

# EXODUS

The Gospel  
According to Moses



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# Introduction & Overview

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## *Studying Exodus*

### **Why Is This Book Different From All Other Books?**

The book of Exodus is referred to more than any other book in the Bible *by other books in the Bible*. Likewise, it has been translated to film more than any other part of Scripture with the exception of the gospels. So what makes this book different from all other books?

Quite simply, this book represents a quantum leap in the story of God and His purposes for the world. While Genesis introduces us to Him as the Creator and the covenant God of Abraham, Exodus presents God as the one who saves a people for Himself, so that He might dwell in their midst and send them into the world as a “nation of priests.” It is another giant step forward in fulfilling his promise to Abraham to bless all the nations through his descendants.

It is a book of movement: of slavery to freedom, of tribal family to nation, of God’s absence to God’s presence. As such, its drama has continued to capture the hearts and minds of God’s people down through the centuries as a part of the grander story of God in the world.

## **About the Book**

### **Literary Style: Biblical Narrative...and Then Some**

The book of Exodus is filled with several important genres of literature all packed into a single story. The first and most well known portion is what we would call [\*biblical narrative\*](#) and presents the story of God saving His people, Israel, from their slavery in Egypt. It continues the story of Abraham’s family from the book of Genesis, which ends with Abraham’s grandson, Jacob, and his children dwelling in the land of Egypt, picking up several hundred years later where we find that the family has grown into a large people group who are enslaved.

But the second and third portions of the book contain [\*ancient law codes\*](#), [\*ritual instructions for worship\*](#), and details plans for the [\*building of a tent shrine\*](#). While this may sound boring to us as modern readers, each of these literary pieces contributes a vital portion to the study. As such, we need to approach the text carefully and

thoughtfully, asking ourselves, “Why did the narrator include this here? What is he trying to tell us and why does it matter?”

We will get into more detail about how to reach each of these portions in the section of **Structure** (see below), but first, let’s talk about the narrator and the audience.

### **Author**

The author of Exodus is never named. There are several sections ascribed to individuals who are characters in the story, such as the song of Miriam (Exodus 15) and the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20) as God speaks to Moses. Ancient tradition holds that the primary author is Moses. And as Moses is a central character, it is possible that he was a major source of much of the material. However, we should also allow for the possibility that others contributed to the text as well, helping to arrange and edit it into its final form as we have it today.

What *is* clear is that the final narrator and editor had a very intentional design and purpose for writing this book, which we will address shortly when we talk about **Structure**. So being aware of this narrator’s intent and attending to his cultural assumptions and authorial purposes is vital for understanding this story today.

### **Audience**

Like the narrator, the audience for Exodus is never identified. However, given that it is referred back to by *many* biblical authors, it is safe to assume that this book was foundational for the ancient people of Israel in understanding their own history, purpose, and the God that they worshipped. Such central themes of identity and purpose must be taken into account when reading this text and it will be vital to understand how this story would have shaped their self-understanding as a people group.

### **Date**

Dating Exodus has been notoriously tricky given that important historical markers, like the reign and rule of specific kings, are not mentioned. That being said, many modern historians, noting both the features of the book and their relation to extra-biblical evidence, date the Exodus story sometime in mid-15th century BC. For a brief overview of the historical data see [\*Prepare the Way of the Lord: An Introduction to the Old Testament\*](#) by Reed Lessing.

## **Structure: Tale, Torah, and Tabernacle**

As was mentioned previously, the book of Exodus contains a variety of literary types, which also correspond, roughly, to the major movements of the book. These movements can be summarized with the words *Tale*, *Torah*, and *Tabernacle* and can be roughly broken up in the following way:

### **The Tale (Exodus 1-19):**

The first section of Exodus tells us the tale of God's people and their deliverance from Egypt, as well as their journey to Sinai where they meet with Yahweh at the mountain. Central to this story is God's mighty action on His peoples' behalf after an *apparent* absence. Through it all the identity of God is revealed, first to Moses, then to Pharaoh, and finally to all the people. We see God's faithfulness to keep His covenant promises to Abraham and his descendants by delivering them so that they might become His chosen nation.

### **The Torah (Exodus 20-24)**

The second section of the book is what we would call Torah. Now this is a word that needs to be properly understood. Unfortunately, we tend to translate Torah as "Law" in our modern translations. However, that is to miss the point. The Hebrew word תּוֹרָה actually means "instruction." It is less a legal word than a word to describe wisdom needed for living well. In this section of the book God is trying to teach His people how to *live* as His people in ways that reflect Him well to the surrounding world and prepare them to be the nation among whom His presence would dwell. As such, it does not offer rules for every area of life, but rather provides principles

### **The Tabernacle (Exodus 25-40)**

The final, and longest, section of the book involves instructions for building the tabernacle; a tent where God's presence would dwell in the midst of His people. While it is often skimmed through by modern readers, this truly is the climax of the book of Exodus because this was the whole *point* of their deliverance: that they would become the people among whom God's presence would dwell in the world. As such, it is important to pay attention to the details and imagery used when describing God's dwell place. What is God trying to teach them? What do we learn about Him and His purposes through this section? Learning to ask these questions will make an otherwise "dry" portion of the text start to come alive.

## Major Themes

### Presence

One of the major themes of Exodus is God's presence with His people. The book opens with God's apparent *absence* as His covenant people have been living under the oppression of Pharaoh in Egypt. However, as the book progresses God's presence becomes an ever visible and tangible reality as He delivers His people through His mighty "signs," appears to them in cloud and fire on Mt. Sinai, and then dwells in their midst at the Tabernacle. This idea of God dwelling with His people is a recovery of the ideal that was last seen in Eden, where God walked with His people in the cool of the day and points forward to a day when God's dwelling place would now be with His people forever (Revelation 21:3).

### Relationship

Closely related to the first theme is the second theme of "relationship." What does it really mean to have a relationship with this God? This becomes a fundamental theme that is woven throughout the book as God teaches His people about His own identity and instructs them about how they might live together with Him as His people.

### Holiness

A third interrelated theme is that of "holiness". This is a theme that we often get wrong today, thinking that it is a moral status that we must aspire to. However, what Exodus makes clear is that holiness is a *status given* for a purpose. God sets His people apart that they might be His representatives in the world and the people among whom His presence dwells. This divine purpose and mission is central to many of the tensions that we see, especially after the peoples' deliverance from Egypt and comes to a crisis point in the episode involving the golden calf.

## Tips for Studying Exodus

### Pay Attention to the Narrator

The narrator and editor of Exodus put the book together with a very specific design and purpose. Making sure you are tracking with the major movements of the book will be essential for discerning the narrator's purpose and intention. While we will meet many characters and observe many events in this book, the main message is carried by the narrator and what he is *doing* with those characters and events. So it is critical to ask questions like, "Why does the narrator recount this story in this way? What is significant about this detail and why does it matter for the overall message?"

### **Be Aware of Cultural Differences**

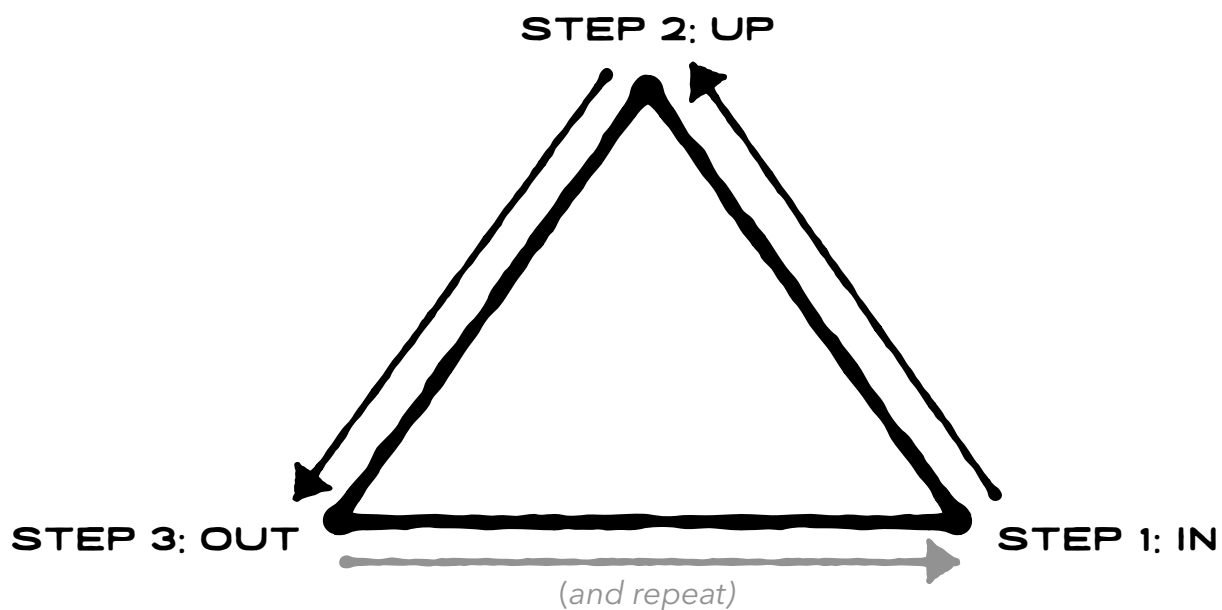
Exodus is an ancient near eastern text, written nearly three millennia ago. As such, the cultural assumptions and theological aims that the narrator has will be very different from our own, so be careful not to impose your own cultural framework or theological assumptions on this text. To help with this, it will be important to attend to these differences by utilizing commentaries and resources that are designed to help familiarize you with the original context in which this story was written. These resources are listed at the end of this introduction.

