MEMOIRS OF MOSES

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PREFACE

The resume of Moses would be very interesting:

- I received the highest schooling available.
- I saw a bush on fire that was never consumed.
- I have over two million followers on Social Media.
- I am better than the average magician.
- I have experience as a herpetologist.
- I crossed the Red Sea without a boat and without getting wet.
- I squeezed water out of a rock.
- I do the “wave” at events and my team wins.
- I saw the face of God.
- By the way, I got away with murder.

Memoirs of Moses walks through the journey of the mighty Moses who experiences life as a legend, loser, loner, and leader.

Memoirs of Moses consists of twenty study guides for personal or group discussion and over one hundred devotions to help you better understand the life of Moses and how you can learn from his victories and failures.



LESSON 1

SEQUEL

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

In the previous book, *Genesis: In the Beginning,* we studied through all fifty chapters of the opening book of the Bible. As we enter into this study on Moses, it is good to review some of the key people and events that led Israel to this point when God raises up Moses.

What are some of the key people and events you remember from the book of Genesis?

_____

_____

_____

Genesis sets the backdrop for Moses' life. This book becomes the sequel as Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy detail Moses' actions and rise to leadership.

This study will focus on four key events and four key people in Genesis. It is realized that each event and person contains many messages with numerous applications. This is designed to be just a sampling.

1. Creation

The first key event is creation. God created the heavens, the earth, and everything within them. He did a good job and even acknowledged it as so. After creating just about everything, He states that He needs to add one more handmade creation.

Genesis 2:18-22 goes into a little more depth on the creation of woman, ***"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.' Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called***

every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man."

Why was woman created?

_____
_____
_____

What is implied since nothing was needed to be created after woman?

_____
_____
_____

Matthew Henry made an interesting observation, "Eve was not taken out of Adam's head to top him, neither out of his feet to be trampled on by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected by him, and near his heart to be loved by him."

2. Fall

The next major event was when sin entered the world. However, before examining the Original Sin in the Garden of Eden, it is helpful to understand 1 John 2:16, ***"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."***

What three areas of temptation are listed in this passage?

_____

_____

_____

What do they mean?

_____

_____

_____

Genesis 3:1-6 contains the story of the first sin, ***"Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die." But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate."***

Who is the serpent?

_____

_____

_____

What portions of the serpent's statements are true and which are false?

_____
_____
_____

How consistent are Eve's statements (3:2-3) with what God said (2:9, 16-17)?

_____
_____
_____

Matchup Eve's battle with the phrases from 1 John 2:16.

Lust of the eyes _____

Lust of the flesh _____

Pride of life _____

3. Flood

Adam and Eve have children and generations follow. Some of them are godly (Abel, Enoch), but some are not (Cain). Soon it appears the whole world has turned from the Creator. God decides to destroy the Earth with a flood.

The world was utterly wicked, yet Noah is described differently. I believe it is fair to call him a noble man. Genesis 6:9-10 says, ***"These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God. And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth."***

What descriptions are given about Noah?

_____
_____
_____

What does it mean to walk with God?

_____
_____
_____

Genesis 8:18-20 describes Noah's first actions after the flood, ***"So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the ark. Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar."***

What was priority number one for Noah once he exited the Ark?

_____
_____
_____

How can worship become a part of our regular routine?

_____
_____
_____

4. Babel Crisis

Only eight were saved from the flood, yet all too soon, man became arrogant and tried to be self-sufficient. They decided to create a tower that would reach into Heaven. They wanted to be like God.

Genesis 11:4 records, ***"Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.'"***

Three dangers and sins are listed or implied in this passage.

"Let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens."

They did not want a tower with its top being high, and in the sky, they wanted to be right ***"in the heavens."*** They were right back in the earliest sins. The pride to be like God caused the downfall of Satan and then to mankind through Eve and Adam. Genesis 3:4-5 gives the dialogue between Eve and the serpent, ***"But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'"*** They wanted to be like God. They wanted to be God.

How does this mindset resurface today?

_____

_____

_____

"Let us make a name for ourselves."

They wanted to be known. They wanted to make a name for themselves. It was to be all about them. This is the epitome of selfishness.

