

## “New Stage of Relationship” (Leviticus 1:1-2)

We’ve been in the series of “The Tree of Life” studying on the Pentateuch. Last time we studied about the Tabernacle, and we also learned how important it is for us to be connected to a local church.

As human beings, we need others to live. It is the same for our spiritual life. We cannot grow as Christians without other people, nor can we experience healing and become mature as Christians. It is because we cannot love or be loved alone. Our topic for today is “New Stage of Relationship.”

### 1. The New Stage of Relationship

God commanded Moses to build the Tabernacle. And, God showed Moses how to make what. Moses did everything as he was commanded by the Lord. Then the cloud covered the Tabernacle, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

#### Exodus 40:38 NLT

The cloud of the LORD rested on the Tabernacle during the day, and at night there was fire in the cloud so all the people of Israel could see it. This continued throughout all their journeys.

#### Leviticus 1:1-2

The LORD called to Moses from the Tabernacle and said to him, "Give the following instructions to the Israelites."

The book of Exodus finishes with the completion of the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was made just as it was instructed by God, and the glory of God filled the place. The book of Leviticus describes Israel's journey with the Presence of God. That is the beginning of their new relationship with God. Up to that point, for Israelites, God was far away and unapproachable. If they came closer to God, they would have lost their lives. But now God is with them. They live with God in His presence, as His people (Lev 26:11-12). The new stage of relationship begins.

This new stage of the relationship requires constancy and commitment.<sup>1</sup> If you were to compare it to human relationships, it would be like the new relationship between husband and wife after their wedding. The bride and groom have built their home together for their future. And they are about to start their new life together as a couple.

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<sup>1</sup> Ari Kahn, *A River Flowed from Eden: Torah for the Shabbat Table*, (Kindle, 2015), 98.

Now, intimacy begins. This relationship is attentive and intentional.<sup>2</sup> For their relationship to bloom, they should prevent anything else from mixing into their relationship. And they need to be intentional to grow their relationship and regularly check how it is.

The Pentateuch, especially Leviticus is designed to bring man close to God.<sup>3</sup> God speaks to his people about the new relationship in Leviticus. Leviticus is about intimacy with God, which may also be called holiness.<sup>4</sup> It is the lifestyle of those who are totally set apart for God.

A couple is always a couple, not just when they are together at home. Even when each of them is at their respective workplaces, they are still a couple. Even when each of them is spending time with their respective friend, they are a couple. They are a couple, not just when they are thinking about their future, but also when they are thinking about world economy, or talking about coronavirus, or reading a book, or listening to music, or searching on the internet.

Holiness is not limited to the activities in the Tabernacle but must be seen in all aspects of our lives.<sup>5</sup> Holiness means, "I am a citizen of God's kingdom in all areas of my life. We are people of God in all areas of our lives." So, holiness is not just a matter of an individual, but rather it is a matter of a family, a community, and even a matter of national level.<sup>6</sup>

#### Leviticus 16:17 NASB

When he goes in to make atonement in the holy place, no one shall be in the tent of meeting until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household and for all the assembly of Israel.

Holiness is a matter of individuals, a family, a community, and a nation.

In Leviticus, many different kinds of ceremonies and offering sacrifices are recorded. It's about how an unholy people can acceptably approach the holy God, and remain in continued intimate fellowship with Him.

Here is a question. Why can a sinful Israelite be accepted by God if the priest offers the sacrifice? What is the basis for the idea that a sinner can be accepted by God? Why do they think they can be accepted by God if they offer the sacrifice?

#### Leviticus 22:9 NRSV

They shall keep my charge, so that they may not incur guilt and die in the sanctuary for having profaned it: I am the LORD; I sanctify them.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 103, 121.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 121.

It is because God sanctifies them. The blood of animals doesn't have the power to remove sin from people. Ceremonies don't have the power to purify sinners. But God purifies them. God is pleased to see our faith when we trust in what God has spoken and act according to our faith. Doing ceremonies and offering sacrifices are not the center point. But the center point is faith in God. And, this faith was shown by the actions as they followed what God said.

#### Hebrew 11:6 NIV

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Faith makes us be with God, knowing that God is pleased with us. We have been saved by God's grace and led into a relationship with Him. It is His joy to have fellowship with us. Knowing this, we come near to God. That is faith.

Faith is our actual connection with God, our committed relationship with Him. It is not what kind of knowledge you have about God, nor what kind of religious ritual you are taking part in or practicing, nor in which religious group your name is listed as a member. Faith is our actual connection with God, our committed relationship with Him.

#### Romans 5:1 NIV

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have been justified through faith. The Bible clearly says that a man is justified through faith in Jesus Christ not by works.

Even this faith in Jesus is the gift from God (1 Cor 12:3). Without the work of the Holy Spirit, we cannot believe in Jesus. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, faith is given to us.

