

Hanging out With Heros

MOSES

A Good Leader
Is a Good Follower



Lorraine
Peterson

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MOSES: A GOOD LEADER IS A GOOD FOLLOWER

Introduction

Your mind may be cluttered with questions: What college should I attend? Should I go out for track? Should I quit my job? Should I sign up for physics? Everyone faces questions such as these. So did Moses. And the choices he made can teach you some very useful lessons. But first, take a short look at his life.

Making Big Decisions

Moses parents were Israelite slaves in Egypt. At the time of his birth, Egyptian law required all male Israelite babies be killed, but Jochebed, his mother, hid him for three months, then in faith launched him in a waterproof basket on the Nile river. Downstream, the Pharaoh's daughter was taking a bath and spotted the strange little boat. After retrieving the basket and discovering the baby inside, she decided to keep him, even though he was from the Hebrew slave class. Moses's big sister, Miriam, had been watching from behind the marsh grass along the bank, and bravely approached the princess who had now claimed Miriam's brother. Would her highness like to hire a Hebrew nursemaid until the boy was old enough to be weaned? The princess thought this was a great idea. So Jochebed was paid to nurse and raise her own son! Thus, Moses was raised as an Israelite but became a member of the pagan Pharaoh's royal family.

The Pharaoh had a large harem, and thus had many children. The princess who adopted Moses was one of many royal children, and Moses may not have had any throne rights. In any case he would have been trained for an important position in the Egyptian government. But we do know the Egyptian throne was inherited through the queen, so in light of the passage in Hebrews 11, "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (v. 24), many people believe Moses was scheduled to be the next Pharaoh. However, he gave up the throne to free his people, the Hebrews.

It seems Moses first planned to deliver his people by force, for he killed an Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a Hebrew slave. Maybe he thought this would spark a revolt. But as soon as word of Moses' foolish act reached the authorities, he had to flee to the desert. There, amidst sand and scrub brush, God spent forty years teaching Moses *His* plan for bringing His chosen people to the Promised Land.

Watching Plans Fail

In the desert Moses became a shepherd, the Egyptian equivalent of the scum of the earth. There he married a native woman and fathered two sons. For years he wandered up and down rocky hillsides with his sheep, until one day God finally got his attention with a flaming bush – that didn't burn. From the bush God told Moses to lead His people out of Egypt, and Moses immediately replied with a pile of excuses. But God countered each excuse. However, Moses wouldn't accept the fact that God would be with him and teach him how to speak. So God sent Aaron – who later proved to be a hindrance. But, finally, Moses agreed to go to Egypt.

When Moses first appeared before the Pharaoh and demanded that the Israelites be freed, he laughed in Moses' face and ordered the slaves to work even harder – weary people don't revolt. Now Moses was unpopular not only with the Pharaoh, but also with his own people. He was in too deep to quit, however, so he decided to obey and trust God no matter what.

Expecting Miracles

Because Moses trusted God, he succeeded. Pharaoh stubbornly resisted Moses' demands, but after ten plagues, each one worse than the last, he conceded defeat and let the people go.

True to form, however, Pharaoh again changed his mind and decided to give chase. Without the Israelites he would have no workforce. He cornered the Israelites at the Red Sea, but God intervened and opened up the sea so His people could walk through, then unleashed the waters as Pharaoh and his charioteers thundered along the sea bottom. Once the people were in the desert, God protected them and fed them daily with bread from heaven.

Moses had a thankless job as leader, for in spite of constant miracles the Israelites weren't impressed. Even when God spoke from heaven with the Ten Commandments, their attitude was, "Big Deal." And when Moses returned from the mountaintop after spending forty days receiving God's law, he found his people worshipping a golden calf idol. God had endured enough. He told Moses He would destroy these rebels for smearing their God's name. Moses was probably as weary of their disobedience as God, but he refused to

give up on them. He prayed. Desperately he told God he would rather lose his own soul than see God's people annihilated, giving the pagan world cause to badmouth God for abandoning His people. God listened and spared the Israelites.