What are some of the ways we exhibit selfishness today?

_____

_____

_____

"Lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

They did not want to be scattered over the earth. They knew the command God had given in Genesis 1:28, ***"And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"*** They were to fill the earth. After the Flood, God repeats the instructions in Genesis 9:1, ***"And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.'"*** They were to separate. This would cause them to live on their own by faith. They could not control things or have the comfort of a large group. They were to step out in faith. Building a tower was not just prideful and selfish; it was an act of disobedience.

Where, what, or how has God called you?

_____

_____

_____

Why have you not acted upon His direction?

_____

_____

_____

After these four key events, we are introduced to four fathers.

5. Abraham

Abraham's life is rich in history. He is referenced several times in the New Testament as also being "saved" by faith. He walked out in faith and left his family. He went to a Promised Land. He tried to force God's timing of a promise and had a son, Ishmael. This son's legacy impacts all the world today. He bartered for Sodom and Gomorrah. At an old age, he then had the son of promise. God provided. God tested the faith of Abraham by focusing on the son, Isaac.

God answered His promise as Abraham and Sarah have a son. Isaac has just become a teenager when God calls him.

Genesis 22:1-2 says, ***"After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.'"***

What does God tell Abraham to do?

_____
_____
_____

How would you expect Abraham to respond to God's instructions?

_____
_____
_____

God called, and Abraham responded. It sounds very simple. Although it is the right thing to do, it does not appear to be the easiest, popular, or most comfortable choice. Genesis 22:3-4 states Abraham's response, ***"So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his***

donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar."

How soon does Abraham respond?

_____
_____
_____

What excuses would most people give for waiting before they responded?

_____
_____
_____

6. Isaac

Isaac is best known for being the son of promise and having twin boys that turn into nations (one of them being Israel). However, in the midst of it all, we see his willingness to trust others.

Genesis 24:1-9 starts the story of trusting others, ***"Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, 'Put your hand under my thigh, that I may make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac.' The servant said to him, 'Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which***

you came?' Abraham said to him, 'See to it that you do not take my son back there. The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your offspring I will give this land,' he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there.' So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter."

What kind of trust is Abraham showing?

_____
_____
_____

How important is marrying someone of the same faith? Why?

_____
_____
_____

Does the passage say anything about Isaac's trust? If so, how?

_____
_____
_____

7. Jacob

Jacob is the deceiver. From birth, he wrestles with his brother. He ends up taking his brother's birthright and blessing. He then has to leave. He is the one who has a dream with the ladder to Heaven and even wrestles with the Lord. Within the midst of all of this drama, he falls in love. He meets Rachel, and she steals his heart. They decide to marry.

The great love story takes a drastic shift as the deceiver is deceived. In Genesis 29:21-30, Laban tricks Jacob, ***"Then Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.' So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, 'What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?' Laban said, 'It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.' Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years."***

Who did Jacob previously deceive?

_____
_____
_____

How is Jacob deceived in this story?

_____
_____
_____

How is deception wrong? How does it hurt the deceiver?

_____
_____
_____

8. Joseph

Joseph's life includes promises, a pit, prison, and the palace. There are more details that can be included.

The Book of Genesis began with God creating everything, and it was good. However, it did not stay that way. Sin entered the world and affected everyone. As the book ends, we are reminded of sin, but instead of retaliation, we read that Joseph forgave his brothers.

Genesis 50:15-21 says, ***"When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, 'It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.' So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this command before he died: 'Say to Joseph, 'Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you." And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.' Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, 'Behold, we are your servants.' But Joseph said to them, 'Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.' Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them."***

What did the brothers fear? Was it justified?

_____

_____

_____

How does this phrase ***"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good"*** relate to your life?

_____
_____
_____

How can acknowledging ***"you meant evil against me"*** be helpful?

_____
_____
_____

"I think the first step is to understand that forgiveness does not exonerate the perpetrator. Forgiveness liberates the victim. It's a gift you give yourself." T. D. Jakes

List some of the ways God used evil for eventual good in the life of Joseph.