### **Revisit the Structure & Themes**

The structure and themes of this book will appear over and over again. Take time to revisit them often. Ask what themes are showing up in the texts that you are studying. Pay attention to what movement of the story you are in. This will help you make the most sense of what you are studying.

## **How to Use This Study Guide**

This study guide was written to help you study Exodus and learn how to live in light of it. As such, each session is structured with the same flow and is designed to help emphasize three kinds of key relationships that are essential for our discipleship as followers of Jesus. They are:



We call this the Biblical Equipping Model in that it centers around studying God's Word (UP), in community (IN), for the sake of living it out in our lives (OUT). Each move has a focus and some key questions that go along with it.

## **STEP 1: IN (Connecting with one another through sharing)**

**Goal:** To share and celebrate how we lived out the life application(s) from the previous week

### **Key Questions:**

- How did your application from the previous week go? What did you learn about yourself, God, or others?
- In what ways did you seek to more fully reflect God and carry out His purposes this past week? What did you learn through those experiences?

Group leaders will want to remind their participants of the vision for why we do small groups and set-up what you hope to gain from your gathering in this week's session.

## **STEP 2: UP (Connecting through God's Word)**

**Goal:** To explore the content, context, and implications of God's Word.

### **Key Questions:**

**Content:** What does God's Word say?

- Read the text out loud and pray
- Make sure you ask another core member or an apprentice leader to do this

**Context:** What did God's Word *mean for its original recipients*?

- What is the setting of the passage? (Read through it several times and the paragraphs surrounding it).
- What patterns, themes, repeated words, or images are emphasized in the text? Why might these have been important?

### **Tough Stuff**

Along the way you will encounter boxes like this entitled "Tough Stuff". These boxes provide you with important notes on how to handle challenging passages and difficult to interpret portions of the text as you move through your study.



- How does this passage fit into the bigger picture of the book it is a part of? (Note the chapters right around the passage you are studying).
- How does this passage fit into the larger storyline of the Bible? (Note where this book is located in the context of the wider Biblical narrative).
- What was the original intent of the passage? (Who was it written to, when, and under which circumstances? What did the author want his original readers to understand? What cultural insights are important to understand as we read it?)

Implications: How might I live *in light* of God's Word?

- Why is this text important for us to study? Is there a timeless truth here that God desires for us to put into practice in our own lives?
- What should be different in our lives as a result of this passage? How is it calling us to realign our lives, purposes, and priorities around God's plans and purposes in the world?
- How is this passage intended to nurture our faith and walk with God?

### **STEP 3: OUT (Connecting to the Mission by Living Out Our Faith)**

**Goal:** To determine how God's Word applies to daily life and concretely helps us look, live, and love more like Jesus.

#### **Key Questions:**

- What are we going to *do* about the implications of God's Word?
- What known opportunities do you have coming up this week to look, live and love like Jesus?
- Try to get really concrete and specific here. What will you do, by when, and with whom? How can we encourage you and hold you accountable to living this out?

#### **REPEAT!!!**

Make sure you have noted what application you are all putting into practice and be ready to circle back to it both throughout the week and during the IN portion at the beginning of your next group meeting.

## What You Will Need

To get the most out of this study, you will need a couple of things on hand to help you:

- A copy of the [\*Exodus Illuminated Scripture Journal\*](#) so that you can take notes and mark up your copy of the text as you study with your group
- Some highlighters, colored pencils, or colored pens so that you can highlight and identify common themes and patterns as you study
- This study guide to help you dive into the passages and ask questions of the text

In addition, here are other helpful resources you may want for your own reference as you work your way through this text:

- [\*The Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible\*](#) edited by John Walton & Craig Keener
- [\*The Gospel According to Moses YouTube playlist\*](#), featuring relevant videos for studying Exodus from The Bible Project
- [\*Exodus Overview\*](#), a digital class on how to study Exodus from The Bible Project
- [\*Teach the Text Commentary Series: Exodus\*](#), written by T. Desmond Alexander
- [\*The Lost World of the Torah\*](#), written by John H. Walton & J. Harvey Walton
- [\*Prepare the Way of the Lord: An Old Testament Introduction\*](#), by Reed Lessing and Andrew Steinmann

## Attribution

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# The Call of Moses

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*Exodus 3:7-4:18*

## **IN: Connecting w/Each Other**

As this is the first time your group is meeting take some time to share some expectations. Ask your group the following:

- What interests you about the book of Exodus?
- What are you hoping to learn over the next several weeks?

## **UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture**

Before you read the text, take a moment to set up the context for the book a little bit. Here are some things you could share with your group:

### **literary context**

The author assumes we've read Genesis. In addition, here is what has happened in Exodus up to this point...

- We've been introduced to the nation of Israel, who "were fruitful and swarmed" (c.f. Gen 1:12ff) in Egypt
- Their oppression by a new regime
- Moses' birth and adoption by Pharaoh's daughter
- Moses' murder of an abusive Egyptian taskmaster
- Moses' flight to Midian
- Moses' rescue of Jethro's daughters and marriage to the eldest

### **historical and cultural context**

The Egyptians were polytheists, with gods for every major part of creation: the sun, the Nile, etc. Pharaoh even claimed to be descended from a god and to be divine. God promised Abraham (Genesis 15:13) that his people would be slaves in a foreign land for 400 years - until the sin of the Amorites (whom they would conquer) had "reached its full measure."

Once you've set up the context a bit, have them read Exodus 3:7-4:18 out loud. Then take a moment of silence to just let the story sink in.

Now that your group has had a chance to hear the story, take some time to really dive in and explore the text in greater detail. You can either ask them to come up with a list of questions based on their observations from the text or you can use the questions below to explore the passage in greater detail.

1. Take a moment to put yourself in Moses' sandals: describe what would happen if Moses tried to explain this to either his wife or his father-in-law. What does he say? What reactions might he get?
2. List the explicit and implicit promises God makes. What concerns do they address? What do you notice about these promises? What connects them?
3. Why is it important for God's name to be known by the people?
4. Why is Moses reluctant? Why does he still refuse to go after all the promises of God?
5. Why does God say Pharaoh won't listen (v. 3:19)? Why strike all of Egypt if it's Pharaoh's fault? What is God's purpose in all of this?
6. Initially God is incredibly patient with Moses' questions, fears, and objections...until verse 4:14. Why does God become angry at this point? What is it about what Moses says that upsets God?

#### **Tough Stuff**

*So is it Pharaoh's choice or God's? Is God making him disobey or is Pharaoh to blame?*

Both, kind of. God clearly plans this whole thing out so that he can reveal himself to Israel and the world, including his superiority to Egypt's gods.

However, it is also clear that Pharaoh himself is hostile to this "new" God and unwilling to release the people of Israel. It is important to note the progression in the book and the interplay between Pharaoh hardening his *own* heart and God then hardening Pharaoh's heart.

In some ways, God gives Pharaoh over to the own inclinations of his heart, while also using Pharaoh's stubbornness to still fulfill His purposes.

## **OUT: Connecting w/the Mission**

### ***Transitional Paragraph:***

While we don't have a spectacular role like Moses, God is still the same. We, like Moses, have to relate to a terrifyingly good God, who has caught us up in his redemption plan, so he can reveal himself to us and to others. He is sovereign, patient, a God who chooses his people, keeps his promises and reveals himself. All this is for both his glory and the good of his people.

And that invites us to consider a couple of applications. Take a look at one of the applications below and take some time to discuss it.

### **Application 1) I'll be there for you...**

Moses didn't know much about God. But he was sure that he was not worthy, confident, or secure enough for his mission. Moses is brave enough in physical danger (see Exodus 2:12, 16ff). But something about a return to Egypt scared him off. God will eventually address the issues of Moses' past - issues that make Egypt scarier than a poisonous snake. But what he offers here is much better: "I will be with you." God still uses the circumstances of our own fears and insecurities to teach us to trust him and rely on him. He still offers something much better than complete emotional healing: the God of the universe says, "I will be with you."

