

**Christ Community Covenant Church**  
**The Story: Chapter 6**  
**Wanderings: Following, Leading and Making Great Choices**  
**Pastor Dave Scherrer – October 16, 2011**

We have all been there; the long family road trip. You have it all planned out, the trip will be long but there will be a big payoff at the end. You get everyone strapped in and your off, a few miles through town, a hard right turn onto the highway, you just get the cruise control set and then you hear it; that small squeaky voice that says “I have to go to the bathroom.”

And that is just the start. After the first stop or so someone says, “Brian’s poking me” (stop poking him), “Brian’s looking at me” (stop looking at him). “Karen is over the line and she is sitting on my side of the seat.” (Karen move over). “Karen stuck her tongue out at me.” Eventually someone up front gets smart and says, David knock it off!”

That goes on for a while till someone from the back seat pulls out the trump card of questions – “Are we there yet?”

Most of us have been there - either playing the role of the tired kid or the role of the tired parent or both. Drivers get tired too. And that is when bad things really happen. The worst thing that can happen is that you take a long wrong turn on a long road trip. I’m not sure it gets much worse than that.

Now imagine that you are the driver of over 2 million people and you decide to go on a long road trip. That was what Moses was up against. 2,000,000 people saying “I don’t like the heat,” “I don’t like the food,” “I don’t like Moses,” “I want to go home and back to slavery.” Can you believe it?

Moses was a tough guy, but he had to grow weary of herding these stiff-necked people toward the Promised Land.

It must have felt something like this at times:

***Herding cats video***

Let’s retrace our steps a bit. We have seen the creation of the world, and even more incredible we have seen the creation of humankind made by God in His image. We are the image carriers of God! Imagine that! **Withedness was the word that summarized God desire for us.** And we have seen God choose for himself a nation through which he intended to save the world. Rather than claiming a nation or tribe that already existed, God decided to make one for himself. So he chose Abram and Sarai to be the patriarch and matriarch of His new nation and he took them to a land and promised them that “One day all that you can see will be yours.” The Promised Land. **And the word of the hour here was Sovereignty, God choosing and in complete control.**

Abraham and Sarah had one son, Isaac, and Isaac married Rebekah and they had two sons Esau and Jacob. It was Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, that God would give a new name, the name Israel, interestingly enough it means “He strives with God.” How appropriate that would turn out to be. And so from this one man the nation of ‘Israel’ was formed - one generation at a time until some 400 years later their numbers were in the millions. They all lived in Egypt, waiting for the day that they would get the “Go ahead” to go and occupy their promised land. Randy two weeks ago described for us the releasing of God’s people through Moses and then last week we find the dislodged people at the base of Mt. Sinai where God delivered his commandments to his people.

***Map 1 Israel at Mt. Sinai***

It was here that God established a covenant with His people and they became people of the Law.

So finally, all is made ready. The silver trumpets sound and the people know it is time to break camp from the base of Mt. Sinai and to move on to the Promised Land! They watch eagerly as the cloud that has led them on their journey by day, lifts from the tabernacle and begins to lead them forward.

### **Numbers 10:11-13**

On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year, the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle of the covenant law. Then the Israelites set out from the Desert of Sinai and traveled from place to place until the cloud came to rest in the Desert of Paran. They set out, this first time, at the LORD's command through Moses.

### ***Map #2 of Israel at Mt. Sinai headed to the Promised Land and Kadesh-Barnea***

They begin moving out in stages, very systematic and organized. They had to be. Bible historians estimate that there were over 2 million men, women and children in this God-chosen nation of Israelites. They take off trusting the Cloud and Moses, God's chosen leader for this most critical moment in the life of this nation. I think we can look at this vignette and come away with some important life truths about Following, Leading and Making Good Choices. We are going to see that when it comes to 'following' it is about trusting and submitting.

### ***Being a good follower – Trusting and Submitting***

Now we would have to admit that this is one tough road trip. From Sinai to Canaan is a little over 200 miles. That is about a 3 or 4 month journey for your average group of 2 million people, based on how long it took them to get from Egypt to Mt. Sinai. It would have been an easy trip if they would have just gone with the flow and obeyed the God that had taken them out of Egypt with miracle after miracle.

