



Faith Fits – Moses

CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... last week, we asked what your favorite snack was. Well, this week's story has the folks drinking something awful. So, flip it. What's the worst thing you've ever eaten? (If the person who cooked it is sitting next to you, God will understand if you lie on this one.)

OPENING PRAYER

God of Mercy, forgive us when we let you down, and continue with us on the journey, help us put the pieces back together.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to week 2 of our current series, Faith Fits, where we are looking at some of our heroes from the Bible and the tantrums they threw. We like to think of them as unflappable, stoic saints... but we learn so much from the times when they lose it. It's nice to know that

even the characters of the Bible who have been called pillars of the faith had the occasional meltdown. There's an old adage that says, we learn more from our failure than from our success. This is good news, because so many of these Biblical characters failed in dramatic fashion. And it's comforting for us because even we are not immune from throwing the occasional tantrum. Last week, we learned from Elijah how, when life becomes overwhelming, we need a nap and a snack. Elijah's nap and snack were literal, but for us, it simply means that we need a break from the stress, and to engage in something that feeds our spirit to give us strength for the journey. Today, we'll look at a few things that cause our meltdowns, and how we might be able to avoid them. But first...

Question 1: Did you get your nap and snack this week? (Literally, sure, but also metaphorically speaking?) What did you do to take a break from whatever it is that's causing your blood pressure to rise? And did you make the time for something that feeds your soul? Why or why not?

SCRIPTURE

So, where do we go from here? Well, we're going to back up about 300 years to what might be a prequel to Elijah's story. See, before the Israelites made it to the Promised Land, (where the kings screwed things up enough to warrant Elijah's meltdown,) the Israelites were foreign slaves down in Egypt. God raises up a leader for the Israelites, who would be called to lead them out of captivity, and take them to this Promised Land. His name was...

Moses

Through some tense negotiations, a few plagues, and a walk through the Red Sea, Moses leads his people out of Egypt. Thing is, God knows they aren't ready for the Promised Land yet. They need to set themselves up as a people, as a nation first. And so, while still in the desert, Moses sets about organizing and leading them. This comes with laws and structure, judging disputes and building a religion, and, as you can imagine, a fair amount of complaints and tantrums from the people. And Moses has to handle it all. The process? He would go up onto Mt. Sinai, receive instructions from God, then come back down and tell them what God said. And that would be the rules and what they would do. Moses had already done this numerous times. But he often spent days, sometimes weeks on the mountain, and, while he's gone, the people are left to fend for themselves. His brother Aaron tried to hold down the fort, but they really looked to Moses for everything. So, you've got a people who have been wandering in the desert for months, newly freed from slavery, light on food and water, trusting one guy for all the order of the entire nation, who disappears on a regular basis, sometimes for weeks, and no one knowing exactly what's going on. It's a recipe for disaster. And sure enough, it leads to one of the most epic meltdowns of the entire Bible. In fact, it leads to THREE meltdowns, that we're going to learn from. Let's take a look at the first.

Read Exodus, chapter 32, verses 1 through 8.

This is our first “faith fit,” that of the people. They have a literal and figurative meltdown. Literally, they meltdown their jewelry to make a golden idol. Figuratively, they have a meltdown over what they perceive to be abandonment by their leader, Moses. Either way, this fit leads to nothing good.

Question 2: Confession time... where would you be in this story? Are you Moses, up on the mountain, trying to do what’s right, leading the people, keeping things organized? Are you Aaron, trying to keep people happy, going with the current, maybe even if it compromises you a bit? Or are you one of the people, impatient, grumbling, ready to move to the next thing? Go!

REFLECTION

Whelp, God says it in verse 8, that didn’t take long. Yes, it had been a few weeks since Moses left, but they were only a few months removed from their miraculous exit from Egypt. Every one of these people could remember the plagues God brought on the Egyptians, the parting of the Red Sea, the clouds and pillar of fire that saved them from Pharaoh’s army. And moreover, every one of them should still remember the Ten Commandments Moses had *just* given them the last time he came down from the mountain, one of which *strictly* prohibited the making of and worship of idols. But what do they do? They make a golden calf to worship. (And Aaron, of all people, helps them do it.) The people have a literal and figurative meltdown. The good news is, we can learn a little something about how to prevent our fits by what leads to theirs. And what leads to their tantrum? A

lack of patience. (That may have stung a bit. It's okay, we'll get through it together.) The people of Israel expected God to act on their timing. And when God didn't meet their expectations, they had a meltdown.

We expect the same of God as we do Amazon Prime. We're going, "God, I've been praying for this thing for weeks. Pretty sure I ordered it 2-day shipping. Why aren't you answering?" And God's replying, "You just got out of Egypt! You aren't ready for what you're praying for. I got good things coming, just be patient." But then, instead of being patient, we make things worse and have ourselves a meltdown. And so, what often leads to our faith fits is expecting God to fit our timing. Ask yourself, that thing that has you on the edge of a tantrum, are you waiting on God's timing, or are you expecting God to meet yours?