*So, what tasks or relationships are most fearful for you? Take a minute to reflect on that. Then read 3:10-12 several times, meditate on it, and let God speak this same promise to you: "Who am I that I should go? and God said, 'I will be with you.'" Share your thoughts with a partner and pray together.*

### **Application 2) And you will go for me...**

Despite his many fears and objections, God has chosen Moses as his agent to rescue his people, for both their benefit and his own. We also are chosen by God to participate in the redemption of his people. Most of us have less spectacular roles than Moses. But the God Moses met with is still the same God who has chosen us. He still calls us, sometimes against our wishes and whims, to join his mission.

*Spend several minutes in reflection. When did you find yourself called to be God's messenger to someone else? What was the result? How did you come to know God better through that experience? How did it bring healing to your past or to your fear or lack of confidence? How did it grow your faith?*

*Now consider how this intersects with the present. How does this affect current situations and relationship you are in? What is making you reluctant to jump in? How do God's answers to Moses address your concerns? What promises of God can you count on? Where is God challenging you to trust him?*

### **Application 3) God owns the debate team..**

Moses didn't really know much about God - only that he should be afraid to look at God's face. As it turns out, He should also have been afraid to debate him! When God answers all Moses' concerns, and he still refuses, the debate is exposed. Underneath it all are just the excuses and delay tactics of someone who is unwilling to obey. What a state to be in at the burning bush! We should know better, having just read about Moses. But we still find ourselves acting like Moses. It's not rational, it's just what we do as we hide from God, from our own fears and our unwillingness to give God control.

*Spend a few minutes reflecting. What "debates" are you engaged in with God? Where does legitimate concern and need for information end and delay tactics begin? Where do you need to learn to trust in the promises of God? Share with a partner and pray for one another.*

### **Application 4) A need-to-know basis...**

God revealed himself to Moses (and later to Israel) to equip him for his mission. But you could also say that God sent him on this mission, strengthened Pharaoh's stubbornness, did miracles - all this in order to reveal himself to Moses and his people. God is still the same and deals with us in similar ways. Often we separate the two ideas: "knowing God better" vs. "joining his mission." We do our devotions to know God better and become a small group leader to join his mission. But God gives us part of his mission so that he can show us **more** of himself and help us know him, his goodness and his power, and help us trust him more. And he reveals himself like that so that we can accomplish his mission. Knowing God and being on mission with God go hand-in-hand.

*Where can you see traces of this false dichotomy (knowing God vs. joining his mission) at work in your own life? In your small group? In your church community? What is your attitude toward witness, serving the poor, advancing justice, leading a small group, shepherding and lovingly holding other Christian accountable? How do you need to adjust your attitude toward tasks that God has given you? What will be different about*

*how you approach and work at your mission? What will be different about your approach to knowing God?*

# Midnight Madness

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*Exodus 12:21-42*

## **IN: Connecting w/Each Other**

Have your group pair back up in the groups they were a part of during the “OUT” portion last week and check in with one another. How did they put their applications into practice this past week?

Once you draw them back together ask if one or two of them could share briefly with the whole group. The purpose is to encourage life application and accountability within the small group, as well as to celebrate how God has been at work in their lives over the course of the past week.

Once a few people have had a chance to share, pray for your time together and dive into Session 2.

## **UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture**

Before you read the passage out loud, take a moment to remind your group a little bit about the context of the passage for today’s study...

### **literary context**

Pharaoh refused to listen to Moses, in spite of miraculous signs (7:10-14). So Egypt was subjected to nine plagues: Nile turning to blood, frogs, gnats, flies, death of livestock, boils, hail, locusts, and darkness. After each, Pharaoh still refused to let the people of Israel go.

### **historical & cultural context**

The Egyptians were polytheists, with gods for every major part of creation: the sun, the Nile, etc. Each plague proved that the Lord was superior to an Egyptian god. God promised Abraham that his people would be slaves in a foreign country for about 400 years, after which time he would deliver them. The Israelite’s knowledge of the Lord was limited. Genesis had happened, but wasn’t written yet. There must have been some oral tradition of such things, but it hadn’t been collated, edited, or validated as God’s Word yet. In many ways, they are learning about God and his character through the events of the Exodus story.



Once you've had a chance to recap the context, have someone read Exodus 12:21-42 out loud. Take a moment of silence after it is read to let it sink in.

Now that your group has had a chance to hear the story, take some time to really dive in and explore the text in greater detail. You can either ask them to come up with a list of questions based on their observations from the text or you can use the questions below to explore the passage in greater detail.

1. Take a moment to put yourself in the story by choosing one (or more) of the following...
  - Imagine you are an Israelite alive during the Passover. Fast forward 20 years. How do you explain to your child the reason for the feast (beyond just quoting v. 27)? What emotions did you have on the Passover night and how do you feel celebrating it now? What details will you include? What will you leave out?
  - Imagine you're an Egyptian alive during the first Passover. Fast forward 20 years and explain to your children or grandchildren what happened.
  - Imagine you're one of the "many others" of v.38, now explaining what happened to your children or grandchildren. What was it like to be alive during the first Passover? What made you decide to go with the Israelites?
2. If the final plague was the real game changer, then why did God send the first nine plagues? What was he trying to teach the Israelites through these other plagues? The Egyptians?
3. In previous plagues, God seemed to make a distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians. So why is the blood needed now? Who is the "destroyer"? Would God have killed an Israelite who didn't put the blood on his/her door? Would he have spared an Egyptian who did? Why does the blood matter?

4. Why kill the firstborn? Why animals? Why isn't Pharaoh dead?
5. What does this last plague teach us about God?
6. Who are the "many other people" mentioned in v. 38? Why is this detail significant? What does it say about the events that have taken place and the impact they have had, not just on the Israelites, but other people as well?
7. Why are the feast instructions so important?

## **OUT: Connecting w/the Mission**

### ***Transitional Paragraph:***

The world, our pride, and the devil are constantly telling us that we're good enough; we don't need rescue, sacrifice, or forgiveness. God's people, and those who would join them, always need to be reminded of who we are. We are all in trouble. We are all in mortal danger when a holy God approaches. And there's no way we can fix it. But God can. This passage is an invitation: the Lord says, "Join my people by trusting my provision of a sacrifice." Jesus Christ is our ultimate Passover lamb. By his blood we are passed over and forgiven.

But this passage is also a warning: beware pride! It's a sure way to a hardened heart. Keep remembering who you are without God's rescue! God saved us not because we were already perfect, but because we really needed it.

### **Application 1) The Secret of Father Brown**

Father Brown<sup>1</sup> attributes a strange spiritual discipline to Pope Leo XIII that helped him solve crimes. With respect to whatever crime he was investigating, he "thought and

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<sup>1</sup> *The Secret of Father Brown*, by G. K. Chesterton, as found here: <https://www.basilica.ca/documents/2016/10/G.K.Chesterton-The%20Secret%20of%20Father%20Brown.pdf>. I highly recommend and urge reading the first 4.5 pages and hope that you might even be drawn in enough to read the whole thing.

thought about how a man might come to be like that, until I realized that I really was like that, in everything except actual final consent to the action...No man's really any good till he knows how bad he is, or might be; till he's realized exactly how much right he had to all this snobbery, and sneering, and talk about 'criminals' as if they were apes in a forest 10,000 miles away."

*Think of a couple of sins that are easy for you to look down on other people for. Commit to work on this strange discipline during your devotional times this week. Don't give up! Look forward to the humility and freedom of the truth - of remembering who we are: that we are for worse than we care to admit and yet far more loved than we ever dared to dream. Share with a friend what God shows you mid-way and at the end of the week. Maybe even pair up with someone in your small group to commit to doing this together.*

### **Application 2) Switch Sides**

Even here, God's defining moment for the new, ethnically Israelite nation, "many others" join in. All that is needed is 1) they give their allegiance to the Lord as God, turning their backs on the idols they previously worshipped, 2) accept his provision of a sacrifice as a way to survive his holiness, and 3) join the community of his people on their journey, following God to the promised land. It is not accident that the call to respond to God still looks the same today.

Only now, the sacrifice has been more clearly explained - the Passover lamb was always pointing forward to Jesus' death in our place on the Cross. And the promised land is not simply Canaan, but the New Heavens and the New Earth where God's people will live in peace and intimacy with him (Rev. 21).

*How does this adjust your understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus? Have any of these three (first allegiance to God, accepting the sacrifice, joining his people) been weak or missing in your explanation of Christianity? or in your acceptance of Christianity? Journal about that this week. If you haven't yet become a Christian, which of these three is holding you back?*

### **Application 3) Celebrate the Feast. Remember.**

The Lord takes great pains to help the people remember this defining moment, so they would know who they are, who God is, and what he has done for us. Just before he died, Jesus celebrate the Passover with his disciples and re-defined the feast. He made bread and wine the center of the meal, declaring them to be his body and blood

(what he did), and our eating as a reminder of our need for his sacrifice and saving power (who we are). It is easy to look down on the forgetful, idolatrous Israelites, but each of us slips into forgetful self-sufficient pride too. We need reminding every bit as much as they did. Part of following Jesus is obeying his instruction: “do this in remembrance of me.”