Although a strong leader, Moses was humble. When criticized he never defended himself. He ignored even Aaron and Miriam's jealous accusations. But God didn't – He gave Miriam leprosy. The forgiving Moses came through again, though, and prayed successfully for her recovery.

Moses was extremely patient with his complaining people, tolerating their grumbling for forty years through the desert. One time, however, he lost his cool and plainly disobeyed God's orders. God had told him to call a torrent of water from a certain rock by speaking to it. Instead, in a blaze of temper against the murmuring multitude, Moses hit the rock twice with his walking stick. God graciously supplied the water anyway, but because of Moses's disobedience, God never allowed Moses to enter the Promised Land. He only let Moses see it from the top of Mt. Nebo, where Moses then died.

In spite of some moments of disobedience, Moses made many good decisions. And those decisions changed time and eternity.

Are You Listening to a “From-The-Pit” Recording?

“By faith, Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasure of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11: 24-27).

There seems to be a tape recording inside each of us, repeating, “You're not very important and what you do doesn't really matter to anybody. So do whatever you feel like at the moment. You can't change your life no matter what you do.” Unfortunately, most people don't realize this message was produced and distributed by the Human Demolition Department of the From-

the-Pit Recording Company.

Contrary to the recorded message, you are constantly making choices of great consequence – eternal consequence. If you choose to be kind to your mother after she bawls you out for something you didn't do, you grow closer to God and pave the way for some member of your family to accept Jesus. If you choose to spend time with God every morning, you will find out what He wants you to do, and others will notice you've been with Jesus and will think about accepting Him as their Savior. On the other hand, if you choose to lash out when accused, or clam up when you have a chance to talk about your faith, or use your time and money selfishly, you may keep people from giving their lives to God.

Moses had to make a drastic choice. Becoming the Pharaoh would require identifying himself with the pagan Egyptian religion. Becoming the Pharaoh would mean abandoning his people in their slavery. He had to either give up his right to the Egyptian throne with its vast power and wealth (the treasures in King Tut's tomb indicate the Pharaohs at the time of Moses were swimming in wealth) or compromise with God. He chose God's way. And history has been changed because of his choice.

You, like Moses, must make important decisions that affect your life, and even other's lives, so you need to establish a standard by which every decision can be made. You must make every decision in the light of *eternity*. If you choose God's will and His kingdom above everything else, making each choice count for eternity, your life will be different. Letting Jesus direct your life is the one decision that will change everything.

As you apply eternity's values to your daily decisions, think of what will change! Will you study the Bible more or watch more TV? Will you cheerfully obey your parents or argue and complain? Will you pray for and witness to your non-Christian friends, or pretend you're no different from them and follow their ways? Will you spend your money carefully and give away more of it, or spend it carelessly on yourself?

In the light of eternity, as you think about college, are you considering how to better yourself for serving God, or how to get a plush job? As you consider a marriage partner, will you leave the decision to God, or will you look for the

person who satisfies your 25-point checklist? Because no matter what that nasty recording keeps telling you, the choices you make do make a difference.

So don't listen to that "From-the-Pit" recording. You are extremely important to God. You're part of the greatest enterprise in the world: spreading God's good news to all people. The world can be different because of your choices. As Moses did, make decisions that will count for eternity.

"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. ... But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24: 15).

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6: 33).

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3: 16).

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6: 23).

1. What is the most important decision you will ever make?
2. What are the consequences of failing to choose Christ?
3. Have you decided to give your *whole* life to Jesus and make Him the Lord of your life?
4. What other decisions will you be making that will count for eternity?

It's What's Inside That Counts

"One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, 'Why are you

hitting your fellow Hebrew?’ The man said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?’ Then Moses was afraid and thought, ‘What I did must have become known.’ When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian” (Exodus 2: 11 – 15).

Sometimes you may think choices are merely an external matter – deciding which college to attend or considering whether or not to buy a car. In reality, the external, the outward is only the result. Heart attitude is much more important than outward action, for if the attitude is correct the decision is apt to be correct. But you can make “the right” decision and still be a failure in God's eyes if your attitude is wrong because God looks deep inside for your motive. Only the right motive pleases Him.