## **2. Four Keys to Faith**

### **(1) Hearing the Word of God**

"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. (Rom 4:3)" How has Abraham started to have faith? By hearing the Word of God.

#### Genesis 12:1-3 NIV

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. <sup>2</sup> "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Abraham heard God's Word, and he followed it and started his journey. But after that, nothing has happened for many years. He also made some mistakes. But he heard God's promise repeatedly, twice and three times. He was fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised (Rom 4:21 ESV).

### Romans 10:17 NIV

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

If you don't listen to His Word, how can you have a relationship with Him? If you don't want to know more about Jesus, how can you trust Him more? If we don't listen to His Word and store up the Word in our hearts, we don't have the seed of faith and the power which makes our faith grow. If we don't have seed, there is no growth or bearing fruit. Moreover, other things will fill our hearts instead of the Word of God. And they will grow and bear fruit. The first key to faith is "hearing the Word of God and store up the Word in our heart".

## **(2) Speaking the Word of God**

In Numbers 13, Moses sent out twelve men, all tribal leaders of Israel, from their camp in the wilderness of Paran to explore the land of Canaan. When they returned, ten of them said, "We can't go up against them! They are stronger than we are!" So they spread discouraging reports among the Israelites. Then all the people began weeping aloud, and they cried all night.

But Joshua and Caleb were different among them. They said, "The land we explored is a wonderful land! It is a rich land flowing with milk and honey, as exactly what God has promised us! Do not rebel against the LORD, and don't be afraid of the people of the land. The LORD is with us! Don't be afraid of them!" (Num 13-14)

They kept God's Word in their mind, believed it, and confessed it. After that, they continued their journey in the wilderness. Among those in their generation, only Joshua and Caleb entered the Promised land. The rest of the people all died in the desert. Even after they entered the Promised land, Canaan, they continued to have battles with their enemies. But their faith didn't grow weak.

Romans 10:8 NIV

But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming:

Notice the phrase, "in your heart." Speaking the Word of God is not just speaking Bible verses aloud with your mouth. Speaking the Word of God means you speak the word which is rooted in you. When you speak the word, you do it in agreement with what God has revealed in His word.

I sometimes speak the Word of God to myself. When things don't go well as I expected, doubt becomes bigger and bigger in my mind. Then, I proclaim the Word of God to myself. "God said this." "God promised me that." My faith arises again. If you want to grow your faith, you must speak the Word of God.

**(3) Praying in the Holy Spirit**

Genesis 24 records that Abraham sent his chief servant to get a wife for his son Isaac. The servant set out on a journey for this important mission. When he arrived at the town of Nahor, it was already towards evening. It was the time the women went out to draw water at the well outside the town.

He prayed to the Lord, "O LORD, God of my master. Give me success and show kindness to my master, Abraham. Help me to accomplish the purpose of my journey. (Gen 24:12 NLT)"

I can understand this part very well. It's a very important mission to find a wife for his master's son. He cannot make a mistake. How can he know who is the right person? Of course, he will pray to God. He is praying for his master Abraham and his son Isaac, not for himself. "Lord, help me, lead me, and give me success to accomplish this mission." If his prayer ended here it looks quite normal, I think. But his prayer didn't end here, it continues like this:

Genesis 24:13-14 ESV

"Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. <sup>14</sup> Let the young woman to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master."

I cannot help thinking that God showed him in his prayer the way how God would let him know who would be Isaac's future wife. In his prayer, through his

prayer, God spoke to him. This cannot be human wisdom. The condition is too simple and reckless for recognizing a future wife. It's like gambling. How would a woman and her family understand this, when he said so? Put yourself in her place, and think about this. If I were Rebekah, I would say, "Stop talking nonsense, uncle. Drink your water. And, you should better go home soon before you get lost." Nobody takes such a story seriously.

However, when her father Bethuel and her brother Laban heard his story, they said, "This is from the Lord" (Gen 24:50 NIV). Pay attention: they said, this is from the Lord, not from man. Rebekah just said, "Yes, I will go." And, Isaac received her as his wife. This is from the Lord.

In his prayer, God showed His will to Abraham's servant, and he obeyed God by faith. And God's blessing spread among the people.

#### Jude 20-21 NKJ

But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith praying in the Holy Spirit keep yourselves in the Love of God.

The Holy Spirit helps us to understand Jesus deeply (John 15:26). Jesus is so great that we cannot understand Him fully by our intellect. When we pray in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit reveals Jesus' greatness in our spirit, beyond our intellect (John 16:14). And when we pray in the Holy Spirit, we can fellowship with God who is spirit as in the direct connection between His spirit and your spirit (1 Cor 2:11-13). This is beyond our intellectual understanding. And, praying in the Holy Spirit not only makes our faith grow, but it also edifies us (John 14:26). The third key to faith is "praying in the Holy Spirit".