*We attend the local church and take communion seriously, not out of religious stuffiness, but because we know we need to remember 1) our neediness, 2) his sacrifice, and 3) our fellowship with the rest of his people. How can you better follow Jesus in this area? Share & pray, and make plans to follow through.*

#### **Application 4) Humble the Pantheon**

The Nile god, sky god, frog- and livestock-shaped gods, fertility gods, the sun god - all are defeated by the Lord in successive plagues. The death of the firstborn was the climax, not only the consequences, but also in theology. Pharaoh was supposedly the incarnation of the god Horus, who protected Egypt from the forces of chaos. But he's powerless to stop the death of his own son, let alone those of all Egypt. This polytheism seems silly to modern minds, but we have our own pantheon. We are tempted to give our allegiance to supposedly powerful gods of popularity, career success, financial security, superior intelligence, romantic relationships, sexual pleasure, food, etc.

*Just like the Egyptians, we look to parts of God's good creation for salvation instead of the Creator. Be honest. Which of these gods and their promises are you tempted to follow? Where do you need to work on keeping your allegiance fixed on the Lord? Journal through these this week.*

# Got Water?

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*Exodus 17:1-7*

## **IN: Connecting w/Each Other**

Have your group pair back up in the groups they were a part of during the “OUT” portion last week and check in with one another. How did they put their applications into practice this past week?

Once you draw them back together ask if one or two of them could share briefly with the whole group. The purpose is to encourage life application and accountability within the small group, as well as to celebrate how God has been at work in their lives over the course of the past week.

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Before you read the passage out loud, take a moment to remind your group a little bit about the context of the passage for today’s study...

### **literary context**

Since Passover, the Israelites have crossed the Red Sea and been delivered from Pharaoh’s army (chapter 14). God turned undrinkable water to good water (chapter 15:22ff), provided manna for the Israelites to eat (chapter 16:1-21). Now we’re back to water.

### **historical & cultural context**

The Israelite’s knowledge of the Lord was limited. Genesis had happened, but wasn’t written at this point. In terms of knowing the Lord as faithful, trustworthy, and dependable, they are still novices who are learning to trust him. The names “Massah” and “Meribah” mean “testing” and “contention/dispute”.

Once you’ve had a chance to recap the context, have someone read Exodus 17:1-7 out loud. Take a moment of silence after it is read to let it sink in.

Now that your group has had a chance to hear the story, take some time to really dive in and explore the text in greater detail. You can either ask them to come up with a list of questions based on their observations from the text or you can use the questions below to explore the passage in greater detail.

1. To help us get into the passage a little bit, try one or several of the following...
  - Imagine you're an elder of Israel. Make a journal entry about the day you just experienced. What emotions did you feel? How did you react to the different events of the day?
  - Write a flaming email from an elder to Moses (pre-water).
  - Write a text message conversation between a patient and a contentious Israelite about the situation
2. Why does the Lord command them to camp in a place where there is no water? Would he have provided water even if the people didn't grumble?
3. Why do the people question the Lord's presence with them? What assumption(s) are they making?
4. Why does Moses fear being stoned? Why is he supposed to pass before the people?
5. What is the importance of the staff?

#### **Tough Stuff**

*Pain and Purpose: is all pain a means to God's end?*

The question of suffering and pain is a tough one. This passage only shows us that *some* pain is a means to God's *immediate* good end. God may bring us to a "no water" place for our current growth - so we can learn to depend, pray, and know him better instead of accuse, complain, and pull out.

What about *all* suffering? Paul writes, "all things work for the good of those who love him..." (Romans 8:28). Seeing suffering, we may say, "What end could justify these means?" Yet it would seem worse to reply, "None. Your suffering is pointless; God is not making anything out of it. It just happened." We can, in fact, take comfort in the knowledge that all suffering - and all things - can be transformed and renewed by God and through his power, even if we don't see it immediately.

6. Why does the Lord say he will stand at the rock? Why strike the rock? What does this mean? What does it teach us about God?
7. Why does the author end the episode with their question, but not an explicit answer?

## **OUT: Connecting w/the Mission**

### ***Transitional Paragraph:***

In this story we see that God is committed to his relationships with us. The main purpose for which he has created us is so that we would know him and enjoy him forever. That sounds great, until you find out what it will take. Inconvenience, embarrassment, hardship, and yes, suffering seem to be necessary. At this point, we often decide we don't want to play God's game anymore. We have a choice: test God's patience, pick up our ball and go home OR trust God and learn to play his way.

### **Application 1) Humpf.**

Oftentimes we follow the same pattern the Israelites did, noticing a problem in our lives and grumbling about it.

*Are there some areas of your life that you could pray about rather than grumble over? Take some time and reflect on that. Pick your most whine-inducing aspect of life and turn it over to God for the week. Bring your complaints to God in an attitude of trust, respect, and love, and affirm your commitment to learn about him as he sees fit. Share with a partner and remind each other through the week over email or via text message.*

### **Application 2) Take my ball and go home (version 1): Present**

Knowing God is well worth the necessary hardship. We've heard it in sermons and we know it in theory. It's another thing to remember it in the middle of a long, drawn out laboratory of frustration, grief, or suffering. It's tempting to give up and accuse God of not keeping his part of the bargain ("Are you with me or against me?").

*What is the hardest or most painful thing going on in your life right now? It may be obvious or it may be somewhere under the surface. Bring that before God honestly, with all accompanying stuff - even feelings of anger toward God or of being betrayed. Have an honest conversation with God about the temptation to take your ball and go home. Pray through Psalm 63 as honestly as you can. Share with a partner as much as is appropriate and pray for each other.*

### **Application 3) Take my ball and go home (version 2): Past and Future**

Knowing God is well worth the necessary hardship. We've heard it in sermons and we know it in theory. It's another thing to remember it in the middle of a long, drawn out laboratory of frustration, grief, or suffering.

*Reflect on a time in recent memory where an anxiety, grief, frustration, or trial went on for what seemed like a long time. How did your attitude fare over that time period? What unspoken expectations or claims on God did this reveal to you? (That is, demands that he run your life nice and easy like you want). Pray through Psalm 63 in your devotional time this week. Memorize as much as you can. Turn off the iPod and cellphone and pray it on your commute or before going to bed. Ask God to give you this attitude of thirst for him and clinging to him in your upcoming hardship laboratory.*

### **Application 4) Is the Lord among us or not?**

If the Israelites had thought about the things the Lord had done to save them, and the manna in their mouths, they could have quickly answered, "Yes." It is easy to get caught up in the present, and let the difficulties of life negate the amazing ways God has delivered us in the past. We may choose to distrust as a form of pouting, or because of a deeper pattern of self-protection in relationships. Either way, going back over what God has done for us over the past several years will help reset our perspective, attitude, and determine.

*This week, take some time to sit down and create a running list of the ways God has provided for you, whether physically, emotionally, spiritually, or mentally. Take some time to praise him for his provision and ask him to help you remember these blessings even in the midst of current challenges. Then share some of these things with an accountability partner at next week's "Share" time.*



# Props for Prayer

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*Exodus 17:8-15*

## **IN: Connecting w/Each Other**

Have your group pair back up in the groups they were a part of during the “OUT” portion last week and check in with one another. How did they put their applications into practice this past week?

Once you draw them back together ask if one or two of them could share briefly with the whole group. The purpose is to encourage life application and accountability within the small group, as well as to celebrate how God has been at work in their lives over the course of the past week.

Once a few people have had a chance to share, pray for your time together and dive into Session 4.

## **UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture**

Before you read the passage out loud, take a moment to remind your group a little bit about the context of the passage for today’s study...

### **literary context**

Since Passover, God has been a one-person show. He defeated Pharaoh’s army, the Israelites only had to run (chapter 14). He provided food and water (15:22-17:7), and they just had to...well...eat it and drink it. But here, he is asking them to get involved...

### **historical & cultural context**

*“Lord my banner.”* In the Egyptian army, the division were named for various gods, and the standard would identify the division by means of some representation of the god. This altar’s name reflects the theology of Yahweh as leader of the armies of Israel.

*Moses held up his hands.* Egyptian texts speak of the uplifted arms of Pharaoh to bring protection as well as to signal the attack.

Once you've had a chance to recap the context, have someone read Exodus 17:8-15 out loud. Take a moment of silence after it is read to let it sink in.

Now that your group has had a chance to hear the story, take some time to really dive in and explore the text in greater detail. You can either ask them to come up with a list of questions based on their observations from the text or you can use the questions below to explore the passage in greater detail.

1. Take a minute to put yourself in the story by choosing one of the following...
  - You're working on your epic movie, *Episodes That Didn't Make It Into Charlton Heston's Version*. How do you capture the drama of the battle scene on film, yet not miss the point of this story?
  - You're Moses writing on the scroll (v.14). But it's actually a papyrus Post-It. You can only fit about 15 words. What do you say?
2. Why does Moses delegate the choosing and the fighting to Joshua?
3. Why only send some of the men to fight? How ready were they for battle?
4. How did Moses know he needed to stand on top of the hill? Why might this have been significant for the soldiers? For Joshua?

