



Bible Study: “It Takes a Village”

Scripture: Numbers 11:1-17

By Captain Harryette O’Brien

Divisional Youth Secretary, Southwest Division

“It takes a village”. These are words that I have spoken constantly since the birth of my son a decade ago. They are words of advice that I write on pretty pieces of paper during baby showers. They are words that I lament and pray over tired mommas who just want a nap. These are words that were spoken to me as I struggled (and still struggle) to be the best mom I can be. I believe this is a phrase that is meant as a chant to encourage and uplift one another. While they are all ordinary words on their own, when strung together, they breathe understanding and acknowledgment.

While doing my Bible reading in the book of Numbers, I came across a scripture that I have read several times before. To be honest, most of the time I have quickly read through it and moved on. However, this time, God stopped me in my tracks and said, “Read this again. I not only hear your heart; I have already taken care of your need”. You guys, those words from the Creator of the Universe were like a salve to my tired soul.

Read Numbers 11:1-17. Verse 17b says, “They will help you bear the burden of the people so that you do not have to bear it by yourself.” Y’all, read it again, let those words soak in. Put a bookmark in that section, because we are going to come back to it.

The phrase, “It takes a village” doesn’t just remind me of motherhood, it mirrors Salvation Army officership too. Chef, janitor, therapist, mediator, teacher, mentor, preacher, encourager, problem solver, event planner, bouncer, and entertainer, is just a glimpse of the many responsibilities a Salvation Army officer has. Chances are, you walk into your appointment and you are expected to know ALL the things. Your employees (if you are lucky enough to have any), congregation members, and clients anticipate you knowing the ins and outs of the job even if it is your first day.

Besides the practical things that need to get done at the corps, there is also the emotional needs that need to be met. You meet weekly with people who need you to: listen, give advice, pray over, provide Kleenex, offer a shoulder to cry on, justify actions, offer understanding, and much more. I am sure there are days when you would rather clean the bathrooms than carry one more emotional burden. Friends, I hear you. I understand you. More than that, God hears and understands.

Starting in the eleventh chapter of Numbers we read about Moses and his problems. It opens with people complaining... see, nothing has changed in THOUSANDS of years. The Israelites were complaining about family drama, tribe drama, food, their surroundings, you name it. "Moses heard the people, family after family, weeping at the entrance of their tents" (Numbers 11:10). Moses could only take so much, and scripture tells us that he pretty much lost his temper. Don't judge him, I'm sure you have been in his sandals before.

At this point, Moses has had enough. He has reached his breaking point. His shoulders are too laden with the burdens of others. He cries out to God, "I can't carry all these people by myself. They are too much for me" (Numbers 11:14). We've all been there, right? The weight of the world or the responsibilities are so great, that we need an out. I've said it multiple times, and I'll say it again: God is such a good gift giver. After God hears the cries of Moses, he doesn't rebuke him. He doesn't say, "How dare you question my authority. You are weak. What kind of leader are you, that you can't do something as simple as taking care of people? I clearly made a mistake in appointing you to free my people." If we are all honest with ourselves, these are probably statements that we have said under our breath about our own abilities or lack thereof. We can all relate to the frustration of Moses.

Fortunately, God doesn't react in the ways we do. Can I get an AMEN? This is the beautiful part that God had me reread so I understood that He knew my heart. God tells Moses to go get men from Israel known to be elders. He is going to take the Spirit that is on Moses and place it on the elders. God then tells Moses, "They will help you bear the burden of the people so that you do not have to bear it by yourself" (Numbers 11:17b). God understood Moses' tired, exhausted, frustrated heart. It is almost as if God was waiting for Moses to ask for help.

Friends, we were never meant to go it alone. Ministry, parenting, relationships, you name it. God created us to be in community. Moses finally realized that he couldn't do it all on his own. He finally asked for help, and when he did, God provided exactly what he needed.

Reflection:

1. Are you exhausted, tired, frustrated? Do you feel like God is too busy with world problems to help you?
2. Don't be like Moses and wait until you are at your breaking point before you ask God for help. What is one thing you can immediately surrender to God?
3. Read Psalms 16 and meditate on the words. What sticks out to you? How does this Psalm relate to our scripture in Numbers?
4. Why do you think you are so hesitant to ask God for help?
5. Think of some people in your community who you can ask to help carry your burdens. Pray about those people and seek wisdom from God.

Dear God,

Thank you for being such a good gift giver. Thank you for constantly reminding me through your word how much I am loved and valued. I relate to Moses so much in this moment of vulnerability. Thank you for not condemning him on his inadequacies as a leader, but for providing him with a community to help carry his burdens. Please bring to my mind people in my community who can help me with the burdens I have to carry. Soften their hearts to be receptive to your leading. Please bring me a community who can help lead and guide others. I love you. Amen.