Moses made “the right” decision – he renounced the Egyptian throne in order to identify with his people. He knew God had promised that Abraham’s descendants would be freed after 400 years of slavery, so he meant to assist God in His plan for their deliverance. Yet, though his choice was admirable, his attitude was not.

Moses intended to deliver God's people in his way, and in his strength. As heir to the throne he had received much military training, so he decided to exploit that training with a show of force. This certainly would make the Israelites claim him as leader in a revolt. So when he spotted an Egyptian beating up an Israelite, he used Incredible Hulk tactics and simply killed the Egyptian. Moses did not bother to check with God first. Consequently, he messed up everything.

Moses hadn’t learned to die to self and live for God. Fifteen hundred years later, Jesus explained that a seed has to be buried in the ground and die before it can produce new life (John 12: 24). If you’ve given your life to Jesus, just as a seed you have new life within you. But a seed must die, allowing its outer shell to disintegrate, so its life can sprout and become a beautiful plant able to produce many more seeds. It can't argue, “No, I won't let my lovely brown shell crack and rot. I have an image to maintain.” If a seed persisted in such an attitude, it would eventually dry up and be useless. Neither can you resist death to self and yet remain alive and useful.

The certain road to a dead-end is the attitude that says, "I'll do great things for God. After all, I'm rather good-looking and popular; I get excellent grades; I'm good at sports; and many people tell me I'm a natural leader." If this is your attitude, get off your cloud, because Moses had more going for him than you do, and he had a zero success rate. He was the adopted grandson of the Pharaoh; he received the finest education available at the time; he was trained to be a king. But in spite of physical strength, leadership ability, and great intellect, he failed miserably by attempting to do God's work in his own way.

There are two steps in learning to work God's way. First, you must *die to yourself*. You must stop depending on any of your abilities or training. You must wait for God's time rather than rushing into things as Moses did. For instance, you may be able to bombard some poor atheist with superior, brainy arguments that defend Christianity. However, if Jesus isn't in control of your argument, if His love isn't shining through, the atheist will most likely run away from you rather than endure humiliation. And you'll have blown your chance to witness.

But dying to your old self and realizing you are nothing apart from God is not enough. You also must *receive the life, power, and guidance of the Holy Spirit*. You must continually say, "Holy Spirit, show me exactly how to witness to this person," instead of depending on some method you've learned. Your witnessing must include your inside, not just your outside.

If you think you've surrendered the outward parts of your life to Christ, you'd better check things out inside. Don't be like the rebellious little boy who, after being told to sit, declared to his mother, "I'm sitting down on the outside, but on the inside I'm still standing up." Learn to obey from the depths of your heart. As Moses, you'll find it's what's inside that counts.

"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life

he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires” (Romans 6: 6-12).

1. When was the old self (that lives to sin) crucified? (v. 6).
2. If your old self has been crucified with Christ, how can you make that fact a reality in your life? (v. 11).
3. The first step in learning God's ways is dying to your old self. What is the second step?
4. Why can't the life of Jesus in you break out if your old self is still in the way?

Rejecting the Miracle-Speech Therapist

“The Lord said to him, ‘Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or dumb? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.’ But Moses said, ‘O Lord, please send someone else to do it.’ Then the Lord’s anger burned against Moses and he said, ‘What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know that he can speak well’” (Exodus 4: 11-14).

What do you dislike the most about yourself? Those forty excess pounds? Your stuttering? Your shyness? Your lack of organization?

Imagine someone saying, “Okay, you can conquer shyness – just trust me. I’ll tell you exactly what to say, and here’s your audience; a crowd of 10,000 people.” Or, “I’ll help you lose forty pounds. All you need to do is live at my house for two months and eat only cabbage and tuna. The diet has never failed yet!” Would you jump at the chance for help, even if these people were known worldwide for their successful cures? The problem is that change requires risk-taking and self-discipline.