_____
_____
_____

SEVENTH DAY

SEQUEL: DEVOTION 1

Jill Osmon

"And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation." Genesis 2:2-3

I have the privilege of coordinating most of our large events at The River Church, and I love it, I mean super nerd love it, it is what God made me to do. But, it is an intense job, very detailed, and very much requires me to expend a lot of mind muscle energy and just plain physical energy. So after a large event, I completely lose the ability to make decisions, I have been making decisions for the last few months about everything, and now all I want to do is sit and not think. After a few days, I feel refreshed, maybe, but I do not always truly feel rested, and I have struggled with why, after relaxing, getting away, why can I not find true rest?

We have all been there, right? We have been through seasons of life that are just exhausting, a new baby, a new job, teenagers, tough financial times, or health issues for yourself or a loved one; and all you want to do is rest. But what is true rest? God rested on the seventh day during Creation, making a command that we rest. Unfortunately, we have a culture that does not truly know rest, even with vacations and days off, rest alludes most of us. Exodus 20:8-11 says, ***"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your***

female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

We often equate rest with time off, doing nothing, or vacation, but what is God saying here? If you look closely, verse 10 says, ***"But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God."*** While we may come back from a vacation or a day off refreshed, we will not know true rest unless we rest in God.

Psalm 91:1 (NIV) says, ***"Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty."*** I know that my soul craves for true rest, and that desire, that need, can only be satisfied by resting in the shadow of the Almighty. So how do we do that? Well, I think we look at how God rested on the seventh day. Verse 31 of Genesis chapter 1 says, ***"And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."*** We look back on all that God has done, even when we are in the deepest valleys, and we see His goodness, kindness, and love, and we rejoice in gratitude. Matthew Henry Commentary puts it this way, "The Christian Sabbath, which we observe, is a seventh day, and in it we celebrate the rest of God the Son, and the finishing the work of our redemption." Then, and only then, will we find true rest.

THE GOSPEL

SEQUEL: DEVOTION 2

Pastor Chuck Lindsey

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." Genesis 3:15 (NKJV)

Though it was 20 years ago, I remember the day like it was yesterday. That day I purchased my wife's engagement ring. It was the largest sum of money, until that point, that I had ever spent on anything in my life. As I type this, I can see it. I was up early that morning with excitement. Six months work was coming to its culmination with this purchase. I could not wait! I was at the bank when it opened that morning withdrawing the cash needed for my purchase. I carefully chose the jewelry store where I was certain I would find "the one." As I walked into the store, I was met by a salesperson who directed me to the engagement rings. I scanned the rows and surveyed the options, scrutinized each piece until I found what I knew was the right one for my bride-to-be. Then the salesperson did something that I will never forget. He did not just pull that ring out and set it on the glass for me to see. He did not just pull it out and hand it to me. No, he first reached into the drawer below him and took out a deep black suede pad that he set in front of me. He carefully took the ring from the case, turned to a machine that quickly cleaned the ring, dried it, polished it, and turned back to me. He did all of this until, at last, he set that sparkling ring onto that dark black suede pad. He knew what he was doing. Here was this beautiful, shining, sparkling heirloom set against the deepest black, void of the suede pad in front of me. The contrast was stark. It was as though I was looking at a star in the night sky.

This has always been a picture, for me, of the Gospel.

The word Gospel in the Greek language means “good news.” In Jewish culture, if you had good news to share with someone you would say, “I have ‘Gospel’ to share with you, we have become engaged!” Or someone might say, “Gospel! You do not owe any taxes this year!” But for good news to appear to be as good of news as it is, it must be accompanied by the bad news. So, for instance, if someone just comes up to you and says, “I am not sick!” you might think, “Well, ok, thank you for that information (I did not ask for it!).” But then you learn that they had gone to the doctor a year prior, and a blood test determined that there was cancer. Now, when they say, “I am not sick!” it means something does it not?

The same is true with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is truly Good News. It is the best news. But it is only good news for a person who understands the bad news. It is not enough to say, “God loves you” if the person does not know why God should not love them. It is not enough to tell a person that they should “trust Jesus, follow Him, and give their lives to Him” if they do not know what will happen if they do not. If they do not know the bad news, the good news does not seem like good news. It just seems like one option among many.