But that is not what happens. Hardly do they get started but people start complaining and griping. These descendants of Israel come by their name naturally. They seemingly just can't help but "strive with God." Rather than submitting and trusting they begin to complain and second guess and strive with Moses' leadership and ultimately with God Himself!

Israel's Complaints to Moses

Israel complains about general hardships of the trip.

Israel complains about the food (every day it's "manna").

### **Numbers 11:4-6**

The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"

Finally, Moses pops! Moses heard the whining, all those families whining in front of their tents. GOD's anger blazed up. Moses saw that things were in a bad way.

### **Numbers 11:10-15 The Message**

Moses said to GOD, "Why are you treating me this way? What did I ever do to you to deserve this? Did I conceive them? Was I their mother? So why dump the responsibility of this people on me? Why tell me to carry them around like a nursing mother, carry them all the way to the land you promised to their ancestors? Where am I supposed to get meat for all these people who are whining to me, 'Give us meat; we want meat.' I can't do this by myself—it's too much, all these people. If this is how you intend to treat me, do me a favor and kill me. I've seen enough; I've had enough. Let me out of here."

To make matters worse Moses' own brother and sister even turn against him. So what are we to learn from these stiff necked gripers?

Being a good follower:

- Good followers don't complain.  
Do you complain a lot? You might not complain out loud, but you may have a critical spirit that is constantly judging, looking for errors, things that went wrong, rather than being an encourager, a person that respects those in charge and believes the best in others and especially leaders. That critical spirit will lead you into a wilderness of fear, friendlessness and joylessness.

The reason that good followers don't complain is that,

- Good followers also Trust - is the object of my trust worthy and God had proven himself? Obviously it is easier to be a good follower if the person you are following is good! God had proven Himself, the plagues, the parting of the sea, the bread that came down from heaven, the power of Mt. Sinai. Moses too had proven his worth. If the object of our faith is sound, we should then follow in trust.
- Good followers Obey - Don't give into fear but instead let love and the hope of the Promise motivate you.

Being a good follower of Jesus means that we understand that not only is he loving but he is also a righteous judge, we are made in his image, not the other way around. Over and over Jesus said "Follow me" and this story can help us know what that looks like.

And it looks like trusting and obeying and not about complaining. That brings us to wondering about being a good leader and I think that is all about character.

### ***Being a good leader – Strong and Courageous***

Israel is at the doorway of greatness. God has promised that there would be no wars or battles but that He would go before them and win the land for them. If they would only obey. But instead they take a tragic wrong turn at Kadesh-Barnea (Numbers 13-14)

Twelve spies (a man from each tribe) are sent to survey the Promised Land for 40 days. Ten spies report about the abundance of the land and also the giants who live there and conclude, "We cannot take the land."

Two spies, Joshua and Caleb, report the same thing about the land, that it is "flowing with milk and honey," but they came to a drastically different conclusion. "Because God is with us, we can take the land," they said. After Moses urges the people to trust God and take the land, the people rebel and refuse to obey. This "wrong turn" forever branded Kadesh-Barnea as the timeless event of supreme faithlessness and the prime example of what it means to choose out of fear, not faith.

Page 76 in the Story and also in:

### ***Numbers 14:1-4, 10***

That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt." But the whole assembly talked about stoning them.

Moses and God hear all this grumbling and finally God's righteous anger can hold back no more and God pronounces a "heavy-duty" judgment over the people's lack of faith:

***God pulls the car over and disciplines His children.***

**Numbers 14:28-35a**

So tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very thing I heard you say: In this wilderness your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected. But as for you, your bodies will fall in this wilderness. Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the wilderness. For forty years—one year for each of the forty days you explored the land—you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.' I, the LORD, have spoken.

Israel's lack of trust in and disobedience to God creates a 40 year detour until the entire generation of faithless followers had died.

***Map #3 showing Israel's path into the Wilderness***

The one thing that God can't work with is stubborn unbelief. The reason this story exists is so that we can see ourselves in the story and not make the same mistakes ourselves – if you have broken down and confessed your sin and yielded your life to Christ, somewhere between baptism and heaven, you are in the wilderness. God is asking us to learn from this wilderness story so that we can apply it to our wilderness story.

