

Let me apologize in advance for my lack of communication skills, and my weak voice. Even God agrees that speaking is not my spiritual gift or talent. He is so gracious that he gives me my brother, Aaron, to speak on my behalf when needed.

Let me also apologize in advance for these people that I lead. They can be out-spoken, pessimistic, and hard-headed. They do what they want even when it gets them in trouble. And, they act in one way that absolutely drives God crazy...they grumble and complain.

Lastly, a disclaimer about a verse in the Bible, Numbers 12:3. Many people believe I wrote all or most of the first five books of the Old Testament, but I don't want to claim Numbers 12:3. If you don't remember that verse, it says that I am the most humble man on the face of the earth.

People today have some psychological terms that I really like. One of them is "father complex." This term alludes to the fact that people psychologically evolve to deal with heavy patriarchal fathers, absent fathers, abusive fathers. If such a thing had existed in my time, I probably would have had one.

I was a Hebrew who grew up for a very short time with a father who was a slave before I was removed from that household and became an adopted grandson of the most powerful man on earth, the Egyptian Pharaoh. He paid no attention to me at all. Most of the Egyptians in court despised me, but they had to put up with me because Pharaoh's daughter was my mom. I was the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. Pharaoh's grandson.

"Acting out"...that's another term I like. When I was about forty, I acted out in frustration. An Egyptian was abusing a Hebrew, so I killed him. I was a Hebrew, but I didn't grow up as a Hebrew. I had no real emotional attachment to the Hebrews at all, but in my frustration, I still acted out.

"Father figure" is another useful term. My father figure came into my life after the murder incident. Jethro, he was the priest of Midian. He was my hero. I learned how to deal with God, people, and sheep from Jethro. For the next forty years, he acted as my father figure. And then, a different hero came into my life.

I had the burning bush moment when I came into direct relationship with God. From that day on, my life changed. People's lives always change when they come into true relationship with God. He had me lead the Hebrews out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and into the desert. I was to be God's representative...their father figure.

It's been about three months since we left Egypt, and we are camped in the Desert of Sinai, in front of the Mountain. The people and herds stretch as far as I can see. The sounds and smells are overwhelming. The people watch as I climb up the mountain, follow the voice of God. I'm eighty years old, but the climb does not tire me out. I reach a flat spot near the top.

God tells me what I am to say to the Hebrews. Words that could change the future of the world. "I brought you out of Egypt to myself. Now if you will obey me, and keep my covenant, you will be a special treasure for me above all people. You will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." The challenge is cast. What will my people choose to do?

I go down the mountain and call the elders of Israel together and tell them of God's offer. All of the people answer together. "All the Lord has said, we will do." I shouted with joy, but I also wish I'd said, "Are you sure you will do all the Lord has said? Do you really know what it means to obey the Lord?" But I don't. I report their answer back to the Lord. He sends me back to sanctify them for three days. He tells me to control the people tightly so they don't get hurt when the Lord himself comes to them.

On the third day, a cloud comes upon the mountain, a warning horn sounds, and the people shake with awe. The people come out of the camp and stand at the foot of the mountain. The Lord descends in fire, the whole mountain shakes and smokes. After God and I speak in front of the people, he calls me to the top of the mountain again. He tells me to go warn the people to stay behind the boundaries or they will get hurt.

I go down and warn the people, and Aaron and I go back up the mountain. When we arrive, we hear the words that will reverberate throughout the ages...The Ten Commandments. The Lord continues with many, many more commandments for the people to follow. The people confirm they will do everything...everything...*everything* the Lord says.

Aaron, his sons, and seventy of the elders of Israel follow me up the mountain. At God's command, I go close, but they stay at a distance. I write down everything the Lord says. I read these to the people, and they again agree to do everything the Lord says.

I take Joshua further up the mountain with me, and leave Aaron behind. I instruct the people to wait for me, and talk to Aaron about what to do if there are any disputes. For six days, the glory of the Lord and a cloud is on the mountain. On the seventh day, the Lord calls me into the cloud. I stay there for forty days. Forty days!

During those forty days, God gives me lengthy instructions for the Israelites, and amazingly detailed instructions on building a new portable worship building, known as the Tabernacle, and all of its furnishings. I don't know it then, but the Tabernacle will last until the time of Solomon, when the Temple is built.

Now, get this. After God finishes speaking, he gives me two stone tablets with the covenant law written on them. The writing is inscribed by the finger of God! These tablets are so special that I know the Hebrews will value them forever, and will never do anything to violate the agreement we have made with God. I can't wait for us to start building the Tabernacle.

Those thoughts are still being celebrated in my mind. "Go down off my mountain." God thunders, "The people have done an unforgivable thing. They are bowing down to a golden calf as if it is their God. Leave me alone, so that I may destroy them in my anger. And I will make *you* into a great nation!"

For a moment that sounds good to me. I am so mad at my people, I agree with God. Then I remember...I am the father figure for my people. I beg God to relent. I remind him that the Egyptians will say that he lured the Israelites away just to destroy them. I remind him that he promised Abraham to make his descendants into a great nation. I beg God to relent, and he does.

All the way down the mountain, I am bewildered by God's statement "a golden calf being used as an idol?" How can that have happened? I find out the story.

I had been on the mountain for many days, the people became impatient. They convinced Aaron to build them idols like their gods in Egypt. He took all of their gold earrings, melted them down, and made them a golden calf. He instructed them to worship the thing he made as if it were God. He built an altar, and they sacrificed offerings to the thing they made themselves. The...the stupidity.

So, I come off of the mountain, and there they are, the people - dancing and worshiping the golden calf. I am infuriated, I take the stone tablets, written by the very hand of God, and throw them to the ground. They shatter into pieces. The people were not following the covenant they had made with God so the tablets were worthless. At least that's what I believed at the time. I grab the golden calf and grind it into powder. I mix it with water and make the people drink it until it is gone. All the while, Aaron babbles some ludicrous story about how the people *made* him make an idol for them, and when he melted the gold, the calf formed itself.

I look at the people, they are still indulging in revelry so shameful. Delivered from 400 years of slavery, with zero chance of freedom for who knows, 400 more years? Until a loving God, whom they had all but forgotten worked on their behalf. It was nothing they had earned or deserved, and this is what they do in return, return to worshipping a man-made god, spitting in his face, so shameful that the surrounding peoples will laugh at them. I shout for anyone who is on the Lord's side to join me, and the people of my tribe of Levi step up. I instruct them to take swords and go through the camp indiscriminately and kill those reveling in their blasphemous, unconscionable idolatry. They kill about 3,000 men that day. For their service, from now on, the Levites are set apart to serve God.

After more repentance and more punishments, God decides to let us go on to the promised land of Canaan. He will send an angel to drive out the people living there. However, God warns that he won't be with us, so as to prevent himself from wiping us out because we are so obstinate and contrary... stiff-necked. This gets the people's attention.

Eventually, we get back on good enough terms with God that he lets me carve replacement stone tablets with the ten commandments on them. He also gives us more instructions to follow and prepares us to build the tabernacle.

Finally, I think, we are ready to follow through on our commitment to God: follow his instructions, let him drive out the people, enter the promised land, and then we destroy any idols there.

So simple. Obey God, and he will provide for us beyond anything we could imagine.