#### **Tough Stuff**

##### *War with the Amalekites?*

All of the people groups inhabiting Canaan were "set apart for destruction." Their sin has been "reaching its full measure" (Genesis 15:16) for 400 years, resulting in cultures that normalized injustice, sexual exploitation, and child sacrifice. But why did the Amalekites get special hostility? They seem to have developed a culture that was even more actively opposed to God - and thus his people - than the average Canaanite nation. When Israel was weak and struggling through the desert, the Amalekites picked off the stragglers, the weak, the sick, the elderly, and murdered them (see Deuteronomy 25:17ff). As such, they became a "type" of all the enemies of God. His expression of hostility toward them is representative of his hostility to all people who flagrantly perpetrate injustice and oppose his purposes in the world.

5. God doesn't always do this thing where the leader's hands being up causes them to win. So why here and why now?
6. Why does Joshua get the credit for the battle? Any thoughts as to why this might be important for the people?
7. What does "the Lord is my banner" mean? What's the relevance of this?
8. Why was it so important to write this down and have it remembered?
9. How does this story compare to previous episodes about depending on God?

## **OUT: Connecting w/the Mission**

### ***Transitional Paragraph:***

With Pharaoh's chariots, all the people had to do was run. The Lord did everything. But that wasn't his long-term goal. He wants them to grow up: to participate in the work of their own protection, to share his work in the wider world, and to recognize and choose dependence when it's not undeniable. Their first real armed conflict of their exodus, with Moses' arms raised, is a baby step in that direction.

### **Application 1) A Thing to be Remembered**

God's goal is for our faithfulness, work, suffering, and gifts to be part of his provision for us and his work in the world. Like Israel, we need practice remembering that even when we 'help', it is God that makes things happen.

*Give everyone in your small group an opportunity to share a recent memory when God work through them to do ministry, whether witness, shepherding, encouragement, leadership, serving, giving, etc. Praise God together and pray that you would always remember the ways he has been at work in and through us.*

### **Application 2) Glory**

*In pairs, share a recent memory when your faithfulness, work, suffering, or gifts were part of the recipe for success. Along with that, share how you did at the time in terms of giving God glory and credit, both internally and verbally. Spend a few minutes praying for each other to resist pride and habitually give God credit when things are going well.*

### **Application 3) It's all You?**

God's goal is for our faithfulness, work, suffering, and gifts to be part of his provision for us and his work in the world. But not to the exclusion of our awareness of our dependence on God for everything.

*Slow down for a minute and reflect: In which areas is it easy to assume it's all up to you, and hard to keep hold of the awareness of your partnership with God? Work? Making ends meet? Things you ought to be good at by now? Something else? What motivates you to leave God out of the picture when it comes to taking care of those areas of life? Pick one of these areas and figure out how to remember that it's not all you in the midst of it. Share and pray with a partner.*

### **Application 4) It's just the Amalekites**

It's easy to remember to depend on God when things are really bad, like when Pharaoh attacks. It's harder to maintain an attitude of partnership with God without a crisis, when it seems like we can handle things. But God is training his people toward that end.

*Brainstorm with your small group how you can work on cultivating an attitude of partnership and relationship with God in "normal" life (work, family life, relationships, etc). Make plans to implement your best idea or two this week, and pray as a group.*

### **Application 5) Not my problem**

We know he's capable of doing all his work directly, like drowning an Egyptian army. Sometimes we prefer that. We're tempted to spiritualize our sloth: if we do nothing, then the credit is obviously God's. Or we rely on situations where God works in spite of us to bolster our confidence in God's favor and love.

*But there are dimensions of relationship, trust, obedience, and maturity available through working with him that God wants us to tap into. What are the areas where you're tempted to say, effectively, "If God wants that done, he can do it without any*

*effort on my part?" Witness to your neighbors, coworkers, family? Care for the socially inept or vulnerable? Something else? Choose one area where you will intentionally choose partnership this week. Share and pray with a partner and check on each other before the next small group gathering.*

# Burnouts Anonymous

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*Exodus 18:5-26*

## **IN: Connecting w/Each Other**

Have your group pair back up in the groups they were a part of during the “OUT” portion last week and check in with one another. How did they put their applications into practice this past week?

Once you draw them back together ask if one or two of them could share briefly with the whole group. The purpose is to encourage life application and accountability within the small group, as well as to celebrate how God has been at work in their lives over the course of the past week.

Once a few people have had a chance to share, pray for your time together and dive into Session 5.

## **UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture**

Before you read the passage out loud, take a moment to remind your group a little bit about the context of the passage for today’s study...

### **literary context**

From Passover (12) to the Red Sea (14) to meeting needs in the desert (15:22-17:7) God has been a one-person show. Then the Israelites begin to participate in providing for their shalom (peace, security, well-being): they ‘help’ God deal with Amalek. In this story, Moses learns an interesting lesson about asking for help himself.

### **historical & cultural context**

*Shalom*. Means collective peace, security, well-being, provision. All that was prefigured by the promised land and is actually achieved in Revelation 21. “*not good*”. The string of many good things done by God followed by something that is not good reminds us of Genesis 2. Similarly there, it wasn’t the presence of evil, just a circumstance that was keeping his people from experiencing intended shalom.

*Where's Zipporah been?* Moses initially brought his family, but apparently thought better of it mid-way and sent them back to her father. They are finally reunited here.

Once you've had a chance to recap the context, have someone read Exodus 18:5-26 out loud. Take a moment of silence after it is read to let it sink in.

Now that your group has had a chance to hear the story, take some time to really dive in and explore the text in greater detail. You can either ask them to come up with a list of questions based on their observations from the text or you can use the questions below to explore the passage in greater detail.

1. To help you get into the text a bit, pick one of the following...
  - Write Moses' letter to the "Dear Jethro" newspaper column (signed, "Overworked in the Desert") and Jethro's published response.
  - Write Jethro's infomercial for his "Beat Burnout" plan. ("Are you overworked? Carrying a heavy burden? Judging disputes for thousands of whiney Israelites?..."). Include a testimonial (Moses?) about the difference Jethro's program has made.
2. Why doesn't God directly tell Moses to delegate? Why let him judge all day long?
3. What is Jethro's spiritual status? New believer? Polite polytheist?
4. Why does Moses listen to Jethro? Why doesn't he ask God?
5. Why didn't Moses think to delegate himself? Why did he delegate the fighting to Joshua, but not this?

6. Where is “their place”? What does he mean “go to their place in peace (shalom)”?
7. What laws and decrees is he supposed to teach them?
8. How does this episode compare or build on the previous episode about depending on God, yet participating with God?

## **OUT: Connecting w/the Mission**

### ***Transitional Paragraph:***

With Pharaoh’s chariots all the people did was run. With Amalek, they achieved peace by fighting under Moses’ uplifted arms. Now, the inevitable disputes that arise as many people travel together threaten peace. God has given them the resources to fix it, and he lets them work it out. It requires willing, empowering leadership and willing, trustworthy, teachable people. And someone to give good advice. But the stakes are higher than they first appear: the people need more teachers of God’s ways, and more people with leadership experience in order to “get to their place in shalom/peace.” And as we try to apply, we realized the barriers are higher than they look, for those of us who aren’t the must humble man on earth (see Numbers 12:3).

### **Application 1) Divide the Load, Multiply the Benefit**

More is at stake here than settling daily disputes with some dispatch. And more is at stake than Moses’ overtime pay. The Israelites are supposed to be learning God’s ways from Moses, and there’s only one of him and hordes of them. If he continues to do it all himself there will be a spiritual vacuum of ignorance, and a leadership vacuum as well. As the force of Moses’ leadership is removed, those vacuum will be filled, but probably not with good things...or people for that matter. Ignorance will be filled with pagan theology and ethics, leadership vacuums will be filled but he most aggressive rather than the most wise or faithful. On the other hand, the more he shares the load, the more faithful people will be taught and trained in godly leadership to bring Israel to the promised land in shalom. The same kind of dynamics face us in leadership.



*Part of our service to those we lead is making sure we don't leave a vacuum behind us when we leave. And we do this primarily by doing the hard work of teaching, coaching, and delegating before we go. Think about your leadership role. Who is depending on you for an opportunity to learn God's way, grow in leadership, and share the load? (Think of specific people. This applies to stay-at-home parents and their kids too!). What parts of the leadership task could you reasonably share with each of them? What will it take from you for them to be successful? What teaching, modeling, coaching, and debriefing will be involved in your faithful leadership? Make concrete plans and share them with a partner for accountability and good advice. Then follow through!*

### **Application 2) Trusting God**

There is a new aspect to trusting God here: Moses needs to trust that God's work will be accomplished even if he doesn't personally do it all. While it's true that sharing the land with the wrong people would have been irresponsible and disastrous, he wasn't the only one who can learn to judge and explain God's ways, even if he is the most qualified. Fortunately, Moses was the most humble man on earth; it doesn't take him long. We too need to face that trust barrier. God can use others, and wants to, for our benefit, for their benefit, and for the benefit of the whole community. But in our fear of failure or our need for success, it can be hard to let go of responsibility or control.

