



Cornton Baptist Church

Demonstrating God's love in action
in the community of Cornton

Through the Bible

Exodus
Nehemiah
2Chronicles Luke
Acts 2Timothy 2Peter
Zephaniah
Ecclesiastes
1Timothy Joshua
Psalms James
Isaiah
Titus
Daniel
Hebrews
Zechariah
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Malachi
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Job
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1Thessalonians
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Philippians
1John
Obadiah
Esther
Proverbs

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...that person is guilty and must confess the sin he has committed. He must make full restitution for his wrong... (v.7)

We are all sinners – we recognise that and we acknowledge that. And we know what to do when we sin – we turn to God in repentance and ask for his forgiveness. 1 John 1:9 reminds us that He is faithful and just to forgive our sins. God does this because of His great mercy and love and because Jesus paid the price on the cross of Calvary. The trouble is temptation is all around us and we do still keep sinning. We might not do it deliberately as we once did when we lived in rebellion against God but we do still give in to temptation at times and sin. And the call here in Numbers is for the people to recognise their sin and to confess it before God. That is the right and proper course of action. And then we ask God by His Holy Spirit to help us yield not to temptation.

I think that some people have the mistaken idea that if they confess their sin to God, that God forgives them and it's all done and over with. It may be done and over with in God's ledger book, but it isn't with others if you've wronged them with your sin. Here in Numbers we hear God giving to Moses instructions on what to do when one sins against another. It begins with confessing our sins before God but restitution is also commanded here for the one who we have sinned against. We have to put things right with our brothers and sisters. If you steal £20 you must repay £20. There is another step here though and that is paying a penalty on top of the restitution being made. So if you stole a car from someone you were to give back the car and then make a 20% payment of its worth on top. That's what Moses was to tell the people.

When we sin in life it is right and proper to confess our sin before God and seek His forgiveness, but then we have to go and make things right with the person we have sinned against as well. Make restitution, be reconciled, and move on striving to sin no more.

Pray: asking God to search your heart and reveal any sin. Confess it before Him and seek His forgiveness.

Reflect: are there those I need to 'get right' with following sin I have confessed to God?

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. (v.24-26)

Chapter 6 begins with the Nazarite vow. This vow was taken by those who wanted to consecrate themselves to the Lord. Now only the family of Aaron could be priests but anyone could become ‘priestly’ (dedicated to God’s service) for a time (anything from a month to a lifetime). The vow of the Nazarite was to express one’s special desire to draw close to God and to separate one’s self from the comforts and pleasures of this world for a time. There were several remarkable Nazarites in the Bible: Samson (Judges 13:5), John the Baptist (Luke 1:15), and Paul (Acts 18:18). These people would abstain from alcohol, not cut their hair and have no contact with a dead body. In essence they would let nothing come between them and God. They dedicated themselves completely to serving God and worshipping God.

At times in life we will want to give more time to God. We will want to dedicate ourselves to him for a period of special service or worship. And at those times we may well have to abstain from certain practices – we will have to stop doing some things to concentrate on God alone and our service to him. What might that be? It might be fasting times when we abstain from food for a short period of time. It might mean not watching TV for that period of time or not turning the computer on (no more Facebook or Twitter). Simply put there are some things in our life that take over and distract us from giving God our complete attention. During these special times of worship and service we have to cut those out and give our all to God.

The chapter finishes with the great blessing for all the people – not just the Nazarites. The results of the blessing were His preservation of Israel (“keep”), His kindness toward her (“be gracious”), and her total well-being (“peace”). He still pours that blessing on us today.

Pray: thanking God for his great blessing on our lives.

Reflect: what do I need to give up to dedicate myself completely to God this week?

And he spoke with him (v.89)

The Tabernacle has been set up and now it is time to dedicate it. The people have given so much already to see this built yet here we see them at the dedication bringing a thank offering to God. This offering is fairly substantial and we see each of the leaders of the twelve tribes bringing the same offering to God. It happens over the period of twelve days – one each day. They bring a silver plate filled with flour and oil, a silver bowl again filled with flour and oil (these 2 were for the grain offering), a gold dish filled with incense, A bull, a ram, and a male lamb all one year old, all for burnt offerings. A male goat for a sin offering. Two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs one year old, all for peace offerings.

Notice too that the tribes come day by day in the order of their placement around the Tabernacle. Nothing happens haphazardly; everything is orderly. We do have to ask why Moses took the time to record what each tribe brought separately. For you and me we would simply say the 12 tribes came each bringing and then listing what they brought. We have each tribe's gift listed on its own. Why? I think God has Moses record all this because these gifts are precious to Him, and He takes note of each gift given to Him. Our gifts to God are precious. It doesn't matter how big or small they happen to be – if we give cheerfully and sacrificially and willingly to God he counts that gift as precious and notes it carefully. Don't forget that Jesus noticed the person who gave the most valuable gift of the day in the temple (Mark 12:41-44). Her gift, though only two pennies, was very valuable to the Lord, and He even took time to point it out to the disciples.

The chapter finishes with God coming and speaking with Moses. We too can commune with God. We don't have to go to any special place – we can talk to him freely now right where we are. Take time to talk with Him now.

Pray: thanking God for the privilege of prayer.

Reflect: how do I give to the Lord - cheerfully, willingly, sacrificially?

They may assist their brothers in performing their duties (v.26)

Moses had to be in the Tabernacle to hear the voice of God coming from above the mercy seat. This would certainly be most frightening in the dark. But the lampstand gave light in the tabernacle. Instead of dark and ominous, it was warm and friendly. This is a picture of Jesus for us. Remember that He is the light of life and the light of the world. Without His light, entering into God's presence would be a dark and foreboding experience. But because of His light illuminating the tabernacle, we can enter in and feel warmth and familiarity.

The remainder of chapter 8 deals with the setting apart of the Levites for service in the Tabernacle. They had to be ceremonially clean for service. Those who were serving in the tabernacle ministry had to be cleansed and presented. So too, with those who would desire to serve God in the church - their sin must be cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. They must be presenting their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God.