So the Gospel is what that salesperson did that day. It is a presentation of the good against the bad. It is the dark black backdrop of our sinful condition before a Holy God. The bad news is that we are all sinners. The bad news is that God demands us to be sinless to enter Heaven (yes, you read that correctly), the bad news is that there is not one person who can make themselves sinless and not a sinner. The bad news gets even worse when you consider that this sin has separated us from God and it will continue to separate us from Him forever unless somehow it is removed. However, since man cannot remove his sins or to make himself sinless and not a sinner, we are stuck. We

will be judged as sinners, condemned to eternity in Hell apart from God because of the wrong we have done. That is the bad news. That is the deep black cloth that shadows our lives.

But here comes “the ring” if you will. Though man could not do anything, God did. Man could do nothing to pay for sin. Man could do nothing to make himself sinless. Though man could do nothing at all, God did by coming and dying in our place. He took our sin upon Himself, as though He was the sinner. Then He was judged as a sinner in our place. Then He was condemned. He was separated from God the Father, and then He died. It was all for us. He served my sentence so that I do not have to. He paid my debt so that I now owe nothing. He was separated so that I never have to be. That is good news!

See today the black cloth of sin that shadowed our lives, and that would have separated us from Him forever in Hell. Now see the jewel of God’s amazing grace. It is the sparkling ring that is His Gospel, given to us. This is the Good News of what God has done.

MAKE A NAME FOR OURSELVES

SEQUEL: DEVOTION 3

Richie Henson

It seems like the greatest allure of the current generation is fame. I do not know many young people who would not like to be internet famous, myself included. I mean, who would not want a million strangers to watch videos about your life?

These desires for grandeur are not new to the current generation. In fact, they go all the way back to Babel. As civilization began to push East, a group of people came together to build a tower to the heavens. It seems strange to think that anyone might attempt to build a tower to heaven, but these people had convinced themselves the status of God was attainable.

As they began building the tower, an interesting statement is made in Genesis 11:4, ***"Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.'"***

These people were looking to set themselves apart as important on the earth. I am not sure I could ever understand building a tower to heaven, but the feeling of wanting to be important is hard to shake. Beginning with Satan, the allure of being like God has led to destruction. For the people in Babel, they desired to be famous like God. They desired to have a name as known as God's. In what ways do we try to gain equality with God? Is it by accumulating wealth or possessions? Maybe we try to be equal with God by handling all of our problems or playing a large role in our community.

Whatever the case may be, we must always remember that no matter how tall we build our tower, God will always be bigger. No matter how famous we make our names, God's name will always be infinitely more famous.

Thankfully for us, we do not have to strive for equality with God. Instead, we can live in the grace of our Messiah, Jesus and have favor as God's children.

THE ART OF LISTENING

SEQUEL: DEVOTION 4

Pastor Ryan Story

We are all born with an innate ability to listen. Babies have the ability to recognize their parent's voice from the moment they are born. I remember how foolish I felt talking to my wife's stomach for nine months, but I will never forget when my son's both looked at me. There were some odd feelings as even little mush balls of adorable, they understood what I said. As children grow, listening becomes a skill. Language comprehension, linguistics, and vocabulary are all things that children are learning as they grow. As time goes on, a child grows to understand who "mama" is for no other reason than the praise and excitement parents get when that child repeats the word that has been said to them millions of times before the age of one. The child does not have the ability to know that "mama" is the informal way of saying "mother;" all the baby knows is when they say something, people react.

Listening is a key part of communication. Communication is a key part of any relationship. There are so many times when I have had my head buried in my phone playing Clash Royal and my wife or sons were trying to get my attention. There is nothing that is so disheartening as when you are saying something and no one is listening. I have learned in the few years of being married and as a parent, that when a person is talking to you, they generally want to see an action out of you. If my wife says, "I need you to get Zeke a cup of milk," and my response is "heard you," that is doing little to help the situation. Be honest, you have lost it on one of your children, your spouse, or a co-worker because they "heard you" but did nothing after it. Since we all have the ability to listen, the issue that we all face is simple, do we act, do we respond after we hear something?