Question 3: In what area of your life are you struggling to be patient? What makes it difficult to rely on God's timing? Or, have you got this timing thing all figured out, and you're just chill, sailing on the breeze?

For faith fit #2, let's skip a section and see what happens when Moses comes down the mountain. (We'll come back to the middle section, promise.)

Read Exodus, chapter 32, verses 15 through 20.

To put it Biblically, Moses loses his crap. He smashes the tablets, burns up their golden calf, grinds it into a powder, and makes them drink their own idol. (Talk about a tantrum.) Now, Moses may have been a bit justified in his anger... did he go too far? Maybe, the punishment probably did not fit the crime, (something we're going to talk about next week.) But he destroyed the idol of the people for good reason. See, yes, they ran out of patience waiting for God. However, this happens regularly, and doesn't elicit this crazy response from Moses. But this time, instead of just being cranky and impatient, they crossed a line. They replaced God with this golden calf...which Moses then *had* to destroy. It's one thing to be impatient with God... it's crossing the line to replace Him.

And yet, we often do the same thing. When we run out of patience waiting for God, we replace him with an idol that we think is gonna make us feel better. When we don't get that thing we've been praying for, we make ourselves a metaphoric golden calf. We pray for a significant other to make us "whole," and God says, "I have so much good for you, just be patient." And we response, "nope, I'm going to keep trying for this thing that I think will make me happy and replace God with it." We pray to be less busy and for more peace, and God says, "Great! Take some Sabbath time and let's hang out." And we go, "nope, if I'm not busy I feel like I don't have value, so I'm gonna make that an idol." So, once you've identified what you're not being patient about, ask yourself, "have I created an idol that I'm replacing God with that Moses needs to destroy and make me eat?" (Okay, it

doesn't have to be that graphic, but you get the idea.) What are the idols you've created for yourself?

Question 4: Consider your answer to question 3. Is there an idol you've set up for yourself in that scenario? Another way to ask this question, what is the ideal you're striving for that might not be what God wants for you?

All right, let's back up and look at tantrum #3. Before Moses goes down to catch the people in their "pagan revelry," God has one more thing to say.

Read Exodus, chapter 32, verses 9 through 14.

Yup, GOD throws a bit of a tantrum. And you know what, who could blame Him? He just gave them everything, led them out of Egypt with some impressive miracles, gave them food and water in the desert, showed them great power and great love, and this is how they repay it? God had a right to be angry and lets Moses know it. But then this beautiful thing happens. Moses begins defending the people, God's people. "God, these are your Creation. These are you chosen people." Then he plays the covenant card... smart move... using God's own words against Him. "In fact, you made covenants with their ancestors. You can't go back on your promises." And, what happens?? God changes His mind! Now, some would say, "God didn't really change His mind. That would imply God was wrong, and God can't be wrong. So, he was just testing Moses." It could be interpreted that way, but it

doesn't say that in the Scripture. It really does sound like God was gonna hit the Almighty Smite Button on the whole gang. And there's something kinda comforting about the idea of a God who is in conversation with us... who responds to a plea by Moses, who says, "have a little mercy."

And what does God do? God renews the covenants with His people and restores the tablets for Moses. God continued to journey with the Israelites and helped Moses put the pieces back together. It's comforting that we have a God who, when we throw a fit, doesn't just hit the smite button. We have a God who can handle our tantrums, who renews our covenant, even when we mess up, who puts the pieces of our tablets back together after we smash them, and who walks with us as we move forward. We have a God who promises to go with us and help us put the pieces back together. Own that. Embrace that. Know that you have a merciful God, who, through whatever meltdown you're in the middle of, isn't just gonna hit the smite button, but who will walk with you, and who will help you put the pieces back together.

Question 5: Theological discussion: Do you think God changes his mind? Does God hear our pleas and change what could happen? Or are our prayers just asking God about what God already knows will happen?

CLOSING

This is probably an episode all three parties would rather forget. It's not anybody's finest moment here. But that is precisely why we can appreciate this story. When we have a meltdown, it isn't our finest moment, either, and we're often looking for a do-over. But even in the worst of tantrums, we can still learn. First, from the fit of the people... what are you not being patient about? Where are you expecting God to work like Amazon Prime? What are you not waiting on God for, and how can you be patient? Then, from Moses's tantrum, what idols have you created to replace God? What are you striving for that isn't what God wants for you? And finally, from God's meltdown... know that you have a God who offers mercy, who doesn't just smite us when we lose it, but rather, who walks with you as you move forward, and who will help you put the broken pieces back together.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations
and close in prayer.**