At 25 years old, the Levites began to be trained for the work in the Tabernacle. They would begin serving at the age of 30, and their retirement age was 50 years old. Although the 50-year-olds could no longer work, they could assist and instruct the 25 to 30 crowd in their duties. The older training the younger - this is God's ideal for ministry. Paul told Titus in Titus 2:3-5 that He wanted the older women teaching what is good, and encouraging the young women in their lives. So if you are older in years your service is not over – we keep serving God until we die. We are called to train up the younger generation – to pass on our advice and what we have learned in service to God. We can all be mentoring one another regardless of age – the more mature mentoring the less mature in the faith.

Pray: thanking God for wonderful servants of God who have trained us in the faith.

Reflect: would I benefit from mentoring? Can I mentor someone younger in the faith or do I need someone wiser to mentor me?

Wait until I find out what the Lord commands. (v.8)

We live in a fast paced world where everything is at our fingertips. We live in the age of the instant – instant coffee, instant families, instant results. That means we have questions we expect and look for instant answers. And yet sometimes we have to learn to stop and wait, to pause and think, to research and ponder before we rush in. The children of Israel were instructed here in Numbers 9 to celebrate the Passover. Some could not celebrate for they were unclean and asked Moses why they could not present their offering to God at the appointed time. Moses does not rush in with an answer. He tells the people to wait. He too waits on God for an answer. The answer comes and Moses shares that with the people.

In life we have to learn at times to wait. God always hears us and sometimes answers us immediately. At other times he waits before giving us an answer. We have to learn to be patient and wait on God. We are not good at that as people though.

The second half of the chapter speaks of God's leading and guiding. The cloud became the chief means by which the Lord told the people when it was time to move on to the next camping spot, where to move, and how long to stay. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they people stayed camped out in that particular spot. When the cloud moved, it was time to pack up and follow the cloud. There was no set pattern as to where they would go, or how long they would stay. It could be just over night that they stayed (vs.21). They could stay for a month or a year (vs.22). The important thing was that they followed God's leading and guiding.

We too are called to follow God's leading and guiding. We don't have the cloud to lead us but we have His Holy Spirit within us, we have His Word to teach us, we have the privilege of prayer and we have other Christians to counsel us.

Pray: thanking God for his leading and guiding

Reflect: what is God saying to me just now? Am I waiting on Him or rushing on in?

Come with us and we will treat you well, for the Lord has promised good things to Israel. (v.29)

It's just over a year since the people of Israel escaped from Egypt. This year has been taken up getting everything organised. Who did the organising? Mainly Moses under the guidance of God. Moses you will remember spent the first 40 years of his life in Egypt. Not just in Egypt but in the palace of Pharaoh. Moses, as Pharaoh's grandson, will have learned how everything worked in ruling and commanding a nation. He may well have been getting trained up to take over from his grandfather. Moses then spent the next 40 years wandering around tending sheep for Jethro. He had time to think on all he had learned and then time to ponder God's ways and not his own. And now Moses is ready. That is why he was called at the burning bush to go and tell Pharaoh to let his people go. Moses has spent this past year getting everything organised. We have already thought on the organisation of the tabernacle and of the tribes around it.

The final parts of organisation come in the trumpets being sounded so the people knew when to move. You can appreciate that moving 2 million people all at once would be no mean feat. They had to go in stages. And so the trumpet would sound to ready the leaders, then it would sound again for the tribes on the East to move then the tribes on the South and so on. Organisation is a wonderful thing and to have people in the church able to help organise is a real blessing. Things go so much more smoothly when someone with the gift of administration is around. Let's thank God for such people.

Moses also recognises here the skills of Hobab, Jethro's son hence Moses' brother-in-law. He asks him to go with them for he knows the area well. He has grown up around the desert and no doubt helped his father tend flocks across the area. Moses wants his help and recognises that Hobab needs the blessings of the Lord as well. It's always good to get help from others and to share our faith with them.

Pray: thanking God for those with the gift of administration in the church.

Reflect: am I willing to ask for help from others? It can be a blessing to us and to them.

The Lord became exceedingly angry and Moses was troubled. (v.10)

The final event at the Ringling Brothers' Circus was always the high-wire act of the Flying Wallendas. The finale consisted of a four-level pyramid formation. The Wallendas kept audiences holding their breath with this daring feat. One evening, however, young Dede Wallenda, part of the pyramid's bottom row, began to wobble. He cried out, "I cannot hold on any longer!" As he fell, the entire pyramid collapsed. Several of his brothers were crippled for life, and one died.

As he led the people, Moses must have feared that he too might collapse. Today's passage, however, shows that Moses took this intense pressure to the Lord . . . and the Lord provided a safety net. Moses was troubled by the constant complaining of the people and the need to keep pleading for them before God. The people have received God's blessing many times since leaving Egypt. Whenever they were in need God met that need – water and food and protection. God was with them as they journeyed now. But the people so quickly forgot all that. How often we do the same. Let's use that hymn to remind us often 'Count your blessings name them one by one and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.'

The people complained about their hardships and the Lord sent down fire in his anger. Moses feared he would collapse but prayed to God and God heard and answered. Again the people complained about the manna they ate and the lack of meat. The Lord was angry and Moses was troubled, having the whole weight of the people's burdens on himself. Rather than buckling he turned to God in prayer. And that is the best we can do too – turn to God first in prayer rather than worrying ourselves and buckling under pressure. The Lord gave Moses strength to carry on and shared the burden of the people around seventy of the elders. Pray first, then follow God's leading.

Pray: asking God's forgiveness for when we try to do it all on our own. Pray too thanking Him for the privilege of prayer.

Reflect: do I turn to God first in prayer when troubles come? Why not?

Now Moses was a very humble man. (v.3)

When the famous sculptor Michelangelo and the painter Raphael were creating works of art to beautify the Vatican, a bitter spirit of rivalry rose up between them. Whenever they met, they refused to speak to each other. Yet each was supposedly doing his work for the glory of God.

Jealousy often parades behind the facade of religious zeal. Miriam and Aaron criticised their brother Moses for marrying an Ethiopian. But God's anger revealed that it was actually jealousy that prompted their criticism. Look how God deals with this act. He first of all states that Moses is the most humble man on earth. Moses' character shines through. Moses does nothing about the complaint and indeed after God's judgement on Miriam he pleads for her healing. He bears no grudges and seeks God's best.

