

## “The Potato Vice Syndrome,”

Exodus 32:1-14

[www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=exodus+32:1-14](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=exodus+32:1-14)

Rev. Robin Gilshire

Chilson Hills Church, Brighton, Michigan

### **Robin:**

For several weeks David has been focusing his preaching on the Lord's Prayer. Our worship has been blessed by a phrase-by-phrase understanding and life-application of the prayer the Jesus taught his disciples...that's us, to pray.

What our Lord gave us in teaching this prayer was a wonderful lesson in intentional, clear communication with God; cause nobody communicates better than Jesus.

Since David has had our worship involved in communication, especially “communing” with God, we'd like to take a look at just how we communicate as a species, and how Christ, our great “Intercessor” helps us with that.

### **Josh:**

As any “E-mailer,” “Tweeter,” “Cell-phoner,” “Face-Booker,” or news-media junkie will tell you, communication is the stuff of life...and relationships. However, as I'm sure we all have learned from time to time, communication is no easy thing. In fact, we are often as likely to be misunderstood and we are understood.

Let's face it...you intend to communicate with everybody: your family, your co-workers, your teachers, your friends, your customers. It's all very risky. The only one who will always understand you is the dog; not the cat...forget that. When everyone thinks you're speaking gibberish, the dog seems to get it.

### **Robin:**

There are those times when you try to communicate with your spouse, but he or she stares at you like you're the phantom menace, an intergalactic space invader from the planet Koosbane or something. Wouldn't it be great if we could invent a machine that would understand perfectly what we're trying to say?

Welcome to “VRS's,” Voice Recognition Systems. These systems are not new, but they are gaining in popularity. There's voice recognition for “hands-free” dialing of your cell phone. There are VRS digital recorders that record instruction, ideas, notes and then plug into a computer.

### **Josh:**

These things are great. Dial a cell number while driving just by speaking somebody's name and never lose sight of the road. Be a lawyer or writer or teacher who gets a good idea or who wants to organize thoughts for a presentation...the list goes on. But, this system is not without its problems.

The VRS must learn to recognize your voice. You are asked to read 20 minutes of either *War and Peace*, *Curious George* or a *Dave Berry* book into the computer of the VRS so it can establish a data base of the over forty different phonemes we use in the English language; and also the way we individually say them. One user commented about his experience: “My computer doesn't understand me. I tried talking to it, but it was fruitless...it wouldn't listen.

When I said, ‘You say po-ta-to, I say po-tah-to,’ it heard, ‘Using potato vice, the auto.’” You know it's bad when you spouse doesn't understand you...forget that, now your computer doesn't understand you!

**Robin:**

Perhaps you're beyond understanding! Not really, something else is at work. Something else is in operation. In honor of, "*po-ta-to, po-tah-to... vice,*" we'll call it the "**Potato Vice Syndrome**" (PVS).

This is a new syndrome, made up at this very moment, you've never heard of it before, **to describe the vice that keeps us from hearing what is being said.** It is a **self-induced** filter that strains words through a defensive grid in our reception system that renders meaning elusive.

Potato Vice Syndrome; PVS. You've got it, I've got it, children of Israel had it.

**Song:**

Moses had already given the folks of Israel an oral version of God's Law. **Exodus 19:25** ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=exodus+19:25](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=exodus+19:25)) says, "So Moses went down...and told them..." But, while Moses spoke the words from God, "You shall make no other gods before me..," PVS caused his listeners to hear: "You shall make no other gods before me, but when your fear and impatience kick in, a golden calf is okay."

This isn't reading between the lines; **it's getting the lines crossed.** This is poor transmission at it's finest; it's fuzzy reception at it's best. This isn't a garbled message; **it's interference in the receiver.** It's PVS.

**Josh:**

Poor reception goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. There the first "Thou shalt not" came across with similar fuzziness, causing the Divinely-directed diet to be abandoned in favor of a more, shall we say, "selected" menu. Forbidden fruit became an appetizer for disaster. PVS.

The lines were crossed when Samson got his hair cut by the wrong stylist. PVS.

Perception problems plagued King David during a stroll on his roof top. PVS.

Communication conflicts cause all kinds of problems for Paul in the Corinthian church. PVS.

Voice recognition problems befuddled Judas. PVS.

Selective hearing afflicts and baffles children and parents every day.

The perception fuzziness is within us. The crossing-of-lines are part and parcel of the human predicament.

**We have met the interference, and it is us.**

**Robin:**

Out in the wilderness, the Israelites knew their freedom was precarious; especially when that freedom had been so closely tied to the personality of Moses. It probably was easy to tire of Moses...you know, the old, "What have you done for us lately, Moses?" attitude.

In his absence, while Moses was away to talk with God, the cost of freedom was revealed, and it proved too much for the Israelites to bear. Freedom, as we know well, means responsibility. The fear of freedom found a ready resting place in these people who, like us, asked every other day, "Are we there yet?!" and when told that they weren't there yet, desired to back to the "security" of bondage as slaves to the Egyptians.