*Spend some time thinking about potential share-the-load opportunities, and where your reluctance is really stemming from under the surface. Again, making concrete plans to address this.*

### **Application 3) I don't need to always be the go-to guy/gal**

Often we feel more impressive, lovable, confident (whatever) when we are doing the work of ministry - especially when we're good at it. Effectively sharing the load means there will be more people who are good at it too. Then we don't feel as special. Most of us experience this.

*With God's help, reflect on where these motivations have shaped your leadership. With God's help, face this selfish darkness in your heart and receive forgiveness, healing, and a calling to righteousness.*

### **Application 4) If it's less work, why is it harder to get myself to do it?**

We have a skewed perspective on work in our culture. As a result, we often "feel bad asking" others to join us, even when they have nothing else to do. But if we shepherd

well and delegate faithfully and skillful, it will be in their best interest to participate, learn, and grow.

*Who can you ask to help you on an area of responsibility where you are currently overburdened?*

#### **Application 5) Community means we all pitch in**

We have a skewed perspective on work in our culture. As a result, we may feel like we're being taken advantage of anytime we aren't pure consumers of someone else's leadership - even when we have nothing else to do. But just as it was for these new judges-in-training, it is in our best interest to participate, learn, and grow - and the best interest of the whole community.

*What are your immediate opportunities to step up, learn, participate, serve, and grow?  
What dreams might God have for you in your next 2-4 years of serving in your church?  
Pray for God to adjust your vision for these things, and for Moses-like humility.*

# Wisdom for Life

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*Exodus 20:1-17*

## **IN: Connecting w/Each Other**

Have your group pair back up in the groups they were a part of during the “OUT” portion last week and check in with one another. How did they put their applications into practice this past week?

Once you draw them back together ask if one or two of them could share briefly with the whole group. The purpose is to encourage life application and accountability within the small group, as well as to celebrate how God has been at work in their lives over the course of the past week.

Once a few people have had a chance to share, pray for your time together and dive into Session 6.

## **UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture**

Before you read the passage out loud, take a moment to remind your group a little bit about the context of the passage for today’s study...

### **literary context**

All along the way, God has been teaching the Israelites about who he is and what it means to follow him. He rescued them and has been teaching them how to live as a rescued people. Now, he paints a picture of what living that life looks like in no uncertain terms.

### **historical & cultural context**

In ancient times it was common for kings, making treaties, to establish a covenant with codes of conduct that spelled out the terms of their ongoing relationship. What is interesting here is that God delivers them *first* and then shares with them the terms of their relationship.

Once you’ve had a chance to recap the context, have someone read Exodus 20:1-17 out loud. Take a moment of silence after it is read to let it sink in.

## Up AND Out

Today's "UP" and "OUT" sections are going to be a little different. Many of us are quite familiar with the 10 commandments, even if we haven't been in church in a while. It would be great to have the ten commandments affect our everyday life, now and long-term - we'd bring less death and misery into our lives (and others'), we'd be more aware of where we are tempted to rebel against God, and we'd be much more aware of how much we need grace and how awesome the cross is. If we can see how these commandments speak to the situations and attitudes of our real lives, we will be the kind of people who truly put their faith into action. So the goal of this study is to really help the commandments sink in and reflect on what it would look like to make them practical.

### Step 1) Meditating on the Commandments

Read through each commandment out loud, leaving some time of silence after each one is read. During the silence, reflect on the commandment.

- What does it mean?
- Why would it have been important for the Israelites?
- How is it still relevant for us?

Then share these thoughts with the group. Once you've had a chance to share them, move on to the next commandment. If your group is stuck, you may want to look at Luther's explanation of each commandment in his *Small Catechism* for assistance.

Don't take too long with this, but just offer a couple of thoughts and insights and move through the others. You will have a chance to go more in depth in just a minute.

### Step 2) Reflecting on the Commandments

Now it's time to get real. How do these commandments play out in our everyday life? Lead the group in brainstorming circumstances and situations where the commandments might really come into play. Ideally, these are situations and moral dilemmas where the members of your group are really struggling and they want some help knowing how best to respond in a way that reflects the character and heart of God.

Invite them to share the scenario, without getting into names, and then workshop together how you might respond. Watch out that people don't feel like their life is

being reduced to an intellectual exercise. This is about providing encouragement and support in living out your faith.

If your group is having a hard time sharing, here are some scenarios that you could use:

1. They say everyone office or social group has one - that really annoying person. You don't know about *every* group having one, but *yours* sure does. Everyone else feels it too. And sometimes says it. Sometimes when the annoying person is present, sometimes when s/he's not. But as you read the ten commandments you feel some conviction. You take some to reflect on in. What might you do differently?
2. During a coffee break you hear a couple of your coworkers making some inappropriate comments about the physical attractiveness of someone in the office of the opposite sex. Others in the group nod in agreement. One of them notices you and invites you to weigh in with your opinion. What would you say beyond the obvious "lust is bad" sermon?
3. You're getting together with some friends to hang out socially and that's when it starts. One of them begins sharing about a conflict they're having with someone else that you know, maybe even someone from church. The vent-fest has begun. Before you know it, others in the group start weighing in, taking sides, and even denouncing the other person, even though they weren't a part of the conflict. How does studying the 10 commandments speak to this situation? What might you say? How could you change the dynamic in a way that promotes reconciliation?
4. You're driving into a parking lot and decide that today that spot is *just big enough*. As you pull in you nick someone's bumper and give their car a noticeable dent. You decide it's probably a good idea to file a police report or at least leave your contact information for the other car. But then again... no one is around. And you know finances are tight. Increased insurance premiums aren't sounding so good. You could just drive away and park on the other side of the lot. But since you just read the 10Cs you realize there are a few ideas you need to apply to the situation...
5. It's sports season again and this year your child has the opportunity to join a pretty amazing team. There's only one problem: they frequently have games, often ones that require travel, at the same time as church, often several times a month. When you express some concern about this, the coach

seems surprised. S/he wants to know why this is a problem for you. How do you explain it to him/her? How do you explain it to your child?

6. You're starting to get serious about your current romantic relationship? Everything about him/her seems great, and makes you happy. You even entertain the idea of marriage. Your parents and close friends, however, want to give you some gentle words of warning about the situation. Okay, maybe not so gentle. Your initial reaction is to rebel, retort, and ignore. But since you just studied the 10Cs, you talk yourself down. Which commandments apply? How do you try them out here?
7. Your small group hasn't made much progress in vulnerability. People aren't opening up like you'd hoped they would and everything just stays on the surface. As you think about this, you realize that your small group isn't a very safe place. The teasing, sarcasm, and strong opinions seem to go beyond fun silliness or sharing personal thoughts, and least in the way they're received, and sometimes in the intent of the speaker. How do the 10Cs apply, and how do you bring it up during the study?

### **Step 3) Naming Your Idols**

At the root of all of these commandments is the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me". Every single one of us wrestles with idolatry: namely, worshipping or valuing something more than God. Whether this is our reputation, comfort, safety, possessions, etc., they can easily become our primary sources of security, self-worth, and significance. You never break one of the other commandments without breaking the first.

So take some time to dig deeper. What are some of the idols you wrestle with that, at core, make addressing the above situations with Christian integrity so difficult? Name them and take some time to pray for one another; that you would be people who worship God first and foremost in every aspect of life.

### **Step 4) Obeying the Commandments**

Before wrapping your study for this session, name one or two of the commandments that you really struggle with. Maybe addressing one of the scenarios above made you think of a situation in your life where you need to act in accordance with your faith based on the 10 commandments. How might you do that this week? Share that in pairs and commit to praying for one another this week. Then, when you get back together next week, share how it went during the "IN" portion of the study.

# Not My People

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*Exodus 32:1-35*

## **IN: Connecting w/Each Other**

Have your group pair back up in the groups they were a part of during the “OUT” portion last week and check in with one another. How did they put their applications into practice this past week?

Once you draw them back together ask if one or two of them could share briefly with the whole group. The purpose is to encourage life application and accountability within the small group, as well as to celebrate how God has been at work in their lives over the course of the past week.

Once a few people have had a chance to share, pray for your time together and dive into Session 7.

## **UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture**

Before you read the passage out loud, take a moment to remind your group a little bit about the context of the passage for today’s study...

### **literary context**

They finally made it to Sinai, and received the commandments. But the experience of God speaking to them was so frightening that Moses was appointed to represent them before God and get the details for the Law and the building of the tabernacle. He’s been gone almost 40 days.

### **historical & cultural context**

*Calf idol.* Common, represented fertility and strength; gods were usually portrayed standing on the back of the calf or bull rather than being in that form.