God punishes them for their rebellion. We have to remember that God is just and righteous and he cannot bear sin. Sin here is the jealousy of Miriam and Aaron. And so he punishes sin and tries to root it out. We are best to seek God's forgiveness and ask for his help in resisting temptation.

Miriam is struck down with leprosy and Aaron is stunned. I think he then recognises their sin and wants to sort it out. The first thing he does is seek reconciliation with Moses. He turns to Moses and acknowledges his sin against him. There are times when the appropriate response for our sin is not only going to God and asking for forgiveness, but going to a person.

There are always consequences to our actions and to our sin. We might think that if we just confess our sin, that God forgives us, and life goes on just as though it never happened. Unfortunately there can be consequences to our sin at times. Here the consequence is 7 days outside the camp on her own. But in the end there is restoration. God restores her after 7 days and he has had the people wait for her before moving on as well. God always wants our relationship with him to be restored.

Pray: thanking God for his grace and mercy.

Reflect: how is my character revealed in the way I act and respond in life.

All the people we saw there are a great size. (v.32)

A children's chorus begins with the words, "Twelve men went to spy on Canaan, ten were bad, two were good." Can you name the two that were good? The answer, of course is, Caleb and Joshua. But can you name any of the others? Now without reading their names in today's passage you in all likelihood did not remember them. The other ten did not enter the Promised Land to enjoy the land God had prepared for them.

Twelve men went into Canaan to explore the land. All the spies confirmed the good news, that the land was indeed flowing with milk and honey (13:27). They even showed the impressive fruit that the Promised Land yielded. The bad news: the ten cowardly spies sowed seeds of fear among the people by focusing on the size and strength of the land's inhabitants. They saw the giants and were afraid.

Caleb and Joshua were different. They saw the giants but their trust was in God. They knew that their God was bigger than any man on earth. Caleb's words were 'we can certainly do it.' With God on our side nothing is impossible. We all remember well the story of David and Goliath – David the little shepherd boy went out and felled the giant because God was with him.

What are the giants in your life? Giants stand for great difficulties. What is it you face today that frightens you and scares you? Are you standing against it or giving in to it? Ten spies gave in to their fear and did not trust God. Ultimately they are remembered no more. Two men trusted God and faced up to their giants in God's strength. We can deal with all things that come our way by trusting in God and taking all our fears to him.

Pray: thanking God for His promise to never leave us nor forsake us and for His promise to always be with us.

Reflect: what is it you face today that frightens you and scares you? Are you standing against it or giving in to it? Trust in God.

Their protection is gone but the Lord is with us. (v.9)

Some people go through life looking into the rear-view mirror. They yearn for the “good old days” when life seemed better. Families were stronger, Christians were nobler, people were happier - or so they think! You have heard people speak like this – hey you might even have done it yourself at some point.

The ancient Hebrews were masters of glorifying the ugly past. They had been slaves in Egypt – they were hard-pressed. They had been forced into hard labour, they were oppressed, they were suffering and they had cried out to God for help. Moses had gone and led them out of Egypt away from Pharaoh and the trouble he caused them. And yet little over a year later they are harping back to Egypt and the “good old days”. How quickly they seemed to forget. 12 men had just been in to explore the land of Canaan, the land of promise. All 12 had seen the lush land but 10 of them focused on the giants and the trouble that might come. So instead of looking forward with confidence because God was leading them, they looked ahead with fear. And this drew them to look back to the good old days. They yearned to go back to slave labour under Pharaoh. No wonder God then punished them by having them wander around the wilderness for forty years so that the entire generation (except Caleb and Joshua) would die and not enter the Promised Land. It is dangerous to yearn for the good old days and ignore God’s leading and God’s promise.

Caleb recognised God’s presence and God’s protection and God’s promise. The Lord was with them so they would take the land and dwell in it – if they just marched forward in faith. But as is the case with us sometimes we hold back and look back and think it would be better if things stayed the way they were or went back to the way they were. When God speaks and leads, the best we can do is trust and obey.

Pray: thanking God for His presence, promises and protection.

Reflect: how is God leading me forward just now? Am I trusting and obeying, or am I yearning for the good old days?

You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the Lord. (v.39)

Those of us who are married wear wedding rings. They remind us of the relationship we have with our spouse. When we are apart we can look at the ring and be reminded of the one we love. That is the idea given here in the tassels. The four tassels with a blue cord were to be tied in the corners of the garments the children of Israel wore. Nowadays the Jews use a 'tallit' for this purpose. The tallit is the Jewish prayer shawl and it has tassel hanging from each corner. These tassels were made and attached to the garments of the people so they would not forget God.

I think they would remember 4 things in particular as they looked at these tassels. Firstly they would be reminded of their relationship with God. Very often in the Old Testament God is introduced as 'I am the Lord your God'. God is with them and leads and guides them. They are his children. We too can be reminded that we are children of God (1 John 3:1). Secondly they are reminded of the requirements of God. As they looked at the tassels they would recall his commands. And God has given many to the people by this stage. The main ones of course are summed up in the Ten Commandments. We too ought to be reminded of our requirements before God. While we are not saved by keeping the commandments, we prove our love for God by keeping the commandments.

Thirdly as they looked down they would be reminded of their responsibilities before God. They were not simply to keep the commandments outwardly but inwardly as well. They were not to give in to lust in their hearts or eyes. Our responsibility is to walk humbly before God as well. And finally they were reminded of their redemption. God had brought them out of Egypt. God has redeemed us too from our sin. We might not have tassels to look at but we can and ought to always remember God's work in our lives and our responsibility to live for him.

Pray: thanking God for being our Father.

Reflect: do I think on God often or do I easily forget all He has done for me.

You have gone too far! (v.3)

Fred Grimm, a Christian probation officer, told of a father who made a scapegoat of his son by blaming him for family conflicts. Although the man and his wife had been fighting for years, the father told his son, “It’s always because of your big mouth that your mother and I fight. If I leave you and your mother, it will be your fault.” The youngster’s problems were compounded when the father died suddenly from a stroke and the mother accused her son of having caused his father’s death. The boy was devastated.

Blaming others for our problems is not only unjust and cruel, it’s displeasing to the Lord. The children of Israel did this in the wilderness shortly after their deliverance from the land of Egypt. When food and water were short, they panicked and blamed Moses and Aaron for getting them into their predicament (Exodus 16, Numbers 11). They made scapegoats of their leaders. Yet God mercifully overlooked their lack of faith and unfair criticism of His servants in those incidents.