Genesis chapter 12 is the beginning of Abram's calling from God. The story starts when one day God called a man named Abram. Genesis 12:1 says, ***"Now the Lord said to Abram."*** This is the beginning of Abram's story. God told Abram to leave his comfort zone and go. God is an amazing communicator, He is able to speak to anyone and can be heard even when no one is listening. The amazing golden nugget of truth is in Genesis 12:4 that says, ***"So Abram went."*** The beauty is, I do not think it would of mattered what God said to Abram, he would have listened; he would have obeyed.

Obedience is linked to listening. My oldest son is a maniac and has not one ounce of fear. He is strong willed as one can be, and he knows how to get his way. I have learned that in order for him to be obedient to the rules of my house, I cannot expect him to do so unless he listens. I learned early that just spanking him when de does wrong was not correcting his behavior. I had to get on his level and re-communicate what his expectations where. If by chance Broly hits his little brother, if I correct him and he does it again, I take Bro in another room, sit down, make him look me eye to eye and make sure he is listening to what he is doing wrong. I call these "dude chats." Once I was able to teach my son that he needed to listen to his father's rules, the obedience came. Not all the time, but he listens better than he did.

Our walks with God are like that. We all know we need to live obediently to God. We all know we should not sin, we all know we should love those who are hard to love, and we all know we must be the light of the world. Sometimes life is not always just an "I am not being obedient issue" it is a "I am not listening" problem. If you are looking to be recklessly obedient to Jesus, you may have to learn how to listen to Him before you get to obeying Him.

DON'T LOOK BACK

SEQUEL: DEVOTION 5

Donna Fox

"Flee for your lives! Don't look back… But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt."
Genesis 19:17, 26 (NIV)

The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah had become evil. Terrible, unspeakable things were happening there, and God was going to destroy them and all the people there. An angel appeared to tell Lot to take his family and flee immediately. Lot, his wife, and daughters hesitated, so the angel had to grab their hands and force them to flee. Once out, Lot's wife turned and looked back. She looked back at what she left behind. She fondly looked back at where her heart was. She disobeyed. She died because of it.

Worldly things ensnare us. They tempt us day and night. If we give in to temptation, we sin. Sodom and Gomorrah had become very sinful cities. God had sent two angels to warn of destroying the cities and the evil people. But He chose to save Lot and his family. The angels said, "Go now, don't look back."

Lot's wife disobeyed. She showed where her heart truly was, in the sinful city. She did not want to leave that behind. First, she had to be forced to leave, taken by the hand and forcefully removed. Then she turned around to look back in direct disobedience. She lost her life that day because of her disobedience.

I remember another story in Genesis 2:16-17, the story that started it all – sin, disobedience, and death. Adam and Eve were in the Garden. Everything was perfect. God had said, ***"You may surely***

eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Enter Satan in the form of a serpent, to tempt them. Eve, and Adam, disobeyed. The consequence was death. Their demise was not immediate as was Lot's wife, but nonetheless, it led to death which had not existed before.

God desires our obedience and will not tolerate any less. There are consequences for our behavior, for our disobedience. Sin cannot be hidden and will lead to repercussions, if not in this lifetime then we will have to answer for them on the Judgment Day.

If you do not guard your heart now, each day, and flee from worldly, evil things, your heart becomes harder and harder, and obedience becomes harder and harder.

How can you guard your heart? Have a relationship with Jesus that is every minute of every day, not just Sunday morning for an hour. Be in the Word. Fellowship with other believers. Grow in the Word in a Growth Community. Pray. Immerse yourself in the love of Jesus, and He will help you flee from temptation and sin. Of course, you will still sin, no one is perfect but Jesus. But when you do sin, repent, ask Him for forgiveness, and the sin will be forgiven. It is when your heart stays in Sodom that you will run into trouble!