#### **(4) Acting on God's Word**

Exodus 3, Moses was a shepherd. One day he saw a strange sight. Though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. When Moses went closer to see this, then God spoke to him, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their cry. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt. I will be with you."

Of course, to this kind of command, no one would just respond, "Ok, I will". So, God made Moses' faith grow step by step.

First of all, God asked Moses to throw the staff in his hand. It was just throwing what he had in his hand, so it was easy. Moses did so, and it became a snake. Then God asked Moses to reach out his hand and take it by the tail. Probably Moses was very nervously, but he reached out and took hold of the

snake and it turn back into a staff. God also instructed him to perform another miracle. And Moses went to Pharaoh.

The second stage was his negotiation with Pharaoh. Each time God sent Moses to Pharaoh, God gave Moses some instructions. Moses spoke and did what he was instructed by God. God performed many mighty miracles. The water in the Nile was changed into blood. There was a huge outbreak of frogs and gnats. There was an epidemic. There was a plague of hail and a plague of locusts that devoured every tree and grass. Then this second stage ended with the Passover.

The third stage was crossing the Red Sea. God instructed Moses to raise his staff and stretch out his hand over the sea. This itself is nothing, it's so easy to do. But the situation was overwhelming. Israel was pursued by the Egyptian Army. And in front of them was the Red Sea, so they had nowhere to escape. At such a great crisis, he was to raise his staff and stretch out his hand over the sea all night long. Humanly speaking, it sounds ridiculous. Isn't it better for him to think of any plan for escape? But as he had already finished his first and second-stage faith training, Moses raised his staff in his hand over the Red Sea all night long. And as you know, Israel went through the sea on dry ground.

And the fourth stage was the 40-year journey in the wilderness. Moses led Israel to the Promised land as he was commanded by God. Even though they have experienced such great miracles of God, the Israelites still complained to Moses, "We want to eat meat! There is no water. We want to go back to Egypt. Why is Moses, you our leader?" They were always complaining.

But Moses continued to lead these people for forty years. When God's anger burned against them, Moses threw himself on the ground, interceded for them and asked forgiveness for them. When the sickness spread among them, he prayed for healing.

"My Presence will go with you and I will give you rest" (Ex 33:14). Moses just trusted in God, obeyed Him, relied on Him, and led the people of God for forty years. If he hadn't had the previous faith training, he couldn't have continued to walk his journey.

"Faith is only real in obedience," Bonhoeffer said.<sup>7</sup>

If we want to make our faith real, we have to act on God's Word by faith. We shut ourselves in our room, read and hear the Word of God, speak the Word of God, and pray in the Holy Spirit. But if we don't act on God's Word by faith, our faith will die. And, if you don't use your faith, or if you hide it, your faith will not grow and even what you have will be taken away from you (Matt 25:14-30).

God knows very well what we can do and what we can't. He never asks us to do what we cannot. And He knows the size of our faith. He never asks us to do an extraordinarily big thing that doesn't match the size of our faith. And He

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<sup>7</sup> Alan Andrews, eds., *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, (Colorado Springs, CO., NavPress, 2010), 122. Kindle.

won't just ask us to do things so easy that we don't need to gather up our courage to step out by faith. God is concerned with us so that our faith will grow.

If we want our faith real, alive, and growing, we must be faithful in little things. For the growth of our faith, we don't need a new teaching. We don't need a marvelous story that touches our heart or makes us excited. What we need is to do what we already know to do and stop what we know to stop. We'll do it by faith on God's Word. As we are obedient to God in little things, God will work in us, and our faith will grow step by step.

Before closing, let's quickly look at three things about obedience.

The first is to act on it immediately. Moses, when he heard the Lord's Word, immediately responded to the Word. He didn't say, "Yes, I believe your Word completely. As you say so, I'll definitely throw the staff, tomorrow." But he immediately obeyed.

The second is not to choose which Words to obey and which ones not to obey. When the Lord talked to Moses, he didn't judge which of Lord's Words he had to listen to and which ones he could ignore. Even though it was troublesome, even though he was not seeing what he had wished to happen, he obeyed each Word of the Lord.

The third is to act with the right attitude. If you act on the Word of the Lord angrily, unwillingly or in a bad mood, even though you do the Word, the Word of the Lord is only a nuisance for you. Your relationship with the Lord will never be deepened. Moses showed we must obey the Lord's Word with the right attitude (cf. Num 20:7-12).

### **For Self-Reflection**

1. Four Keys to Faith are: (1) Hearing the Word of God, (2) Speaking the Word of God, (3) Praying in the Holy Spirit, and (4) Acting on God's Word.

- How has your faith grown in practicing these? Think about your experience in each key.

2. Bonhoeffer said, "Faith is only real in obedience." Do you agree or not? Why?

3. From Moses, we can learn about obedience to God's Word: (1) immediately, (2) not to choose, and (3) the right attitude.

- Which one are you practicing well? Which one are you not practicing so well? How would you improve?