You probably at times try to hide behind your weaknesses. For example, being overweight can be used as an excuse for a shabby wardrobe and lack of popularity. Stuttering or shyness are excuses to avoid giving an oral report and meeting new people. “Neatness makes me uncomfortable” seems to

justify your messy room. Beneath these alibis, however, lies the real reason: You despise work, discipline and consistency. In fact, you sometimes enjoy your sense of inadequacy and want to keep your crutches.

Such thinking, which comes from a lack of faith, keeps God from doing some wonderful things for you. That's what Moses did. He turned down one of God's great miracle offers – and lived to regret his decision.

When God told Moses to confront Pharaoh and demand the freedom for God's people, Moses made excuses. One of them was, "I'm slow of speech." Maybe he had a speech defect or had difficulty putting ideas into words. Whatever Moses' problem, God had the power to remedy it. And He quickly reminded Moses He had made man's mouth, and Moses could trust Him for whatever words he should say. But Moses turned down God's offer of a miracle.

Moses wasn't intending to be rebellious, for he wanted to do God's will. Forty years in the wilderness had taught him that brash self-confidence has nothing to do with faith. Now Moses was a humble man who believed he in himself could do nothing. He had finished step one of the two-step process, but things would not go right until he had finished step two: to acknowledge, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4: 13). Moses would not take this step of faith; and lack of faith that limits God's power is *sin*. No wonder God became angry when Moses refused to be His spokesman!

Because Moses refused, God appointed big brother Aaron to speak for Moses. And more than once, Aaron caused major problems for Moses. The worst thing Aaron did was supervise the making of a golden calf idol during Moses' forty days on the mountain with God. Moses would have saved himself much trouble if he had accepted God's task for him and allowed his weaknesses to be overcome by God.

How about your weaknesses? God wants to help you conquer your problem of overweight, stuttering, shyness, disorganization, or whatever. He'll do it if you'll trust and obey Him. You will have to face some of your excuses squarely, renounce wrong behavior patterns, and by faith step into a life of obedience. Change may come slowly, and God's ways of accomplishing

change may surprise, even shock you, but be assured He knows what He is doing. Don't refuse the services of the miracle therapist. Be willing to dump your crutches – and your excuses.

“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40: 29-31).

“Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. Peter said, ‘Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.’ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and leaping, and praising God” (Acts 3: 2, 6-8).

“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible’ (Matthew 19: 26).

1. What characteristics of God are shown in the above verses?
2. Do you have any weaknesses you need to overcome? What are they?
3. Can you believe a God with so much power can change you completely?
4. Claim one of these verses as yours. Then, in faith and willingness to obey, ask God to start changing your weaknesses.

All You Need Is a Blank Check

“But the king of Egypt said, ‘Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work! ...’ That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and foremen in charge of the

people: 'You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota. They are lazy ...' Then the Israelite foremen went and appealed to Pharaoh: 'Why have you treated your servants this way? Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told, "Make bricks!" Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people.' Pharaoh said, 'Lazy, that's what you are – lazy!' ... The Israelite foreman realized they were in trouble. ... they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, and they said, 'May the Lord look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his servants and have put a sword in their hand to kill us'' (Exodus 5: 4, 6-8, 15-21).

You're puzzled. You broke up with your non-Christian boyfriend and you haven't had a date for a year. Or you studied hard for the World Literature test, resisted a perfect chance to cheat, and still received a D-. Or you resolved to always obey your parents, because you knew that was God's will, but now your mother is asking you to do all the housework in order to avoid all the excuses your brother gives her. You've made a big sacrifice for God and everything has gone wrong. Why?

Moses felt the same way. He had chosen to obey God, thus risking his life by facing Pharaoh, leader of the world's strongest army, and risking his sanity by leading an entire nation across a waterless, foodless desert. He had tremendous faith to willingly accept such danger and responsibility. But the whole project blew up in his face.