Later, though, here in Numbers 16 the Israelites committed the same sin again and God judged them severely. Here they moan at Moses and Aaron for going too far. Everyone is holy they say but you are lording it over us; you are making yourselves better than us. They are unhappy because they have not reached the land of promise – they are not in the land flowing with milk and honey. Instead of looking at their own lives though to see why this is, they look at Moses and blame him. They make him the scapegoat. God deals with them severely though and looks after his faithful servant.

Sometimes when trouble happens and things do not go the way we want or expect, we should look at ourselves and our own lives first rather than blaming someone else. Better to examine our lives and seek God’s forgiveness.

Pray: confessing any sin to God and seeking His forgiveness.

Reflect: am I blaming someone else for something just now? Why?

I will rid myself of this constant grumbling against you by the Israelites.
(v.5)

God gets to a stage in this chapter when he is totally fed up with the grumbling and moaning and complaining of the people. He has placed Moses and Aaron in charge of the people for a reason. Yes they are not perfect but he is with them and is leading and guiding them and using them. The people are grumbling against Moses but in fact because God is working in and through Moses, his chosen servant, then they are grumbling against God. And that is a dangerous thing to do.

We ought to be slow to complain against our leaders. That is not to say they are perfect and always get it right. It's not that we should let our leaders do just whatever they want to, and to let them lead us off a cliff or something. That leads to cult mentality and we have seen that in various ways in the States in particular over the years. But on the other hand, we need to be careful that we don't find ourselves complaining against God. How do you know that God might not be controlling whatever situation you're unhappy about? The next time you are unhappy with a leader or the leadership team pause for a moment and consider if God is at work in the situation – if he is, then let him have his way; if not and the leaders are doing their own thing then challenge them gently but firmly.

Here God shows he is at work by having Moses gather the staffs and lay them down. Aaron's staff not only sprouted but had buds, blossomed and produced almonds. God exceeded the demands of the test and proved beyond doubt that Aaron had been chosen as high priest. The people recognise their sin and are in awe before God. They cry out that they will die because they are so sinful and unworthy. It is good for us to recognise our sinful state and be reminded of God's grace and mercy.

Pray: for the leaders within the church – for your pastor and deacons.

Reflect: what am I unhappy about just now in the church and moaning about – have I considered it might be God at work?

I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites. (v.20)

The life of George Mueller is a picture of complete dependence upon the Lord. Burdened by the plight of England's numerous orphans, Mueller opened a children's home in Bristol in 1836. So sure was Mueller of God's ability to provide all the material needs of the orphanage, he resolved to bring every need to the Lord in prayer. For the remaining 68 years of his life, the Bristol children's home, as well as others built later, were completely run by faith.

In many respects, the Levites were to have been a similar "object lesson," illustrating to the rest of the nation a life completely dependent upon the Lord. Aaron and his descendants were to be the priests and the rest of the Levites and future descendants of Levi were to assist them. Their role was always to be in the Tabernacle. They were to administer the sacrificial system. They were to deal with the various offerings. In fact the priests and Levites were to be responsible for teaching the Law, maintaining the sanctuary and offering sacrifices. They were responsible for making sure that the worship of the people was proper.

On account of this they would have no income of their own, nor in time to come would they have their own share of the land allocated to them. God reminds them though that he will provide for them as they serve him. The Israelites would give their tithes to the Lord and the Levites would receive these as well as receiving the offerings. In this way they would be repaid for their service. God looks after his servants.

God still uses tithes to provide for those set apart in a special way for His service. Although we're all in His service, some are called to ministries in which they are dependent upon the body of Christ for their support. Keep giving to the Lord and keep serving the Lord. The key point in this passage: set our eyes on God and follow him wholeheartedly; let him be the desire of our hearts and not money and wealth; and he will look after his children.

Pray: thanking God for his many blessings

Reflect: do I focus more on accumulating wealth than on God.

They shall be kept by the Israelite community for use in the water of cleansing; it is for purification from sin. (v.9)

It was very easy to become unclean without realising it. To touch a corpse, to be in the same room as the dead, to stumble over a grave, was enough to defile the Israelite, and excommunicate him from the Tabernacle. This applied to the priest as well – he had to be clean. When the priest went out to sacrifice the red heifer he had to wash and even then he remained unclean until evening. Plans were put in place to deal with the contamination of sin. The ashes of the sacrificed red heifer were used in the water of cleansing. People had to purify themselves by using the water on the third and seventh day so they could be washed clean and restored. It all sounds so tough and serious. And yet that is how God views sin – he has to turn his face from it. The people had to be cleansed to come before him once more.

The same is true in our day. It is so easy to be contaminated by sin. We speak to those every day who are not saved. We hear their filthy language and listen into their crude jokes. We read their unchristian thoughts in books and papers. We see images that cause us to lust or get angry. There is so much sin around us and we cannot help be touched by it in some way. It pervades our thoughts.

And all of this at times affects our prayer life. We feel guilty coming before God because of the sin in and around us. Our thought life is not as it should be and so we don't pray. That of course is the wrong approach. Just as the Israelites had to be cleansed so we too need that continual cleansing of our sin. Whenever we come to spend time in God's presence we should begin by confessing our sin and receiving his forgiveness. Then our conscience is cleared, our sin forgiven and our access to God clearly opened once more.

Pray: confessing any sin to God and thanking him for our forgiveness achieved through the blood of Jesus.

Reflect: how do I avoid joining in the godless chatter of colleagues and friends – or how do I change the conversations for good?

Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites you will not bring this community into the land I give them. (v.12)

Among the many legends that surround the life of Abraham Lincoln is the story of how Lincoln, as a young attorney, was defending a man accused of murder. Lincoln's defence was that the man had been provoked and that under enough strain any person could be driven to a desperate act. The prosecutor disdained Lincoln's suggestion, but the story holds that during the trial Lincoln so severely goaded his opponent that in a rage, the prosecutor grabbed the unloaded gun on exhibit and tried to shoot Lincoln.