“THE LORD WILL PROVIDE”

SEQUEL: DEVOTION 6

Pastor Caleb Combs

The story in Genesis chapter 22 is one with which I have always struggled. God had just blessed Abraham and Sarah with a baby when all signs pointed to them being too old. Yet, now God challenged Abraham with the blessing. He told him to take Isaac to Moriah and offer him as a sacrifice. Now, this is where I struggle. This seems totally opposite of the character of God. Yet, Abraham was obedient. He took his only son, some supplies, and headed to the mountain. On the way, Isaac asked his father, “Where is the sacrifice?” Abraham responded that God would provide. Several times Isaac asked his father on the journey, and every time the response was the same, “God will provide!” I am not sure if you have children, but if God asked this of me, I am not sure I would have responded the same way Abraham did. I would ask, “Really God? I prayed for years that you would give us a child, and now you want to take him away?” Abraham had to be thinking all of these thoughts, yet his actions showed a resilient faith. When they reached the top of the Moriah, Isaac built the altar and then his father laid him on it. The Bible tells us that when Abraham lifted the knife, God called to him, “Abraham, Abraham, Abraham, don’t lay a hand on Isaac, I have provided the sacrifice.” Just as God said, there was a ram stuck in a bush nearby, and Abraham and Isaac made a sacrifice to God. Genesis 22:14 says, ***“So Abraham called the name of that place, ‘The Lord will provide;’ as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.’”***

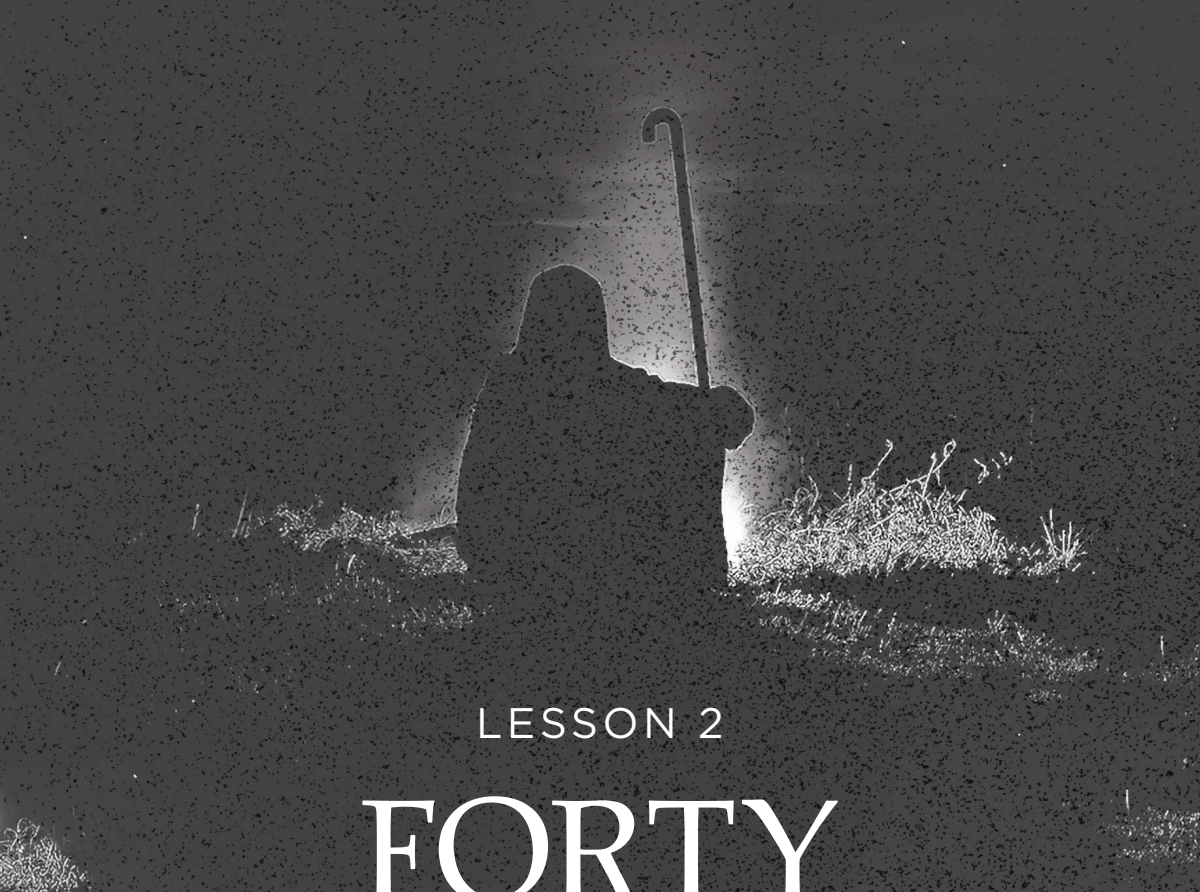
This is an incredible story of God’s provision and testing, yet I have always struggled with understanding the desperation in which God put Abraham. Ultimately, it was a calling by God to Abraham for him