Pharaoh's stubbornness came as no surprise. God had warned Moses this would happen. But Moses did not expect the king would retaliate by forcing the Hebrews to work harder, to fill the same quota of bricks – but find their own straw. It was an impossible task. And the Egyptians beat the Israelite foremen whenever their crews failed to deliver the required number of bricks. So the Israelites blamed Moses. They sent a delegation to Pharaoh to beg for mercy, and as they left the fruitless discussion, they ran into Moses and Aaron. In their frustration they gave Moses a piece of their minds and told him they hoped God would punish him. Poor Moses! He was willing to give his life for his people, but now they wouldn't even give him the benefit of the doubt. In the midst of rejection, he had to make his most important decision

ever: Would he stick with God when everything was going against him? Or would he give up?

Unlike forty years earlier, Moses did not run from this crisis. Now he was certain that God had sent him. Moses was also certain he had no selfish motives, and that only God's will mattered anymore. And since he could depend on no person, even among his own people, he turned to God.

Moses discovered his God was almighty. When God had spoken to him in the desert, He called himself, "I AM." Epp comments: "In revealing Himself to Moses as I AM, God was telling him: 'I will be to you whatever you need.'" like a blank check that can be filled in by faith. 1) God was saying I AM your strength. I AM your security. I AM your wisdom. I AM the one who loves you. So Moses staked his life on I AM.

(1) Theodore H. Epp, *Moses, Vol. 1, God Prepares His Man*. Lincoln, Nebr.: Back to the Bible, 1975, p. 105.

And I AM proved to be all Moses needed. Moses could do nothing about his predicament; God had to do it all. And He did by sending a series of ten awesome, horrible miracles. The Egyptians were finally convinced, and the Israelites left Egypt in style. The Egyptians even gave the Israelites their gold – just to get rid of them!

You'll face situations just as discouraging as those Moses faced. You'll make a major decision to obey God, and everything seemingly will fall apart. Will you stick with God when times get tough? Or will you turn away? Your God is almighty, for He hasn't changed since He spoke to Moses. His name is still I AM. I AM _____ (whatever you need). It's a blank check you can fill in by faith.

"Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty'" (John 6: 35).

"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'" (John 8: 12)

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” (John 14: 6).

“It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1: 30).

“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4: 19).

1. Using the above verses, list all the things Jesus can be for you.
2. List the things in your life you have not asked Him or permitted Him to be because your heart has been set on something else.
3. How about asking Jesus to fill the needs in your life? How about using your blank check?

Why Not Choose the Best?

“The next day Moses said to the people, ‘You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.’ So Moses went back to the Lord and said, “Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.’ The Lord replied to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book’” (Exodus 32: 30-33).

How important on your agenda is God? What sacrifices are you willing to make for Him, for His work and kingdom? The choices you make show where your priorities lie. For instance: Will you befriend the new kid at church, or stay with your clique? Will you fork over a few dollars for your church’s missionary in Nigeria, or spend them on pizza? Will you spend your afternoon visiting a classmate in the hospital or playing video games? Be honest now, where are your priorities? Are you doing God's work or pursuing your own interests? Moses has a chariot-load of lessons to teach about priorities.

After God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments, one of which prohibits idol worship, Moses went to the top of Mount Sinai to talk with God. There he spent the most amazing forty days any man had ever experienced – only to return to the most horrifying sight he could imagine: his people dancing around and worshiping a golden calf, just like the calf idols in Egypt. They were rebelling against the God who had performed mind-blowing miracles to bring them out of Egypt! What do you think went through Moses' mind?

Moses first must have thought, *Get rid of the whole bunch. I won't put up with such a thankless lot.*

So God gave Moses a big test to discover if Moses was truly committed to leading God's people to the Promised Land. “Maybe,” He told Moses, “it would be a good idea to destroy these people and raise up a new group from your descendants.” Not only was God testing Moses' commitment, He was testing his ego. (Wouldn't you be tempted by the chance to father God's chosen people?) But even in his great distress, Moses didn't jump at such a chance.

Moses responded by praying for the people. He knew God had promised a great nation would come from Abraham, and from that nation would come the Messiah. He also realized God would not be glorified in the eyes of the surrounding nations if God's miracle people were simply destroyed. So he pleaded with God to let them live.