True or not, the story illustrates a point. Part of our sinful humanity is our proneness to react angrily when provoked. This is sinful because we are still responsible for what we do, even when provoked. Still, most of us know what it's like to be pushed beyond our endurance. Here in Numbers 20 we see Moses being provoked and responding angrily. The people of Israel never give up grumbling and complaining. And it seems they never learn a lesson the first time round. There is no water for them where they are and so they grumble against Moses. Should they not have recalled another time there was no water – and God provided as Moses struck the rock? It seems they did not remember and complained.

Moses first of all turned to God and was told what to do, but then in his anger he disobeyed God and did his own thing. God told him to gather the people and speak to the rock and water would pour out. Moses gathered the people but was so annoyed at their whinging that he struck the rock twice (perhaps he remembered the previous encounter too and decided to do it in his own strength and in the same way as before). He ignored God's instructions in his anger. And the punishment for he and Aaron was that they would not lead the people into the land of promise. Even leaders fail...our confidence should always be in God alone.

Pray: asking God to help us avoid trust in him more.

Reflect: how do I respond to provocation? Do I turn to God first before responding?

Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived. (v.9)

Blood transfusions save lives. 8, 000 units of blood are needed every day in the UK to meet hospital demand. Who receives these transfusions? Accident victims, people undergoing surgery, and patients receiving treatment for leukaemia, cancer, and other diseases. For these people, a blood transfusion is often the difference between life and death!

In today's reading, the Israelites needed a spiritual "blood transfusion." Yet again they have fallen fall to sin. They are impatient with Moses and with God. They complained about no food and no water. They moaned about the boring diet they had. They were losing faith in Moses and in God. Manna was becoming dull to them. We've often talked about how manna is kind of like the word of God. We need to read it daily to feed ourselves. But if we're not careful, it can become "boring" to us. We can get tired of reading it or listening to Bible Studies. In those situations we have a heart problem. And it is vitally important we sort that out. Our relationship with God should be such that we never get bored or tired – we should always want more and more of him. To keep that desire we should keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

The people of Israel took their eyes from God and concentrated on the struggles around them. They moaned and complained – they sinned against God. A plague of snakes is sent among them on account of their rebellion. They quickly realised people were dying having been bitten – they recognised their sin and asked Moses to speak to God on their behalf. Moses was told to make a bronze snake and lift it up on a pole – when they were bitten the people were to look at this bronze snake and they would live. By this simple act of faith they would show their repentance. This predates Jesus – when we sin we have to look to Jesus, confess our sin and receive his forgiveness.

Pray: thanking God for Jesus.

Reflect: do I need a spiritual transfusion? Turn to Jesus afresh today.

I must only speak what God puts in my mouth. (v38)

We learn several important lessons with Balaam in this chapter. The first one is that lesson of how many times do we have to be told something before we listen and obey. I remember so well the kids growing up and having to tell them something 4 or 5 times over a period of time before they listened and obeyed. We still see that today in the kids club when some of the children have to be told the same thing over and over and over again. Here in Numbers 22 Balaam is told by God not to go with the men to Balak and not to curse the Israelites for they were blessed. Balaam listened despite the lure of money.

Yet Balak sent his men back with the lure of more money. Balaam had been strong the first time but is quickly tempted with more here. And so he says he will speak to God again. As if God is going to change his mind. But Balaam is intrigued by the money on offer. Sometimes in life we are tempted by the attractions and possessions of the world around us – we then begin to compromise little by little. Stay strong and avoid making decisions purely based on money.

Balaam then sets out with the men but an angel of the Lord appears and the donkey Balaam is riding stops and gets off the road. 3 times here the donkey responds to the angel of the Lord and 3 times Balaam beats the donkey. The donkey was slowing Balaam down – perhaps he was in a rush thinking of the wealth on offer. Sometimes things happen to delay us, hold us up, etc. But rather than get mad at the “donkey” that slowed me down, perhaps we ought to consider that God was sparing my life.

Finally as Balaam stands before Balak he acknowledges that he can only say what God has for him to say. Sometimes we are too quick to speak what we think people want to hear. We tickle their ears. Friends we are called to remain true to God and sometimes that means speaking hard words or keeping our tongue in check. Only speak what God has for you to say.

Pray: asking God to learn the lessons of life.

Reflect: what am I tempted by just now? Ask for God’s help to resist.

It will now be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'See what God has done!' (v23)

Balak is determined to have Balaam cure the Israelites so he can smite them from the earth and so they do not destroy him. Balaam has him prepare 7 altars and 7 sacrifices and they together make those sacrifices. Balaam then goes to hear from God. And the first message brought back down is one of blessing. Balaam says what God tells him to: "God hasn't cursed or denounced Israel. They are a holy people, dwelling apart from others, and aren't going to be counted or judged among the nations. I'd love to be blessed like Israel is blessed!" Balaam sees that the Israelites are God's favourites if you like and would love to be like them.

Balak is annoyed but Balaam affirms that he can only speak what God puts in his mouth. Balak is annoyed and tries to get him to do it again. He moves to a different location as if location will help him. There was another place to see the Israelites from - Balak hopes that with a new perspective, Balaam will have a new curse. But he says, "God doesn't change his mind like a man does. He's promised to bless, and bless He will. Israel is walking in obedience to their God, and He isn't going to curse them."

And then there is that great verse 23 that speaks of the fact that God has done so much for the people of Israel. As people looked at the nation of Israel they will see God's hand at work – both in times past and in the present. God it was who saved them and redeemed them from the hand of Pharaoh. God it was who has provided for them in the wilderness. God it is who has a land prepared for them – and nothing can stand in the way of that.

There is an important lesson for us to remember here. God never changes. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). That is the lesson Balaam was getting and Balak should have got...but he tried more as we will see tomorrow.

Pray: thanking God that he never changes.

Reflect: what does it mean that God never changes.

I see him, but not now; I behold him but not near. (v.17)

Balak is persistent if nothing else. Having been let down twice and heard of blessings rather than curses on the Israelites he still goes on. Perhaps he thinks it will be third time lucky. Balaam in part at least is being affected by what is going on. This third time he does not use any sorcery which he obviously did the first twice. This time God does not simply put words in his mouth but the Spirit of God comes upon him. This is in contrast to Balak who has not changed. He has heard of the blessings but still wants a curse. He still thinks he can defeat the people of God.

