

# No Longer Slaves: the In-Laws

At key moments in his illustrious life, Moses benefits from the insight and intervention of outsiders. That's a remarkable thing when set against our cultural moment, where only insiders get to speak and act. We are firmly persuaded of the need to show tolerance, to accept the actions and views of others without judgment, and to resist the impulse to speak and act, lest we be found intolerant and judgmental. Only insiders get to comment: those who are "tribe". And in a time where self-definition reigns, we are free to decide who is "my tribe" and who is not: who can speak to me or challenge me or not.

1. Who is "tribe" for me, and what does that entail for the relationship we have?
2. Who **\*doesn't\*** get to speak or act in my life, and why?

But God loves to use outsiders, who see things insiders have forgotten, who bring a perspective insiders have never had. The only criterion is that they have love: a real love for God, and for whomever they speak to or intervene with. Love is the high ethical criterion of the New Testament; without it, we are noise (1 Corinthians 13:1). But with love overflowing, we can expect insight and the freedom and confidence to act. Read Philippians 1:9-11.

3. Can you tell a story of this in your life, where your love for another enabled you to speak and act toward them with insight?

The two stories we will consider involve outsiders acting boldly toward Moses, granted a mandate by their love. The first is Zipporah, travelling with Moses back to Egypt with their infant son Gershom. Read Exodus 4:24-26.

4. How do you react to a story like this? What does it mean for you that it is "scripture"?

Though no one knows for sure, a case can be made that Moses carries unresolved bloodguilt from the murder of an Egyptian - the reason he fled. As Moses begins his return to Egypt to act for a holy God, his failure to address this bloodguilt leads to judgment. Zipporah, daughter of a (Midianite) priest, registers what is going on and acts according to her wisdom: the blood of an innocent, applied to the guilty, will resolve the bloodguilt. So she circumcises Gershom and applies the foreskin to Moses' "legs" (most likely his penis). The anger of Yahweh is assuaged, and Moses is saved. It's reasonable to imagine that Zipporah did not know Moses' guilt until this moment (as a priest's daughter she

would have acted earlier had she known the incident). If so, she shows incredible presence of mind, setting aside her shock in order to act swiftly and decisively.

Though married to Moses, Zipporah is an outsider: daughter of a pagan priest, citizen of a wild Ishmaelite tribe. But she loves her husband, and is attuned to the ways of deities, and so she is empowered to act. She saves the saviour of Israel!

5. Who is your “Zipporah”?
6. What are you keeping secret? (If with a group you don’t need to discuss this openly, but do reflect. Perhaps it will be time to share?)

No less striking is the role of Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro aka Reuel. This is clearest in Exodus 18, after Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, when Jethro comes (with Zipporah and the boys) to be alongside Moses. Read Exodus 18:9-12, where you see the love for Yahweh and for Israel (and Moses) that governs his heart. This is what qualifies him to challenge Moses (vv. 13-18) and to give him the kind of counsel Moses will accept (vv. 19-26).

7. Who are the “trusted outsiders” in your life?
8. If they were with you right now, what would you ask them?

Finally, consider your own heart.

9. Does love govern your relationships with others?
10. Where do you need to speak or act as a “trusted outsider”?

Pray (together, if with a group) for the overflow of love in your hearts, and claim the promise of insight, and a mandate to speak and act (Philippians 1).