**Hebrews 3:15 - 4:1 The Message**

For who were the people who turned a deaf ear? Weren't they the very ones Moses led out of Egypt? And who was God provoked with for forty years? Wasn't it those who turned a deaf ear and ended up corpses in the wilderness? And when he swore that they'd never get where they were going, wasn't he talking to the ones who turned a deaf ear? They never got there because they never listened, never believed.

For as long, then, as that promise of resting in him pulls us on to God's goal for us, we need to be careful that we're not disqualified.

We received the same promises as those people in the wilderness, but the promises didn't do them a bit of good because they didn't receive the promises with faith. If we believe, though, we'll experience that state of resting. But not if we don't have faith.

After 40 years of wandering, they end up where they began—at another “Kadesh-Barnea.” The geography is somewhat different but the choice before them is essentially the same as 40 years before. They camp on the outskirts of the Promised Land and have one huge decision. Do they believe God and enter or fail again to trust and obey?

What we see here is that being a good leader is not so much about strategic plans and project management, skillful hiring and firing and techniques learned from Harvard Business Review.

No it is about character. Joshua and Caleb showed it. Moses showed it.

Being strong and courageous

Perseverance – a long obedience in the same direction

Sacrificial selfless leadership

God took us through this story so that he could sum it all up in one last great sermon; Moses' final discourse, his going away speech that he delivered not long before his death. He tells the people that they now stand once again on the edge of the Promised Land. They are back to a Kadesh-Barnea moment.

**Map #4 showing the nation of Israel just to the east of the Promised Land**

**You see whether you are leading or following it all comes down to making great choices.**

Moses tells the people that they have a fresh opportunity to trust and obey God who has promised this land for almost 700 years. Moses tells the people that they are not alone—that God is with them.

**Deuteronomy 30:11-15, 19-20a**

"For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?'

Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it. "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days."

In the course of our lives, each of us will face one of these 'Kadesh-Barnea' moments; a moment when everything that you have believed in and stood for in your life is called to the test. It may be as simple as an invitation to a party on Friday night where you know something wrong is bound to tempt you. A business deal that your boss wants you to cut corners on. Maybe, though they know you're married, a pretty gal or good looking guy invites you out for a glass of wine after work, just as friends. These Kadesh-Barnea moments don't happen often, maybe three or four times in your life will you come to a true life and death decision. But there is a secret to making a great choice in that moment. God shows us with this passage. The way you will victoriously face that life shaping decision in the future, that choice that may alter the entire future of you and yours for generations to come is by facing the decision today. You have to decide today who you will serve. You have to decide today to choose life. Then when the pressure is on the choice is easy. You already made your choice.

**Community Covenant**

Today I make a covenant with my community that I will choose life and prosperity. I will love the Lord my God. I will walk in obedience to him. I will keep his commands, decrees and laws. I choose to live and increase and to receive the blessings of God. I choose to trust in God and his leadership.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witnessed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

This card notes that you are the driver of a car. People follow where you go. On this "road trip" called life, this card says you will covenant with this community of believers called 4Cs to trust and obey God, knowing that God will never lead you into a wrong turn. Each of us, staff, elders, the children's ministry leaders, student ministry leaders, those who volunteer to serve coffee and set up chairs and lead small groups – all of us in the church family are challenged to sign the covenant community card indicating that together, will trust and obey God. We have heard the voice of God through Moses and we will "Choose life!"

We all know that signing a pledge card isn't the magic wand of facing temptation victoriously. But a pledge from the heart with a conviction founded in truth makes a difference. For thousands of

years the leaders of the church have been inviting believers to make a mutual commitment to a 'Rule of Life,' a covenant to live a life committed to experiencing the 100 fold blessings of God.

Take the card and take a week to pray, asking God if this is the time and this is the fellowship to pledge.

As I said, each of us, at times, is asked to be a leader. Each of us at times is asked to be a follower. We do both to the glory of God under the direction of the Holy Spirit for His purposes. Successful leading and following all boils down to a choice: Do I know, believe and trust God – have enough faith – to love Him by choosing to follow (obey His commandments) Him regardless of the human costs?