Balak did not like hearing of God's protection and provision for this people. Balak is hot with anger. How dare Balaam turn the tables on him, blessing the very people he was paying him to curse, and cursing those whom he insisted that he bless! To make matters worse, Balaam has done this three times (24:10). Balak knows how to hurt a fellow like Balaam - he fires him and withholds his pay (24:11). Balaam tries to explain, but Balak is not listening (24:12-13). In spite of his anger, Balaam gives Balak a final, unsolicited word from the Lord in his fourth and final oracle.

In this final oracle we get a prophecy about the Messiah I think. In verse 17 Balaam speaks of a royal ruler who will crush all his enemies. This would be partially fulfilled with David, but completely fulfilled with Jesus. He speaks of the fact that he sees him but not now, he beholds him but not near. Indeed it would be another 1400 years until Jesus came the first time.

It looks like it's all over between Balaam and Balak. They go their separate ways. But wait! There's more! Apparently, Balaam never made it home, or at least he came back after awhile. It was his idea to tell the Moabites to send their young ladies to seduce the Israelites, and bring God's wrath (Num.31:16). Balaam might have appeared to be changing but he didn't. He hadn't come to a true knowledge of God. May we not stop short in coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Pray: for those we know who know the truth but have never accepted it.

Reflect: have I responded to the truth? Have I truly put my faith in Jesus?

I am making my covenant of peace with him. (v.12)

It appeared last time round that Balaam had not given in to the temptation for money. Balak had withheld his fee for he had given him what he wanted. We look at the story and think to ourselves Balaam done good. And yet as we read chapter 25 we discover the secret of what he must have done – and this is confirmed for us in Revelation 2:14 ‘You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.’ Balaam knew he could not curse the people of Israel but in his sly thinking he thought of a way they could destroy themselves – he saw a weakness and exploited it. At some stage he went back to Balak and told him to send in lots of nice attractive young ladies to seduce the Israelites. And that is what he did. They indulged in sexual immorality, then made sacrifices and ate them and bowed down to the Moabite gods.

God was angry and ordered that every guilty person was to be put to death. Would you believe that even when they were caught out some still blatantly carried on sinning? The gall of one man who brought a lady right into his tent before Moses and the others. He obviously did not care – he was getting what he wanted and was blinded by sin. Phinehas had enough and barged straight in killing both man and woman. And this act of zealous love for God and his ways was enough to put an end to the plague and save the people. God’s anger subsided and peace came because of him.

We are called not to stand for sin – whether blatant or otherwise. When we see a brother or sister sinning we are not to kill them though – we are to confront them and warn them of their sin in the hope that they will see the error of their ways and repent. If there is no repentance then 1 Timothy 5:20 says ‘Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning.’ You can be certain that people began to be afraid of sinning when Phinehas used that spear!

Pray: for strength to resist temptation and remain true to God.

Reflect: is there sin in my life? Deal with it and repent of it.

Not one of them was among those counted...in the Desert of Sinai. (v.64)

The book of Numbers gets its name from the two censuses taken during its pages. The first census was taken in the second month of the second year of the wandering in the wilderness. We're now some thirty-nine years later. And another census is taken. These verses break down each tribe by family, giving total numbers of each tribe. The judgments of God took their toll, but procreation seemed to round the numbers back up, so that the total number of Israelite men over 20 years old that could go to war differed very little. In the first census, there were 603,550. In the second census, there were 601,730. But when you look at the breakdown by tribe, it is interesting to note the staggering losses of the tribe of Simeon (from 59,000 down to 22,000), and the declines of numbers in the tribes of Reuben (3,000 less), Gad (5,000 less), Ephraim (8,000 less), and Naphtali (also 8,000 less). Why did these numerical differences matter?

God was giving the tribes their inheritance in the Promised Land based on their size. The tribes that fell into sin and incurred God's judgment lost quite a bit of land. Sin often has repercussions that we know nothing about until later. And that is why it is important for us to abstain from sin when we can - for it is often later when the enormity of our sin sinks in.

And of course all these counted were not counted in the previous census – they have all reached the age of 20 or above since then. The 603,550 counted 39 years earlier have all died; they have all perished in the wilderness. And this was just as God had said during the intervening years when they had sinned against him (Numbers 13-14). Because of their faith 38 years before, Joshua and Caleb alone were left from the generation that left Egypt as adults. Walking in faith brings great blessing and longevity to our lives. The secret to long life – walking in faith before God.

Pray: asking for strength to walk daily with God.

Reflect: do I trust God in every area of my life?

May the Lord...appoint a man over this community...so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd. (v.16-17)

All through the Pentateuch, we see Moses being a man who interceded for the people of God. Now, as his life nears an end his prayers are still directed toward intercession. God's desire is that each of His sheep would have a good shepherd. Jesus was continually feeling compassion for the multitudes because they were sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). Moses had a heart for God, and he too desired that the people of Israel would have a man to shepherd them. He is concerned for succession planning here. He asks God for a successor to lead the people into the Promised Land.

All through the books of Exodus and Numbers we've seen Joshua being faithful to serve quietly and without recognition. He led the fight against the Amalekites in Exodus 17. He waited for Moses on Mt. Sinai for 40 days in Exodus 24. He waited in the tent while Moses would speak to the people after hearing from God in Exodus 33. He was zealous for Moses in Numbers 11, desiring Moses to be respected and in control. He was one of the 12 spies sent into the land of Canaan, in Numbers 13, being one of only two who came back with faith instead of fear.

Now, God commands that he be commissioned to lead the people of Israel. If you desire God to give you big opportunities, be faithful with the small opportunities. Too many people want to begin ministry at "the top of the heap." They see big ministry as big popularity, big audience, big pay cheque, big benefits. But ministry is all about serving others. If you're not willing to serve a few people where you're at, don't expect God to give you more people to let down. But if you're faithful to devote your life to those whom God entrusts to you, be they babies in the crèche, kids in the Sunday school, a dozen people in a little church, then God can be comfortable to entrust you with more ministry. Because of his faithfulness for 40 years, Joshua is getting the promotion of a lifetime!

Pray: thanking God for faithful people like Joshua.

Reflect: do I crave the limelight or am I happy serving faithfully in the background?

