

HOWe THINGS ARE...

March 2004

Hello! How are you?

I'm in an interesting predicament (or maybe not interesting; maybe just a predicament) this month. Thing #1: I was hoping that some kind of short term trip would come up and that would be the topic of this newsletter. That didn't happen. Thing #2: This past month or so at work has been all about dealing with various and sundry new viruses and anti-virus plans and some spam filtering things. These two aspects of email, spam and viruses, are mostly discouraging. It's all reacting to what the bad guys are doing and trying to figure out what they'll do next and that leads to paranoia. My problem: I had a tentative plan. It involved me deciding where I was going by Feb 29 and it didn't involve viruses, spam or anything else unpleasant.

So I'm reading Judges (a book with a boatload of troubling issues). There at the end, there's this three-day war. On Day One, the Israelites ask God who should lead them into battle. God tells them who should lead them. Off they go into battle and they're soundly defeated; 20,000 of them die. They go back to camp, obviously discouraged, and ask God if they should continue. God tells them they should. Day Two: they're defeated again. So this time, again fairly discouraged, they ask God if they should keep going. God tells them to go back and that they'll be victorious this time and so they are. Alright, OK, fine, Day Three they win the battle. I'm troubled that Day One and Two were miserable defeats. Here's what I want the lesson to be: Day One and Two there was something wrong with the request: it was the wrong way to ask or the wrong thing to ask. Then finally they figure out the right way and thing to ask God and then they win the battle. However, that's not the lesson. How they asked God for guidance for Day Two was perfectly fine and God was perfectly clear about what they were to do (go into battle) and they lost and lost badly. And my little mind that works in formulas is unhappy with this situation.

In January, I had a server upgrade to do. My home church asked for time specific prayer requests and I asked for prayer for the upgrade to go well. People prayed; they sent notes saying they prayed [Thanks for those and for praying]. The upgrade went amazingly well. Better than I could have anticipated. Then last month, I had a similar situation where I needed to work on the server, but this time I didn't ask for prayer at all. In fact, I forgot to even have my team at work pray until after I already was into it. Although the no-prayer time wasn't a tragedy, it certainly didn't go miraculously. It took longer than I thought, and didn't go nearly as well as the previous time.

So wouldn't you think, "Aha, here's a formula: people pray, server upgrades go well. No prayer; not so well"? So how come the Israelites are soundly defeated on Day Two when they followed the formula (consulted God before going into battle and did what he said)? Why does there need to be a Day One or Day Two at all? Couldn't we just skip to Day Three, the victory? I'm asking questions (not answering them)... as I'm sitting here on what feels like my Day Two... Here's the thing and maybe the lesson: I don't see the purpose of the defeats of Day One AND Day Two -- doesn't mean God doesn't have a purpose and, what's more, Day Three is coming.

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