paul writes, how can they believe in him? How can they believe in Jesus if they've never heard about him?

How can they believe in him if they've never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless somebody tells them? And so Jethro hears this news and he can't wait to hear more.

[10:48] So he gets word to Moses, verse 6, that he's on his way. He's coming together with Moses' wife, Zipporah, and her children who somewhere along the line had been sent back to Midian.

Perhaps presumably for their safekeeping. And so it's happy families and there's an emotional reunion. And then Moses takes Jethro into the tent and gives them the lowdown, verse 8.

So Moses tells his father-in-law about everything. And so you can just imagine the conversation. Moses tells Jethro everything that's been happening in these past 17 chapters.

The way God saved them. All the signs and wonders. And Jethro's going, wow, that's amazing. And God did this amazing thing with the Red Sea, says Moses. What? That's unbelievable.

And then the Egyptians gave chase. Oh no, what happened next? Then God came to the rescue again. And he brought the waters coming down on top of the Egyptians. Wow, that's incredible.

[11:54] So Jethro hears about the way God rescues his people. And all the way through, the author's emphasizing this rescue or saving language.

So we look at verse 1 again. Jethro heard how the Lord brought them out of Egypt. That's a rescue. Verse 2. We find out in verse 2 that Moses' second son is called Eliezer.

Because it means God helped me. God saved me. Verse 8. We hear about everything the Lord has done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. And how the Lord saved them.

And then again in Jethro's response, verses 9 and following. It's rescue, rescue, rescue. So that's the first thing. If you're going to respond rightly to the God who saves, you need to hear the good news of what he's done.

He's delivered his people. He's rescued his people. Secondly, Jethro shows us how to respond to that. And here he's in stark contrast to the Israelites who've been whinging, basically not trusting in the God who has literally just answered their prayers in bringing them out of slavery.

[13:10] Well, the people might be grumbling, but Jethro is buzzing at this news. Verse 9. Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the Lord had done in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians.

He's delighted about hearing of God's rescue. And it produces in him an emotional response, a joyful, thankful response.

Now some of you might have seen the documentary Free Solo. By the way, don't watch it if you don't like heights or suffer from vertigo or anything like that. But it's about Alex Honnold climbing El Capitan in Yosemite in California, about 2,300 feet of elevation.

And he's doing so without ropes. Death defying years in the preparation. Nobody had ever attempted it before.

Probably nobody even thought of doing it before. But he gets to the top and lives to tell the tale. And right at the top, he's catching his breath. And the documentary maker asks him how he feels.

[14:21] Well, his response is a master class in understatement. So delighted. So delighted. And that's all the chat that the filmmaker could get out of him.

He's probably too knackered at the end of it. But Jethro is genuinely delighted. He's thrilled with this chat with Moses and takes enjoyment in the retelling and the rehearsing of this amazing story of redemption.

And that's something we love at St. Silas too. We love to hear the stories of God's work in people's lives. We love to hear people's testimonies. That's a baptism or when we're interviewing people.

We love to know how people became friends of Jesus. That's a great way of getting to know someone, isn't it? If you found out that someone's a Christian, why don't you ask them to tell their story of how they became a Christian, how they became a friend of Jesus.

And some of us over the years have found it helpful too to write these out, to note down our testimonies in a journal or whatever of how God rescued us.

[ 15 : 32 ] So that you can remember them and enjoy the details of God's saving work in our lives. Well, Jethro's rejoicing and his delight finds expression in this astonishing confession in verse 10.

Just remember, he's a pagan priest from a foreign land. And Jethro says, Praise be to the Lord who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians.

Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods. So I think this is really cool.

A conversation leads to conversion. A conversation leads to conversion. Jethro has a God chat with his son-in-law about all that God has done for him and he gets really excited about it.

And it results in this former pagan priest believing in the God of the Bible, confessing that God saves his people, defeats his enemies, confessing that the Lord has no equal and praising God for all that he has done.

[ 16 : 53 ] And not only that, not only that, but get this in verse 12. Jethro even brings a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God.

At last. At last, sacrifices offered to God in worship. Isn't this what they were meant to do all the way along?

Way back in Egypt, back in chapter 5 of Exodus, the Lord told Pharaoh, through Moses, to let my people go so that they could come into the wilderness, three days journey, that they may sacrifice to the Lord our God.

So this whole sacrifice thing was a pretty key part of it. But up till now, there hasn't been a single mention of God's people offering sacrifices.

There's been grumbling. But in just a few verses, Jethro gets a whole lot of things right. He shows us how to respond to the news of God's rescue.