This is an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. (v.8)

When I worked in the bank I remember taking over as cash supervisor one week. As part of the handover process I was reminded of the combinations for the safe, good practice for handling and storing the cash, days of collections and uplifts of cash, and a variety of other things. I would then count all the cash with the outgoing supervisor to make sure it was all there and accounted for. After a month or 2 as cash supervisor I would move to another section of the office and we would repeat the process of handover.

Here in Numbers 28 we have something of a handover – or perhaps more of a reminder to the people of Israel. This new generation that are about to enter the Promised Land will not have received these instructions firsthand – they will only have heard of them from their elders and watched them in action. Now, with the ‘changing of the guard,’ as it were, God tells Moses to remind the people to be faithful to continue to offer all the offerings that they have been commanded to give.

There is a reminder of the need to keep our lives right before God. The daily offerings remind the people to come before God morning and night and seek forgiveness for their sins. They recognised that their lives were blighted by sin – no matter how hard they tried still sin ensnared them. In life we have to keep that same focus for we too are tempted on every side all day long.

I am reminded of the following prayer: *“Lord, I have been so good today. I haven’t raised my voice to anyone. I haven’t called anyone rude names. I haven’t yelled and screamed, ranted and raved at anyone. I haven’t even broken anything or hurt anybody. But Lord, I’m about to get out of bed in about five minutes and I will probably need your help then.”*

Pray: asking God to help us resist temptation today and to walk in His ways.

Reflect: Do I have regular times of prayer morning and night, and during the day?

Celebrate a festival to the Lord for seven days. (v.12)

Everyone loves a party. We celebrate Christmas every year and have the family round. On special birthdays we all gather to celebrate the occasion. At weddings we invite relatives and friends to join us in celebrating our union together. Often these occasions are some of the only times we see certain family members – the rest of the year we are too busy to spend any time with them. Time together is important.

And this was certainly the case for the children of Israel. They have been wandering around the wilderness for forty years and now they are about to cross over into the Promised Land. God has Moses remind the people of some instructions he gave forty years previously. This is their refresher course. God wants to make sure that when they enter the land of promise they will not forget their God and all He has done for them.

And so instructions are given here in chapter 29 which deal with feasts (there is also the Feast of Weeks and the Passover in chapter 28) – the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. The basic issue is of course worship before a Holy God. Feasts were special occasions in the calendar year for the people to come and worship and remember significant events. They are of course to worship God always but these were specially set aside festivals.

Feasts were important for several reasons. Sometimes a feast was tied to an historical event, and the yearly celebration helped the people remember what God had done in the past, such as the Passover, when God had delivered Israel out of Egypt. They were opportunities to pass on the faith. These were times to make the children ask questions and learn about their family's faith. They brought the people together. These feasts were often called "holy convocations", we call it "fellowship". And they had prophetic importance – the Passover spoke ahead to the Lamb of God coming to take away the sin of the world once and for all.

Pray: thanking God for festivals which remind us of His Work.

Reflect: which festivals mean most to me? Why?

When a man makes a vow to the Lord...he must not break his word but must do everything he said. (v.2)

One of the reasons people swear an oath or take a vow is to help people believe what they're saying, kind of like putting your hand on the Bible in court and swearing to tell the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth. It's like the person who says, "May God strike me dead if I'm not telling the truth". Sometimes we say things like "Cross my heart and hope to die" or "I swear on my mother's life." All the time we are making a promise and saying something else to help people believe we will carry it through.

In life we sign cheques (well maybe not so much now with debit cards around) and promise to pay the named person an amount of money. Our bank notes come with the words "(name of the bank) promise to pay the bearer (amount of the note)" and it is signed by the chief executive or governor of the bank. Promises which are binding.

Moses reminds the people here in Numbers 30 about vows. When the people make vows to God they should keep them. God holds a man or woman to their word. He expects us to fulfil what we promise. In other words we are to be people of our word. Jesus would later say in Matthew 5:37 speaking to the people around him in that day who made vows and oaths and promises about just about anything and then tried to get out of them at every turn as well "*Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.*"

The challenge to us is not to make promises lightly. We often do that with our children don't we? I promise we will go to Disneyland for holidays. Don't promise unless you intend carrying through. And of course we have those little slips of the mouth 'I'll get back to about that' or 'The cheque is in the post' or 'We must get together for coffee soon'. Think through what you say and make sure you keep your promises.

Pray: asking God to help you keep promises you have made to Him.

Reflect: how good is your word? And are you as good as your word?

Take vengeance on the Midianites for the Israelites. After that, you will be gathered to your people. (v.2)

Today, many drug users will be sentenced to prison for breaking the law knowingly and willingly. But what drives me crazy is that the dealers that manufactured and sold the drugs to these people are still selling on the street, flying in their planes, living it up in their mansions. That is not complete justice. God, however, is a God of complete justice. The Lord doesn't just judge the user, He judges the dealer. And so, after the Israelites have been judged for their sin, God turns His attention to the Midianites, telling Moses, 'Take vengeance on the Midianites.' This chapter is linked back to chapters 22-24 where Balak tried to get Balaam to curse the Israelites. Although Balaam could not curse the Israelites, he did want the fees for divination that he'd been offered. So he gave advice to the Moabites and the Midianites, telling them to send their idolatrous and immoral women over to the Israelite camp to tempt them into sin.

The advice worked, the plan succeeded. The Israelites fell into the trap, and God judged them for it, killing 24,000 of the Israelites. Certainly, they had sinned knowingly and willingly against God. They deserved their judgment. Here in chapter 31 we see God having vengeance on the Midianites who had deceived and seduced his people, Israel. We read these verses and sometimes struggle that God would command such a thing. But our God is a God of justice as well as a God of love. He hates sin in any shape or form. You will remember the sin of the Midianites is of adultery – they seduced the children of Israel from their true husband, the Lord. Adultery carried the death penalty in the ancient world (Leviticus 20:10). What we have here is punishment for adultery.

I guess the lesson for us is this - let God be the judge. If you are in doubt whether or not the vengeance is yours, don't! Keep in mind, I'm not too sure how Moses must have felt. After all, these are the people of his father-in-law and his wife! God hates sin and as a God of justice deals with it.

Pray: asking God to forgive your sins afresh.

Reflect: do I like to take revenge? Leave it in the hands of the Lord.