*Revelry.* Implies a drunken orgy; typical of pagan fertility festivals.

*Smashed tablets.* Not a tantrum. The tablets had the terms of the covenant on them, one copy for each party. Culturally, this symbolized severance of the covenant.

*Idol-dust tea.* Not punishment, but rather an object lesson. Represents the total destruction of the deity; may highlight the foolishness of bowing to something that will become human waste.

Once you've had a chance to recap the context, have someone read Exodus 32:1-35 out loud. Take a moment of silence after it is read to let it sink in.

Now that your group has had a chance to hear the story, take some time to really dive in and explore the text in greater detail. You can either ask them to come up with a list of questions based on their observations from the text or you can use the questions below to explore the passage in greater detail.

1. To help you get into the text a bit, pick one of the following...
  - Supposed Moses & Aaron never really get over their annoyance with each other over this episode. Imagine their sibling rivalry conversation 30 years later.
  - A reliable source has given you, editor of the *Israelite Enquirer*, a crazy story and lots of pictures. You devote the front page to this juicy incident. What is your headline?
2. Why are the people so quick to give up on Moses? Why give up on the Lord? Who is the calf replacing, Moses or God?
3. Why does Aaron give in so easily? Why say, 'a festival to the Lord'?
4. Who are "they" in verse 4? Why is Aaron surprised in v. 5?
5. Why does God offer to start over with Moses? Why does he change his mind?



6. How do Moses' arguments work? Does he convince God?
7. Why does Aaron give such a stupid excuse?
8. What is the significance of drinking the idol dust?
9. What is the purpose of the Levites' mission? Why so many (3000)? so few (0.2% of the total number of the people)?
10. What is Moses' offer? Why now? Why has he become so committed to Israel's future?
11. Why are there so many punishments? (3000 die, idol dust, plague, and more)?
12. How does this episode relate to the story of exodus so far?
13. What does "Time comes for me to punish" mean? When will that be?

## **OUT: Connecting w/the Mission**

### ***Transitional Paragraph:***

This is a big text with a lot of detail, but let's ground it and connect it to our own lives today. As we realized studying the commandments, we are all prone to make idols. We

are all prone to rebel. It's easy to fool ourselves about our rebellion, not because the commandments were complicated, but because we *want* to believe the lie. Ironically, while God is showing Moses how he will dwell with the people, in a tent in their midst, rank idolatry and rebellion jeopardizes their status as God's people. If they were really God's people, they shouldn't want to stay there; if they're going to stay there, God can't be their god, and in fact already isn't. But even this doesn't prevent God from achieving his purpose. Israel collectively receives mercy, some are weeded out, their move to Canaan is confirmed. And we see hints of a "time for [God] to punish" and a substitute to take the blow for the people.

### **Application 1) I'm not fooling myself**

What idols are lurking beneath outwardly religious attitudes or behavior? Often the American Dream merges with the gospel in our thinking and practice; then it's easy to say we are devoted to God when we're really pursuing a career, spouse, perfect little family, house in the burbs, etc.

*Choose one amoral American-Dream-pursuing activity that you will opt out of this trimester as a way to dethrone the American Dream wanna-be idol. Make sure you tell someone in your group so they can encourage you and hold you accountable!*

### **Application 2) Welcome to the Grand Illusion**

Who are the cultural "ring leaders" in your life?

*List people or social forces that act as instigators for some version of idolatry. For each, what is the temptation? the lie? the consequences? Reflect on your list, and ask God to show you which is the most tempting for you. Pick something to fast from (say, until Easter) as a declaration of your independence from the wanna-be idol. What positive, God-honoring thing will you instead put in its place? Prayer, Scripture study, worship, serving, generosity, time with friends and family, etc? Get some accountability and prayer support!*

### **Application 3) Building the Perfect Beast**

"It's been 40 days and no miracles. Time for another god." The Israelites' fear of being abandoned and guide-less in the desert made them vulnerable to make a substitute.

*Reflect on the trimester so far. What circumstances caused the strongest anxiety or fear? What were the accompanying temptations (followed or not) to replace God with*

*something/someone else? Discuss both the fears and temptations with your Father in heaven, and confess and pray with a partner.*

#### **Application 4) Highway to Hell**

Substitute gods often seem harmless at first. “What’s the big deal? I’m/you’re not hurting anyone.” But besides the insult done to God, any replacement of God is a slippery slope toward an increasingly ruined life, for you and everyone you relate to.

*Think through how the slippery slope process works for the most tempting idols in your life, and use that as motivation to “burn” them this week.*

#### **Application 5) On my way...home sweet home**

Is God calling you to change directions and return to him? Or is he calling you to start following him for the first time? There is amnesty available! Don’t wait!

*Figure out a concrete way to remind yourself of the de-throning of the idol (maybe not burn, crush, and drink, but you get the idea). Have someone from your small group do that with you and pray for you as you re-orient your life this week.*

#### **Application 6) Rebel without a clue**

Moses has a growing awareness of God’s plan for his people and a growing passion for God’s glory. Though the Israelites were frustrating, he interceded for people who deserved destruction, and pled with God for mercy on their behalf.

*Whom has God placed in your life that’s difficult to shepherd, witness to, or care for? Someone who regularly reverts to self-destructive disobedience in spite of any exhortation or encouragement? We’ve all been that person at times, so it makes sense to give them grace and be like Moses: intercede for the rebellious. Commit to pray for one of these people every day this week: for God to forbear in judgment, to soften their hearts, and show his glory in his generous grace to this person.*

# You Know You Want To Come

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*Exodus 33:1-6, 12-23*

## **IN: Connecting w/Each Other**

Have your group pair back up in the groups they were a part of during the “OUT” portion last week and check in with one another. How did they put their applications into practice this past week?

Once you draw them back together ask if one or two of them could share briefly with the whole group. The purpose is to encourage life application and accountability within the small group, as well as to celebrate how God has been at work in their lives over the course of the past week.

Once a few people have had a chance to share, pray for your time together and dive into Session 8.

## **UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture**

Before you read the passage out loud, take a moment to remind your group a little bit about the context of the passage for today’s study...

### **literary context**

This continues the fallout from the golden calf incident. Through Moses’ intercession God refrained from destroying Israel, but has also said that he *won’t* travel with them (32:24).

### **historical & cultural context**

*Anthropomorphism.* “Imagining the deity in frankly physical terms was natural for the ancient monotheists...but such concreteness does not imply conceptual naivete. Through it the Hebrew writer suggests...that God’s intrinsic nature is inaccessible, and perhaps intolerable, to man’s finite mind, but that something of his attributes - his goodness, the directional pitch of his ethical intentions - can be glimpsed by humankind” (Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, pg. 506).

*And the Lord said.* Each repetition of the formula for introducing speech indicates that Moses did not respond when its as “his turn” to talk.

*“know you by name.”* Idiom for intimacy and election.

Once you've had a chance to recap the context, have someone read Exodus 33:1-6, 12-23 out loud. Take a moment of silence after it is read to let it sink in.

Now that your group has had a chance to hear the story, take some time to really dive in and explore the text in greater detail. You can either ask them to come up with a list of questions based on their observations from the text or you can use the questions below to explore the passage in greater detail.

1. To help you get into the text a bit, choose one of the following...
  - Sketch Moses' slides for his presentation on why God should come with them, both from Moses' end and responding to God's concerns. Use as much of the passage as you can.
  - Suppose Moses had quit because of the golden calf. Write Israel's want ad to attract a new mediator. Include skill & character requirements, job description, and benefits.
2. Make two columns: "Presence" and "No Presence." What does the passage say are the results or other concepts associated with each?
3. Why does God want the ornaments off of his people (vv.4-6)? It seems like a strange order.
4. Why does God offer to send an angel ahead this time to drive out their enemies? What makes this different from what he promised before?
5. Why is it dangerous for God to be with the Israelites? What does he mean by "stiff-necked"?

6. What does it mean that God's presence won't go with them, especially when he is omnipresent?
7. What is the connection between God's presence and rest?
8. What if Moses hadn't interceded further for the people? Has God changed his mind? What exactly is going on in this exchange?
9. Why does Moses ask to see God's glory? How and why does God answer Moses' request in the way that he does?

## **OUT: Connecting w/the Mission**

### ***Transitional Paragraph:***

God's people are a paradox. They're different: holy ones, set apart to do God's will and exemplify his goodness among the nations, the ones with whom the holy God is pleased to dwell, protect, and bless. But they have the same fallen nature as everyone else. Just like the nations, they rebel and do evil and provoke God's wrath to destroy them. It's an impasse: God must either dwell with and destroy his people, or abandon them to let them live, but remain in sin. Either way, his salvation purposes and promises through Abraham fail. How will he solve the problem? The answer is by providing a mediator, someone who can identify with and represent the people, and offer atonement, but someone with whom God is also well pleased. Temporarily, this is Moses. Ultimately, it is Jesus the Messiah.

