

Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ

March 10, 2019

To Adult Teachers:

March 10, we will study Numbers 32:1-22. Discussion questions are:

1. In what ways has your spiritual life been shaped and enriched by being part of a healthy faith community?
2. Why did Moses react so negatively to the request of the Gadites and Reubenites? How was it easy for Moses to assume that they were repeating the error of the Israelites in Numbers 14? In what ways did Moses misunderstand their motives?
3. How easy is it for us to make assumptions about others' motives based on their past actions (and our perceptions of the same)?
4. The Reubenites and Gadites were balancing the needs of their families with their commitment to the larger community of faith. What are some issues that make that balance difficult to maintain in today's world?
5. The Reubenites and Gadites were willing to fight for land that would never belong to them (but would belong to the other Israelite tribes). Can you think of someone who made a significant sacrifice for something that was to your benefit, even though they would not personally benefit from it?
6. What are some ways that we can have the same selfless commitment of the Gadites and Reubenites: devoting ourselves to the benefit of the whole faith community, even when there is little benefit to us from our efforts?
7. How is the attitude of the Reubenites and Gadites the opposite of the consumer mentality? How can we avoid a consumer mentality in our approach to Christian community?

Sermon: *All for One*

Numbers 32:1-22

My late wife Cheryl took our junior high girls from church camping. When they arrived at the campground, they discovered that the tent they had borrowed was riddled with holes. It let mosquitoes and rain in. Some of the girls got sick and were up all night puking. Several sleepless nights. But something happened. They bonded. Tightly. Those girls are now in their 40s and are still tight. If you ask them how that came to be, they'll tell you about a certain junior high camping trip.

Their story just demonstrates something that every youth minister worth his salt knows: when you take kids on trips, you hope some things go wrong (not dangerous or financially ruinous things) because through such experiences—enduring hardship together—close-knit community forms.

And that's what's been happening during Israel's 40-year journey in the wilderness. Through shared hardship, God is forming them into a strong community of faith. A community bound together by common trust in God, by shared values that reinforce that trust, by common traditions that remind them who they are.

1. To live as free people, we need to be part of a community of faith. The "first word" of the twelve steps is "we." If we hope to remain spiritually strong, we need to be part of a strong and healthy faith community. If we have a ghost of a hope for our kids to be believers, they need to be part of a strong, vibrant, healthy faith community. But strong, healthy, vibrant faith communities don't just spring

full-grown out of the earth. They take time and effort, and there are challenges to be overcome, as seen in Numbers 32. From the story there, I find some important reminders about what it means to live as part of a faith community.

2. First, a little background. The east and west sides of the land of Palestine are divided by the Jordan River. The Israelites were camped on the east side of the Jordan. On the other side, the west side of the Jordan, lay the land God had promised to their forefather Abraham. They were ready to cross the Jordan and conquer that land, when two of the tribes came to Moses with a request. *Read* Numbers 32:1-5. They want the land they are presently occupying, not the land across the Jordan. Moses is not happy with this request. *Read* Numbers 32:6-8. Moses remembers the previous generation, the one that had left Egypt as slaves. They had come to the same place—ready to cross the Jordan and take the Promised Land, but they had refused. They believed ten fearful spies instead of two who trusted God. Result: they wandered in the desert for 40 years. Now a new generation, and two of the twelve tribes are saying, “we don’t want to cross the Jordan.” You can understand Moses’ anger: *read* Numbers 32:14-15.
3. But that’s not the end of the story. They tell Moses that he has misinterpreted their motives. *Read* Numbers 32:16-19. Moses is satisfied with that explanation and replies (*read*) Numbers 32:20-22.
4. As I read this, I see some meaningful applications to our task of building a strong faith community. First, a strong faith community replaces assumptions and accusations with open and courageous communication. Moses hears these two tribes saying they don’t want land on the other side of Jordan and he immediately assumes that they’re doing the same thing that the earlier generation did. Assumption leads to accusation. In our faith community, we do have standards of right and wrong. We didn’t set them, God did. But we must be very careful about throwing around accusations of wrongdoing. I’ve seen people take matters of personal preference go to war over them as if they’re defending absolute truth. We are in a time of transition. Taking stock of who we are and where God is calling us. A time to consider changes that will help us fulfill God’s call. We may have disagreements, but we must communicate openly and respectfully with each other, not make assumptions and accusations.
5. Second, a strong faith community balances care for family with care for the larger community. The two tribes told Moses, “give us a little time; let us build pens for our cattle, and some fortified cities so our wives and children will be safe in our absence, and we’ll go across Jordan to fight with the rest of the people. Contrast to what happened with previous generation. *Read* Numbers 14:2-3. Families are important. But there is a trap here. I’ve seen people who let their concern for and involvement in their immediate family override their involvement in the larger community. How?
 - a. Drop out of involvement in the larger community under the guise of “family time” or “family responsibilities.”
 - b. Over-involvement in activities that reduce participation in larger Christian community. Kristi, Stephanie, et. al.
 - c. Make sure your family is cared for. Then, invest some of your time in building the health of the community.
6. Finally, a healthy faith community “crosses over” for the benefit of others. The tribes of Gad and Reuben made the commitment to cross the Jordan River and fight for land that would never be theirs. “We are not going to sit back and enjoy our blessings until we help our brothers get theirs.” That means that there are some attitudes we must avoid:
 - a. Sometimes, we get an attitude of, “I got mine, now you get yours.” I want to speak to older adults here. I’ve heard people say, “I’m not going to work in the children’s ministry. I’ve raised *my* kids. Let them raise theirs.” Direct benefit to you? Not much. But making sure that the whole community has access to God’s blessings. Maybe you’re not gifted for work with children’s ministry, but let me challenge you to seek out intergenerational relationships. Take a young

couple to dinner. I'd like to see a formal ministry of older adults mentoring younger here, but you can start informally.

- b. Insensitivity to new or fringe people. My observation about people serving and the difficulty of new/young people to work their way into that structure.
- c. The consumer mentality. If it meets my needs, it's good. If it doesn't, it's bad. Imagine a young person who joins the Army and goes through basic training. Then, he writes a review on Yelp: "The accommodations at this resort were horrid. The beds were insanely narrow and unbelievably hard. The so-called "meals" were not fit to eat. There was no option to choose the recreational activities I'd prefer—they were dictated by the management and they were mandatory. The activities started way too early and went on well after we were all tired of them. The resort staff were rude beyond comprehension. One of them—who was under the delusion that he was somehow in charge—did nothing but yell at us abusively all day long. I was never so happy to leave a place in my life. I'd give this resort one star out of five—and that's being generous." That misses the point. But some of us slip into that mentality with our faith community. Everything from the worship service to the softball team is measured by the consumer mindset: does it suit me, meet my needs. New question: does it strengthen and build the faith community?

God has begun a great work of building a strong faith community here. Will we be committed enough to that project to see it through?