Why do you discourage the Israelites... (v.7)

There is a very popular saying which has been around for a long, long time – ‘Look out for number 1.’ We have been taught that it is all about us and that we can have it our own way when we want, and where we want. Things haven’t changed. It appears here that the Gadites and Reubenites want it their own way. They like the look of the land where they are and think they should stay right there. They no longer want to go over to the Promised Land. And so they do not worry about discouraging others. That’s what the selfish person does as well – looks out for number 1 and forgets everyone else. Moses asks them here why they would discourage their fellow Israelites and then reminds them of what happened to their ancestors when they were sent in to spy the land. That generation had sent 12 men into Canaan to suss it out and 10 came back saying no we should not go in. They were afraid, they lacked trust in God, and they discouraged their fellow Israelites from going in. That was forty years ago!

And here we have another group of Israelites trying the same. The problem was that God had a perfect plan, a wonderful inheritance for these tribes. Although they hadn’t yet seen it, they should have trusted that what God had for them was better than what they saw before them. But they thought that being on the edge of the wilderness, close to the Promised Land, was good enough for them. It is almost as if they are saying “This is as far as I’m going into this Christianity thing. I’m in the wilderness enough to have a good time, but I’m close enough to the Promised Land to feel spiritual.” Too often, we fall into this trap of finding a comfort zone in the wilderness and staying there.

Thankfully this lot listen to Moses and agree to help their fellow Israelites enter the land. They are willing to help others and stand together. We are often called to do the same in life. We are called to get out of our comfort zone, stop looking after number 1 and serve God fully and completely as we stand together with our brothers and sisters in the church.

Pray: asking God to help us get out of our comfort zones and serve him.

Reflect: am I sitting comfortably just now? In what way is God trying to shake me from my comfort zone?

Destroy all their carved images and their cast idols and demolish all their high places. (v.52)

Chapter 33 begins with a reminder of the journey the Israelites have been on. As they look back at the various places mentioned many great stories will come flooding back to their minds. They will remember how God led them out of Egypt (verse 3), saving and redeeming them from the hand of Pharaoh. They will recall their safe passage through the Red Sea and how Pharaoh and his men were destroyed (verse 8). Their minds will be drawn to the bitter water made sweet at Marah (verse 9) and the provision of water from the rock at Horeb (verse 14).

Looking back over places and events in our lives can be a great encouragement. It is a wonderful reminder of how God has led and guided us, provided for us and pardoned us. Doing this should draw us to praise and thank God, and also to be encouraged that as he has led in the past so he will continue to lead and guide us in the future.

As the children of Israel then look out over the Jordan God tells Moses what they must do when they first cross over into the land of promise. They are to drive out the inhabitants of the land and destroy all of their idols and images. There doesn't seem to be any kind of time period specified before these idols were to be destroyed. It wasn't like God was saying, "Take these home for a while and see if they disgust you, and if after ten days you are disgusted, then destroy them." No, they were to destroy these things as soon as they came into contact with them. There are some things you just don't want to mess with!

The world has some pretty tempting things to offer. If you don't deal with them immediately, you're going to get sucked into the temptation. We know that from our own experience. So when temptation comes deal with it immediately – don't wait until you have sinned and fallen short.

Pray: thanking God for his provision and leading in time past and asking him to continue to lead you in the future.

Reflect: what do I do with things that tempt me? Decide to get rid of them immediately rather than waiting to see how things work out.

This will be your land with boundaries on every side. (v.12)

In these first fifteen verses, the Lord describes in detail the borders of the Promised Land that God was giving to Israel. As you look at this land in a Bible Atlas, you see that it is much, much larger than the small parcel of land that Israel inhabits today. In the Millennial Reign of Christ, when the Jews finally possess all that has been promised to them, the land of Israel will extend all the way from the Nile to the Euphrates, which includes the entire western half of Iraq.

In the second half of this chapter, the Lord gives Moses the name of the men who will be responsible for dividing and apportioning the land to the various tribes and families. Note these men are chosen by God not Moses. They were told the locations of the borders before they even crossed over and conquered it, before they even had possession of it. You don't have to have already taken possession of it to appreciate what God has for you. Get into the Word and dig out the promises that God has for you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. Read about Christ's return and our mansion in heaven with him. Be encouraged by this and look forward to it.

There are boundaries placed here so the people knew what to expect and what not to expect. Egypt is not included within the boundaries because God does not want his people in Egypt any more. Boundaries are often set for us to remain within so we are not drawn into sin. I well remember growing up being told not to go to certain parts of the town. My parents knew fine well that no matter how good I was if I went to some of these areas and mixed with what went on there I would end up in trouble – so I stayed away. Boundaries are for our protection. That's why we have the Ten Commandments – God's guidelines for right living.

Pray: thanking God for his promises contained within Scripture.

Reflect: where and when am I most tempted to sin? What boundaries can I put in place to stop myself being in those situations?

The towns you give the Levites from the land the Israelites possess are to be given in proportion to the inheritance of each tribe. (v.8)

Each of the tribes would receive their inheritance, their portion of land. Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh opted to take the land east of the Jordan rather than enter into the inheritance that God had prepared for them. But remember that the Levites were not getting an inheritance in the land. They would receive the tithe of the Israelites as their inheritance. But they still needed a place to live, so the Lord tells Moses that each of the tribes are to give towns to the Levites, as well as pastureland around those towns. This concept of the people providing physically to those who minister spiritually carries through to this day. Just as ministers are provided for by their church congregations, the Levites will receive 48 towns in total, which we will see happen in Joshua 21.

Notice that the giving of towns is not done equally. Each of the tribes does not give the same amount of towns. Rather it is done proportionally. When God asks us to give, it isn't a flat amount that applies to everyone. There is a suggestion of the tithe which of course is the first ten percent of our income. But that is the minimum we ought to be giving. God expects our giving to be in proportion to our substance. If you have more, you give more. If you have less, you give less.

Think to the life and teaching of Jesus and the encounter when he was sitting near the place in the temple where people gave their money, and he pointed out the person who gave the most. Mark 12:42 *'But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything - all she had to live on.'* Someone said it's not how much you give that counts, its how much you hold on to for yourself.

Pray: thanking God for all His good gifts.

Reflect: on the statement 'Someone said it's not how much you give that counts, its how much you hold on to for yourself.' How much do I hold on to?