We know what that kind of ready resting place feels like; especially in Michigan. Every other day since 2008 when our economy went bust we've been asking, "Are we there yet?!" and when told that we're not, we've used our PVS to consider going back to the "security" of those laws and banking practices that created our financial bondage in the first place.

**Josh:**

So, Moses is away from the camp talking with God and, of course, the fear intensifies and the static comes up. We know what causes PVS; the Israelites knew, too. This story from the book of Exodus defines and illustrates the cause well.

**The interference is our own self-interest, which isn't served by waiting on God or, in the case of the Israelites, waiting on God's deliverer.**

The fuzziness is our need for security not met by an unseen God, not satisfied by the assurances of God's representative.

**We are in a wilderness...a spiritual, a economic, a self-confidence, a relationship wasteland and we don't want to die out here!**

Something...someone...had better come along to calm our fears and set our feet on solid ground; and we want them to come, now! The feeling is: **(Both)** "It's my security, and I want it NOW!"

**Robin:**

If that something or someone doesn't come along, **the voice crying within us is so loud that we will take its seducing instructions to create a false one.**

"I feel just awful about myself and I want to feel better; I don't have any money, so I'll buy something expensive to cheer myself up!" "As a nation we were lied to and cheated by bank executives and politicians into an economic disaster, but the work it takes to fix a problem this big is taking too long; let's go back to the way things were done before, that'll solve things!"

**The voice IS the interference, but it comes across loud and clear to a ready receptor.**

In Exodus, according to the instruction of all those mass voices, Aaron builds a golden calf...he uses his creative gifts to satisfy a host of sound systems all blasting the same interference. "We're scared right now, we want answers right now...the calf will see us through." That's what the children of Israel heard. That's what we can hear the voice saying.

**Josh:**

"You can't make it without a fix." That's the interference...the drug of choice in the economy of insecure disobedience. Alcohol, caffeine, tobacco, sports, cocaine, work, sex, indifference, television, violence, consumerism...as Yogi Berra said it, "Two words: Gotta have it."

"God doesn't hear you." "If God loved you..." "You are alone." "Nobody cares."

**The interference gets louder and louder precisely because everybody gets the same interference.**

A human community can actually serve as an amplifier of the voices. PVS become the most popular item on the menu...the hottest dish...meal of the month, toast of the prayer, appetizer of the election.

**Robin:**

And so, we build or calves but not our muscles. We think we build them as individuals, but it's a community undertaking...("undertaking," hmmm). It's a family affair...the human family, that is. Like you, Josh and I know this; when it comes to being human, **(Both)** "I are one." Who else builds calves? Look around you. We are a church of calf builders, all misinformed by the interference that rises up within us. PVS.

**Josh:**

Professionals build calves at their work, afraid of the insecurity of trusting God for their identity. Single people build calves of marriage, believing they are incomplete, even in Christ, without a mate. Many of us make performance and achievement a golden calf, believing we have no worth outside of what we do.

Others make appearance an idol of adoration, hearing the voices that change the promise of being created in God's image by the interference of thousands of TV ads into a narrow definition of beauty and attractiveness that is enhanced by the product of the moment. **(Both)** All of us build golden calves.

**Robin:**

But while we are shrinking the size of our comfort zones and building our golden calves, there is one who, thanks to God's compassion and on our behalf, is involved in intervention and intercession. In their retreat conversation, God tells Moses that the Israelites have fallen into disobedience, and that God will, in righteous anger, delete them rather than save them.

**Josh:**

Moses, however, pleads for the people. Moses does this not just out of concern for them. He pleads for them because he knows that the greater glory of God is served when faithfulness to God overcomes fickleness to fear. Moses knows the crossed lines of communication are untangled by the covenant of love from God.

Good heavens, do you think there really could be a significant difference between a human community and a community of faith?

**Robin:**

If you're thinking that this Exodus story of Moses interceding with God on behalf of the Israelites is a metaphorical prototype for another interceding deliverer in our own time, you're right. Today, as we build our own idols in response to the interference, there is One who brings clear communication to the Creator

God on our behalf; that fella, Scripture says, "...lives to make intercession for us." Even today, the love of God compels the risen Christ to plead on our behalf, even as we build golden calves. As Paul so eloquently puts it: "While we were sinners, Christ died for the ungodly."

**So the PVS interference is revealed for what it is...a problem with reception, not transmission.**

**Josh:**

The potato vice syndrome is shown for what it is...crossed lines overcome by a rugged cross. And when we think that no one understands us, we have the promise that no one is risen Deliverer praying for us, but because he is risen from what we did, we can approach God ourselves.

**Robin:**

Please remember, in the midst of building your calves, God always recognizes **your** voice.