

GENUINELY HUMAN

A Devotional Meditation on Korach (Korah)

Numbers 16:1-18:32; 1 Samuel 11:14-12:22; Psalm 46:10; Ezekiel 33:10-11;
Romans 12:9-21; 1 Corinthians 5:9-6:8; 1 Timothy 2:1-6

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Argument, Kirsi Karppinen, oil on canvas, January 19, 2011, [via Flickr](#).

The greatest suffering I have experienced is the pain of broken relationships. That kind of pain is bad enough when I am at fault, but it's much worse when the fault is not mine, and maybe not even the other person's, but I still get the blame. Those are impossible situations in which anything I do is likely to make matters worse. That's why I've learned to keep quiet and pray for God to bring the right result, even if it's painful.

Strained relationships result from miscommunication, misunderstanding, and unmet expectations. This is true in intimate relationships among family and friends, as well as professional relationships of business and ministry partners. We project our own

expectations, interpretations, and biases onto other people, and therefore draw skewed conclusions about their motives. I have been on the wrong side of disputes in which I assumed the other party was motivated by selfishness, greed, or a narcissistic quest for control, when it was really I who was the one motivated by such things. The other party may have been entirely innocent, or unaware of the offense I had taken. My passionate insistence on getting my way blindsided them and made the situation worse – or sometimes created a situation where none had existed.

It's not easy to fix a broken relationship under those circumstances, but it is possible. The process moves forward when I stop waiting for the other person to “come to his senses,” and start listening to the Holy Spirit. If I have been at fault, He explains that and tells me what I can do to fix the problem. If I have not been at fault, He reminds me to be still and know that He is God.

Through such situations, I have learned by experience what Paul means in his exhortations about relationships like this one:

Let love be without hypocrisy—detesting what is evil, holding fast to the good. Be tenderly devoted to one another in brotherly love; outdo one another in giving honor. Do not be lagging in zeal; be fervent in spirit. Keep serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, enduring in distress, persisting in prayer, contributing to the needs of the *kedoshim* [holy ones; saints], extending hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you—bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be proud, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own eyes. Repay no

one evil for evil; give thought to what is good in the eyes of all people. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live in *shalom* [peace] with all people. Never take your own revenge, loved ones, but give room for God's wrath—for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay," says *ADONAI*. Rather, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. For by doing so you will heap coals of fire upon his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:9-21 TLV

Paul says similar things in his first letter to the community of Yeshua's followers in Corinth. The Corinthian believers had to take each other to court because they could not settle disputes among themselves. That brought a stinging rebuke from the apostle:

Therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you have lawsuits among yourselves. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? But you yourselves do wrong and cheat—and against your brothers and sisters at that!

1 Corinthians 6:7-8 TLV

This is the same community where an extreme case of sexual immorality moved Paul to advise, "turn such a fellow over to satan for the destruction of his fleshly nature, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord *Yeshua*." (1 Corinthians 5:5 TLV)

It's the extreme cases that get our attention. Those are the irreconcilable ones, the cases in which no rational appeal or logical reasoning have any effect. Maybe there is no rational appeal because those involved have opted to embrace the beastly nature of the flesh instead of the divine nature of the spirit. When enough people in a community act that way long enough, they are in danger of living in a hell of their own making, where the only law is the law of the jungle.

Every community is on the brink of such an eventuality. Ancient Israel certainly was. If the Covenant Nation chosen by God Himself was frequently on the brink of self-destruction, and occasionally went over the edge, then what hope does any society have?

One of those extreme cases happened when Moses and Aaron faced a revolt led by their cousin Korah. Korah was not satisfied to be part of the elite tribe of Levi, specially chosen by God to assist the priests and care for the holy things in the Tabernacle. He aspired to the priesthood, and we can assume he thought he should be High Priest instead of Aaron. He was supported by 250 notable men of Israel, chief among them Dathan and Abiram of the tribe of Reuben. In his quest for power, he slandered Moses and Aaron, accusing them of exalting themselves above the people.

We should pay attention to what Moses did when his cousin and the hostile crowd confronted him. He could have called on his own supporters – perhaps an elite bodyguard led by Joshua – and forcibly put down the revolt. That would have restored the peace temporarily, but in time another leader would arise who might succeed in dividing the tribes and pitting God's Chosen People against themselves. How would God proceed with His plan of redemption if the nation He chose for that purpose dissolved into its component parts?

That's why Moses chose a different route: when Korah opposed and falsely accused him, he fell on his face and appealed to God. He did not try to resolve the issue in his own strength, but stated the case before the Supreme Judge and let Him resolve the matter.

The scriptural account doesn't tell us what Moses may have done to try to reconcile with Korah and prevent the revolt, but when the revolt happened, Korah and his followers put themselves beyond the possibility of reconciliation. That's why God's judgment was to remove them all, and then take action to vindicate His chosen leaders.

We can assume Moses was not pleased with the outcome. There is no joy in vindication when it means the irrevocable breaking of a relationship, especially in such extreme circumstances as what happened with Moses and his cousin. As a godly leader, a man of vision, and a humble servant of the Almighty, Moses understood the need to cut off the cancer before it destroyed the nation, but saving the nation is no comfort when it means losing a brother. For the rest of his life, Moses may have wondered what he could have done to prevent Korah's rebellion, and if there was anything in his actions and attitudes that might have contributed to the terrible outcome.

This is what it means to be genuinely human. Our Creator made us to be bearers of His image in our daily interaction with one another. If He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, then neither should we. If He suffered extreme indignity to rescue people, then humans made in His image should do the same. He gave us the example of how to live at peace with all people as far as it depends on us. We can't please everyone, and we can't be at peace with everyone, but we are obliged to try, just as He did. It's in our humanity that we reflect the image of our Creator, but that image is visible only to the extent that we die to self and lift up others.