He knew from his own experience God was merciful, so he asked God to forgive His people. Moses was willing not only to put up with such rebellious people and give up the chance for his descendants to be God's chosen people, but he was willing to live in hell so these people could be saved. His is perhaps one of the greatest prayers in the Bible: “But now, please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written” (Exodus 32: 32).

Nowhere can we find greater identification with God's cause. Moses was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice – which only Jesus, the sinless man, could make. Moses could pray like this because of his close relationship with God. God had become so important to him that nothing else mattered.

You, too, need to spend time with God. You must get to know Him and love Him so much that choosing His work, His honor, and His will above your own interests becomes automatic. If you know God like that, you, like Moses, will experience God's glory. Since you have a choice, why not choose the best?

“I am the Good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ... No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.” (John 10: 11, 18).

“I speak the truth in Christ – I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit – I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race” (Romans 9: 1-3).

“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved” (Romans 10: 1).

“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Colossians 1: 9).

1. How did Jesus illustrate to His followers His love and concern for them?
2. How did Paul feel toward the people he worked with?
3. From where did Paul get his great love and concern for people and God's work?
4. Tell Jesus you want His concern for God's work in the world. Tell Him His kingdom is more important than your affairs (if you mean it). Then ask Him for a specific way to show that concern.

Let God Be Your Defense Lawyer

“Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife,

for he had married a Cushite. 'Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?' they asked. 'Hasn't he also spoken through us?' And the Lord heard this. (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.) At once the Lord said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, 'Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you.' So the three of them came out. The anger of the Lord burned against them, and he left them. When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam – leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy; and he said to Moses, 'Please, my lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed. Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away.' So Moses cried out to the Lord, 'O God, please heal her!'" (Numbers 12: 1-4, 9-11, 13).

You like to feel important. Everyone does. You want people to respect you and think well of you. You want them to need you. But God wants to fill these longings with Himself.

You have a very important position in God's strategy for changing the world. Possibly, one of the reasons God has chosen to work through you is to fulfill your desires for belonging and being needed. When God's power is working through you to touch other people, and you are fully occupied with bringing glory to God, you won't care whether people notice you or not. God will be noticing, and what else could matter?

Unfortunately, it is too easy to shift your focus from God to people. You can be too impressed by compliments, then fall apart at criticism. And if falsely accused, you probably lash out in anger. It's too easy to spend a great deal of time fretting over your popularity rating.

Moses decided never to gauge his life by the opinions of others. He chose to live for God, and nothing else. He was never jealous of others and he did not erect walls around himself, bristling with self-defense cannons to bombard anyone who hurled advice, criticism, or false accusations at him. He placed his reputation in God's hands and let God defend him. And God did a very good job.

Miriam and Aaron jealously resented their younger brother's leadership. And as you know, jealousy loves to find fault. First, they gossiped about Moses's

wife and then criticized him for marrying an Ethiopian woman. Then they questioned his exclusive authority, claiming God could speak through them just as well as through Moses.

Throughout this verbal abuse, Moses remained humble and meek. And God dealt with the accusers. He called the two brothers and their sister before Him and asked Miriam and Aaron why they had been unafraid to speak against God's chosen leader. Aaron admitted his sin, but Miriam apparently didn't, so she received an instant case of leprosy.

Even when Miriam got her just reward, Moses didn't say, "You deserved that for bad-mouthing me." Instead of rejoicing in God's revenge, Moses prayed for her and God healed her. Moses didn't allow his life to be ruined by hurt feelings, lack of respect for others, and self-pity. Only serving God was important to him.

Decide while you're young to receive your sense of importance and security from God alone, and you'll save yourself great heartache. Because people are fickle, they'll disappoint you. They'll misjudge you. But God is faithful and will always be just and honest with you. You'll save yourself much trouble if you'll always let God be your defense lawyer.

"Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret – it leads only to evil" (Psalm 37: 5-8).

"Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men" (Psalm 43: 1).

1. What should be your attitude when people let you down or criticize or falsely accuse you?
2. What promise does God make to you in Psalm 37: 6?
3. When you are falsely accused, do you ask God to show people you

are right? Or do you run around trying to be your own defense lawyer? (Even before you ask God to defend you, ask Him if some of the accusations are true. As part of the human race, you tend not to see your own faults.)

4. Are you resenting anyone for something he has said about you? Forgive him and start letting God handle your reputation.

“Quick, Give Me a Patience Pill!”

“Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. The Lord said to Moses, ‘Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.’ So Moses took the staff from the Lord’s presence, just as he commanded him. He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, ‘Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?’ Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank” (Numbers 20: 2, 7-11).

You’ve never needed lessons on how to make excuses. Children barely able to talk concoct imaginative reasons for why they do (or don’t do) something. We all use the same excuses: “But I was exhausted”; “It’s just that I had a bad day at school”; “I don’t feel very good, so don’t expect much of me today”; “Well, she just got on my nerves”; “I couldn’t stand it anymore, and besides, I had shown her a lot of patience all day long”; and the list goes on.

Excuses are used to cover up an inability to handle pressure. However, with the Holy Spirit in you, you can obey God regardless of the pressure. You can choose no longer to make excuses, not to be ruled by fear, irritation, or laziness. God expected this kind of obedience from Moses, and he expects the same from you; and He never will ask you to do something for which He has not given you sufficient strength.

Moses met one of those pressure situations in the desert. The people had run out of water and began grumbling, which drove Moses and Aaron to prayer.

At which point God gave them clear instructions to solve the problem: (1) Take out the rod. (2) Gather the people. (3) Talk to the rock and it will gush water. God wanted to impress the people with His power and holiness as they prepared to enter the Promised Land, and this was a perfect opportunity. They needed a fresh sense of God's greatness.

But the people were getting frantic, and Moses was getting upset, so he yielded to the pressure of the moment. Instead of calmly speaking to the rock, he yelled and whacked it twice with his rod.

Moses could have had a lot of excuses. After all, he had patiently put up with these rebellious people for nearly forty years, so he had a right to blow his cool. Besides, in a previous incident, he had hit a rock (as God had instructed) and it had produced water. Maybe Moses just hadn't understood the instructions. We have no record of what Moses said when God came and told him what he had done wrong. But whether he instantly admitted his wrong or made excuses, he had disobeyed. He had chosen to give way to his natural reactions rather than let the Holy Spirit give peace. And once a person loses his cool, he loses his ability to think straight. The leader of God's chosen people had made a fool of himself. God severely punished Moses by not permitting him to enter the Promised Land.

One reason for this severe measure was to teach future generations that the God who has all power expects His children to depend on that power at all times. Lack of faith is always sin. And some of the best chances of practicing faith come in everyday incidents – such as when you lose your purse; or when everyone laughs at the inappropriate statement you made; or when you studied the wrong chapter for the test. These are the times when you can let the Holy Spirit take over so you can live above life's ordinary irritations.

In order to start living above these irritations, you must do two things: First, you must reject Satan's lie that God can't change your natural reactions that seem automatic. *Nothing* is too hard for God. Second, you must trust the Holy Spirit each time you hit a situation that has you crying, "Quick, I need a patience pill!" Tell the devil to take off, then give the Holy Spirit a chance to handle the whole thing – and you won't need any kind of pill.

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Colossians 3: 5-10, 12).

1. Jesus died to give you an all-new self. Are you choosing that new self by letting Jesus live through you?
2. On a paper make two columns, one titled “Actions of the Old Self,” and the other, “Actions of the New Self.” Then list, from the above Scripture passage, what those actions are. Now ask yourself, is it ever worth rejecting God to give the old self a chance?
3. List the commands given in the Scripture passage. To obey these, you must consciously choose to give each situation over to God's control.
4. What situation in your life needs to be turned over to God? Now do it. And each time the devil taunts you about it, tell him, and yourself, that it is now in God's hands.