[ 18 : 00 ] He's delighted. He praises God. He confesses. But the Lord has no rivals. He brings a burnt offering and other sacrifice. He ends up, end of verse 12, having a picnic in the presence of God.

And so here, Jethro, having a meal with the elders of Israel in the presence of God, gets a foretaste of what really the second half of the book of Exodus is all about.

As we'll see, what the second half of chapter 18 is also pointing forwards to, life in God's presence. But not only that, but this brings to fulfillment the promise that God made to Moses way back at the burning bush in chapter 3.

So why don't you keep a thumb in chapter 18 and turn back a few pages to page 60. And chapter 3, verse 12.

chapter 3, verse 12.

[ 19 : 10 ] Moses is anxious about all that God's asked him to do. And God said, I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you.

When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this same mountain. So Moses was promised way back then that he will successfully return with God's people to the very mountain where he is now standing and having a meal with his father-in-law Jethro.

God promised Moses he'd be with them every step of the way. And what we're going to see next is what it's going to take to relate rightly to the God who is with us.

So that leads us onto our second main section, relating rightly to the God who is with us. So we've been thinking about how to live as a rescued people.

And in the first section, Jethro's been like a foil to the people, showing us in contrast to them how to respond rightly to God's rescue, his joyful praise and marked contrast with the grumbings of the people.

[ 20 : 25 ] And then in the second half of chapter 18, from verses 13 onwards, Moses' father-in-law witnesses Moses' leadership in action.

And this is a bit of a Bible that's beloved by management consultants and HR gurus. So in verse 14, when his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing, he said, what is this that you're doing for the people?

Why do you alone sit as judge? And Moses replied, because the people come to me to seek God's will. Whenever they have a dispute, it's brought to me, and I decide between the parties.

We said earlier on that the people of Israel here in Exodus amount to at least two million people. In America, a megachurch is defined as having more than 10,000 people.

So by these measures, that would mean Moses is trying to single-handedly pastor 200 megachurches. You can ask Martin how he'd feel about doing that afterwards.  
[ 21 : 32 ] Jethro's verdict, verse 17, he shoots from the hip. Moses, what you are doing is not good. You're going to wear yourselves out.

The work is too heavy for you. You cannot handle it on your own. He's saying, this is crazy, Moses. This is mental.

Carry on like this, he's saying, and you're heading for a burnout. Something's got to give. And they need to get organized into tears of leadership.

And Moses needed to be given in no uncertain terms, some no-nonsense, pragmatic advice from his father-in-law. Now, fathers-in-law can be quite daunting.

It can be quite daunting to meet your father-in-law. Depends who it is, of course. But I remember the first time I met my father-in-law.

[ 22 : 32 ] The only things I knew about him were he was big, about six foot four, and at least that around the waist. And he didn't speak any English.

It doesn't matter if he hears the tape recording now. But he served in the Soviet Army. And then when Latvia gained independence from the USSR, he was ready to defend its capital, Riga, against Russian aggression.

So as you can imagine, it was a little bit daunting, a little bit intimidating, that first encounter. I remember from that first time one particularly agitated conversation that he was having in Latvia and with Alice.

And I didn't understand what was going on, but it turned out that he wanted to take me into his forest alone. Now, Alice didn't think this was a terribly good idea, him not speaking English and me not speaking Latvian.

But, and I tended to agree with that. I also didn't think it was a terribly good idea either. And I'm thinking at this stage, this could go one of two ways.

[ 23 : 39 ] I thought either this is going to go badly or go well, and this is what was going on in my head. Either this is a very good thing and it's a kind of rite of initiation, a kind of strange rite of initiation that they might have in Latvia to welcome me into his family.

Or this is a very bad thing. Indeed, he's taking me into this forest to feed me into his wood chipper and not getting back from this forest alive. Happily, I think it was either the former or he just wanted me to shift around some logs and stuff like that.

But certainly it can be wise to take on board advice on certain pragmatic matters from one's father-in-law and listen to them. You might even pick up some decent life hacks from them.

And no doubt some useful, practical tips can be gleaned from Jethro. There's even some management consultancy books that mention Jethro in some of her footnotes.

But we need to ask ourselves here, is this really what this section's all about? Is it simply a kind of Bronze Age pamphlet on management strategy?

[ 24 : 55 ] What do we get if we're missing the second half of chapter 18 from our Bibles? And to help us understand, it's going to help us to just take a little bit of a step back for a minute and see the big picture here.