### **Tough Stuff**

*Has God changed his mind?*

Like the rest of the OT, this passage describes God in human terms. This includes his relating to humans as if he experienced time as they do. However, this "does not imply conceptual naivete" any more than use of God's "face", "back", or "hand".

God created time, and is not stuck in it like we are. He "sees" the whole of creation history at once, just as he is present at every point in the universe. So God is never surprised by events or ignorant about what is in the future. The question, then, is not 'how can God change his mind?' but 'why does God interact with Moses and Israel this way?'

### **Application 1) Just ask**

While it's sometimes confusing how intercession works and how God relates to the space-time continuum, one thing that isn't confusing is God's desire for us to intercede for others, especially those who would otherwise be prone to destruction. So as we work not be confusing theology, let's follow what we do understand.

*Make praying for those who don't yet know Jesus a regular part of your life. Get started by picking two people in your life who aren't yet Christians. Pick a partner from your small group, share their names and why they matter to you, and meet midweek to prayer for these people together. In addition, commit to praying for them daily over the next several weeks and share what happens as a result.*

### **Application 2) Ask BIG**

There was no Bible for Moses to read so he could know God better. (Moses would need this kind of revelation of who God is so he could start *writing* the Bible!) So Moses asks, "show me your glory," and God grants it. His special knowledge of and relationship with God was crucial to the success of Israel.

*We still have to apply ourselves to the task of knowing God better. Don't wait around for a theophany. Don't just hope worship will become exciting again. Pick up your Bible. Read good theology. Get a partner and start reading through a book to open your eyes to the wonders and glory of God. There are some great options out there, but a few places to start are:*

- *Mere Christianity by C. S. Lewis*
- *The Cross of Christ by John Stott*
- *Jesus The King by Tim Keller*

*Commit to reading this book together and meeting regularly to share your thoughts and reactions.*

### **Application 3) God is Sovereign**

"I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." We don't control or manipulate God, we can only ask. But if God will do what God will do, why pray at all? Great question. The answer starts with trust. Clearly God doesn't need prayer to get things done. No one asked for the universe. But in his desire for relationship and partnership with us, often what God wants to do, he wants to do through answered prayer. At some point you need to give some good thought to this question.

*Instead of trading ignorance with other confused people, how about reading a book on prayer? Two good places to begin are by reading *Daring to Draw Near* by John White or *Prayer* by Tim Keller. Meanwhile, honestly pray: “Father, I’m not demanding or manipulating. I’m just asking...”*

#### **Application 4) Dangerous Presence**

We need to come to grips with the danger of being a sinner in the presence of a God who is completely good and holy. But first, God’s holiness is not a familiar concept. We tend to associate it with “harshness” or “strangeness”.

*Spend some time correcting your understanding by reading Trevethan’s *The Beauty of God’s Holiness*.*

*Second, as we meditate on the commandments Jesus-style (see Matthew 5), we see ourselves more clearly: as one of the “bad guys.” And as C. S. Lewis says, what can be worse than coming face-to-face with absolute perfection, and realizing that you’re enemies? What can save you then? From this perspective we can come to grips with the amazing thing God has done at the Cross. Multiply your gratitude and expand your worship of Christ by meditating on this truth this week. Make the most of some of the high holy days and seasons this year (Like Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, and Easter). Invite non-Christian friends to join you during these times. Let the Holiness, Beauty, and Mercy of God shape your heart during these seasons.*



# What's In A Name?

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*Exodus 34:4-14, 27-35*

## **IN: Connecting w/Each Other**

Have your group pair back up in the groups they were a part of during the “OUT” portion last week and check in with one another. How did they put their applications into practice this past week?

Once you draw them back together ask if one or two of them could share briefly with the whole group. The purpose is to encourage life application and accountability within the small group, as well as to celebrate how God has been at work in their lives over the course of the past week.

Once a few people have had a chance to share, pray for your time together and dive into Session 9.

## **UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture**

Before you read the passage out loud, take a moment to remind your group a little bit about the context of the passage for today's study...

### **literary context**

This completes the golden calf incident. Through Moses' intercession, God refrained from destroying Israel and has consented to travel with them, and Moses boldly asked for even greater knowledge of God: “show me your glory.”

### **historical & cultural context**

When it speaks of the name of the Lord it is speaking not just telling us how to refer to him, but telling us something essential about his character and essence.

Once you've had a chance to recap the context, have someone read Exodus 34:4-14, 27-35 out loud. Take a moment of silence after it is read to let it sink in.

Now that your group has had a chance to hear the story, take some time to really dive in and explore the text in greater detail. You can either ask them to come up with a list of questions based on their observations from the text or you can use the questions below to explore the passage in greater detail.

1. To help you get into the text a bit, choose one of the following...
  - Write a “Top 10 Reasons Moses Took So Long to Come Down the Mountain” list. Have fun with this one :)
  - Put yourself in Moses’ sandals for a second. Write a journal entry trying to describe what you experienced on the mountain.
2. Why punish the children to the third and fourth generation? What does this even mean?
3. What does it mean that God is jealous? Jealous for what? for whom?
4. What’s so important about not making treaties or intermarrying? Maybe reflect back on Israel’s story so far for clues.
5. What’s so important about the feasts? What is the relevance?
6. What is the significance of God proclaiming his “name”? Why these attributes? What attributes are missing and why?
7. What are the “wonders” (v.10)?

8. 40 days to get a copy?! What is the need/purpose for all that time? Why fast during that period?
9. Why is Moses glowing? And why now? After all, he'd talked with God before!
10. What is the connection between the two portions of the passage above (vv.4-14 & 27-35)?
11. What is the connection to 2 Corinthians 3:18? Look it up and make some comparisons.

**Tough Stuff**  
*Sharing God's glory?!*

Is this blasphemy? Surprising as it is, this is the teaching of the New Testament! Check it out:

- Romans 1:23
- Romans 2:7-10
- Romans 3:23-24
- Romans 5:2
- Romans 8:17ff
- Romans 8:30
- Romans 9:23
- 1 Cor. 2:7
- 1 Cor. 15:43
- 2 Cor. 3:18
- 2 Cor. 4:17
- Colossians 1:27
- Colossians 3:4
- 1 Thess. 2:12
- 2 Thess. 1:12
- 2 Thess. 2:14
- 2 Timothy 2:10
- Hebrews 2:6ff
- 1 Peter 1:7
- 1 Peter 1:24ff
- 1 Peter 4:14
- 1 Peter 5:1-4, 10
- Rev. 4:4 & 21:11

## **OUT: Connecting w/the Mission**

### ***Transitional Paragraph:***

Now that we've taken some time to reflect on this passage together, let's apply it to our own lives. This is the climax of Exodus: a glimpse of God's end game!! God started the Israelites with a humiliated beginning, but now is sharing his glory with them - at least with their representative. In spite of our sin, God wants to give us more than forgiveness. He wants to give us his glory! Glory was God's intention for humans from the beginning. We are "predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29). To that end, God initiates a covenant and commands us to obey him, to put him first and guard against disobedience, and God transforms us into his likeness so that we are the king of people he is: gloriously compassionate, gracious, faithful, merciful, good, and just.

### **Application 1) Be amazed**

God really wants to share his glory with humans, even us. Not merely reflect. God's goal is for us to be "transformed into his likeness with every increasingly glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18), "that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:14).

*Spend 2 or 3 devotional times this week thinking, meditating, journaling, and worshiping through the verses in the “Tough Stuff” box above. Make plans to have a meal with another small group member and discuss what you’ve learned, how you were impacted, what God was challenging you with, etc. Choose one verse from the list to memorize together.*

### **Application 2) Feast**

God gives several commands - attending regular festivals, driving out of the Canaanites, destroying their religious stuff, not intermarrying, etc. They are all designed to help the Israelites preserve their relationship with God and make glory-sharing possible by guarding their heart and preventing idolatry.

*How is God calling you to be similarly diligent? What spiritual disciplines do you need to take more seriously (without falling into legalism)? Where do you need to be more careful or wise about limiting the influence the world has on you (without falling into isolationism)? Make some specific plans to share and then pray with a partner.*

### **Application 3) Fast**

Besides the above, where diligence can pave the way for glory-sharing, it seems like receiving close encounters with God and being transformed into a more glorious person are not walk in the park either. It took Moses 40 days to receive this revelation of who God is. Not a 40 day hunger strike until God finally, begrudgingly revealed himself. That’s how long it took for Moses to be able to receive that much knowledge of God. Most likely there was a significant increase in Moses’ self-knowledge as well, since that limits our knowledge of God. John Calvin once wrote, “There is no deep knowing of God without deep knowing of self, and no deep knowing of self without deep knowing of God.”

*When can you invest significant time and energy in this process. Consider a couple of ways: take a retreat day to just spend time in prayer, reading, and self-reflection, read and reflect on The Gift of Being Yourself by David Benner, set aside weekly time for reflection and journaling, and dwell in Scripture in order to listen to God tell you who you are.*