And some of you, if you've got a good memory, might recall that we've met Jethro before. We've seen him sit down and have a meal with Moses before, way back at the beginning of Exodus, way back in chapter 2.

On both occasions, we meet Jethro right after Moses gets out of Egypt, right after a rescue through water. On both occasions, we meet Jethro right before Moses meets God at Mount Sinai.

On both occasions, Moses is tending a flock, Jethro's sheep in chapter 3 and God's people in chapter 18. And so these two passages about Jethro bracket the whole first half of the book of Exodus, the whole first half of God's big rescue.

The first half of chapter 18 looks backwards on God's big rescue and shows us how to respond to that. The second half of chapter 18 looks forward to the second half of the book of Exodus.

[ 26 : 21 ] And it's all about how to live post-rescue as God's people, how to relate to God, how to relate to each other as God's holy people and God's holy presence under God's holy rule.

So this chapter, chapter 18, acts like a hinge between the two halves of Exodus. And Jethro shows us how they're related. So let's take another look at verse 16.

Moses says, when they have a dispute they come to me and I inform them of God's decrees and instructions. And then in verse 20 Jethro says, teach them God's decrees and instructions and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave.

There's no doubt about it. Moses is overworked. Jethro sees that. But he's overworked specifically because of the needs of a rescued people to know how God wants them to live.

And Jethro gets the importance of that. He sees the need for God's word, God's instructions, God's laws and statutes to be made known, to be disseminated throughout the people of God so that they know how to live in a way that's pleasing to God.

[ 27 : 48 ] And he knows it's going to take a mindset shift for Moses if this is going to be achieved. It's going to take a bit of restructuring of God's people to multiply this ministry of God's word.

Verse 21. Select capable men from all the people, men who fear God, trustworthy men, and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.

Note that it's character as well as ability that qualifies you for this ministry of making God's words known. Moses still deals with the difficult cases of course, but this way the ministry workload is shared and spread throughout the people and the ministry of God's word is multiplied.

That's what the people are going to need as they move into the promised land. That's what we need now. That's what we're about at St. Silas. We often say to you, it's not just those of us out the front who do the work of ministry.

Our ministry here is to equip you all to minister to each other, to know God's word so that you can do works of ministry, learning Christ together as you speak God's truth into each other's lives.

[ 29 : 10 ] and be transformed by it and become the people God has rescued you to be. So Jethro in this second section is showing us how to live as a rescued people by showing us the importance of relating rightly to God and each other by getting the word of God known, understanding how God means for us to live in a way that's pleasing to him.

that's all part of the deal. That's all part of the rescue package. So in closing, let me just draw a few of these threads together.

What happens when you become a Christian? What do you get when you're rescued by God? Well, being rescued by God means you get the full package.

not just hauled out of a pit and left on the side of a pavement to get on with it. Our rescue is so much bigger than that. You get to live in the presence of God.

And Jethro shows us what to do with it, how to live that out as a rescued people. Just like the Israelites, we've been saved by the blood of the Lamb.

[ 30 : 29 ] Like Israel, we've seen our enemy defeated, we've been brought over to the other side. So let's take our cue from Jethro.

We're not inoculated as Christians from hardships and troubles of this life. Instead of grumbling, let our hearts be filled with thankfulness, delighting in our salvation through Christ, taking enjoyment and talking about it to each other, encouraging each other in doing so, and remembering that God may be pleased to use these very conversations by His Spirit to lead to conversions.

Conversions of our family and friends and colleagues who need to know this God who can rescue. And let our lives be marked by praise.

We owe our whole lives as living sacrifices to the Lord Jesus who rescued us. So let us bring offerings as Jethro did to the Lord who saves us.

Let our lives be transformed together as we are guided by God's words and as we speak God's truth to one another in love.

[ 31 : 44 ] And let us enjoy God's presence because that's the bottom line. What do you get when you become a Christian? you get God Himself.

You get to live out your life with God under His gracious care. With this rescue you're not set free and then simply left to your own devices.

You get the whole of life permeated by the presence of God. So let's bow our heads again and pray. Father thank you for so great a rescue.

Thank you for so great a salvation. Thank you most of all for Jesus. And Lord God we thank you for the ways that Jethro has shown us how to respond to such good news and how to relate to so great and so wonderful a God.

and as we as we seek to know Jesus more and more and as we seek to bear witness to Him may you guide us through your word to walk in His ways and live lives that are pleasing to you.

[ 33 : 09 ] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to respond now in praise and Greg and  
What you and you