to trust Him. Recently, I was able to travel to Durban, South Africa to serve at Key of Hope. Key of Hope is a ministry that works with children throughout Durban. It is an incredible ministry, founded and run by Dan and Rachel Smither. Before we went to South Africa, I thought it would be a great idea to bring some supplies. We brought suitcases packed with school supplies to be distributed by Dan and Rachel. I also know how big soccer is there, so I called in a favor. My friend, Caleb Stanko, plays professional soccer in Germany and he has a huge love for missions, and so he provided soccer equipment and jerseys for me to take with us.

On our first day in South Africa, we dumped all of the bags out in Dan's office, and he was excited about all of the supplies. That same day the director of his soccer programs came to him with a dilemma. He had spent most of his soccer supply budget on something other than supplies. He came to Dan and explained that his team had been unable to train and even play in games because they had not eaten. You see, most of them barely have enough money to eat once a day, and that was not close to enough nourishment for them to be able to play games or practice. The soccer director decided to use the supply of money to feed them and now was not sure how he was going to supply the needed soccer equipment. In the same response Abraham responded to Isaac, Dan responded, "God will provide!" Dan told him to turn around and see the very equipment he needed had already been provided by God. The young man was absolutely amazed at how real God was and is.

As I sit typing this devotion, I am challenged by that exact statement, "Do you realize how real God is?" I am ashamed of my unwillingness to trust that God will provide. I want to take control of situations myself and not trust that God will intervene. Maybe you are just like me and are a "control freak." Or maybe you have no issues in trusting God. I know in the easy situations, I have no problem trusting. But when the

rubber meets the road, and our situations turn dire, that is when we truly see the extent of our faith. Do you trust that God will provide? I can say definitively that God will provide! It may not look the way you thought or imagined, but we have a real and active God working for our favor.



LESSON 2

FORTY

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

I was raised with 20/15 vision. It was great. However, when I turned forty, the eye chart looked a little different. I needed glasses for reading. I tried the progressive lenses, but I felt like I was learning to walk all over again. So instead, the doctor gave me one contact for reading. I leave the contact in for 30 days before I exchange it. I read with my left eye, but see the world with my right eye.

Moses did not wear glasses, but every forty years, he viewed life differently. His first forty years were in the plush palace. Things changed when he saw "his people" mistreated. He then fled for forty years until God called him to lead Israel for the final four decades of his life.

What age was the biggest change for you? Why?

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In Acts chapter 7, Stephen gives his final sermon. To capture the attention of his crowd, he gave a history lesson to show how everything led up to the point where the Messiah (Jesus) would come and die for our sins. In the process, he breaks Moses' life into three segments of forty years.

D.L. Moody summarizes the three segments by saying, "Moses spent forty years thinking he was somebody; forty years learning he was nobody; and forty years discovering what God can do with a nobody."

1. Somebody

In Exodus chapter 2, we read about the birth of Moses and the circumstances for his adoption by the princess. This was a privileged experience, and it often comes with an heir of being somebody special.

How did Moses end up being raised in the palace?

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Stephen summarized Moses' upbringing, ***"But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph. He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive. At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God's sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house, and when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds"*** (Acts 7:17-22).

What "superstars" did God use in Scripture?

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What can be some negative outcomes if a "superman" rescues a people?

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What are some of the advantages of Moses' childhood that may have helped him later?

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"Two of the chief defenders of the faith in the Old Testament and in the New - Moses and Paul - were both well-versed in the language, the thinking, and the philosophy of their cultures." Ravi Zacharias

Is there something you have gone through or are going through that God will use for good?

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Hebrews 11:24 gives a very pivotal point of Moses' life, ***"By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter."***

2. Nobody

Moses was a "Prince of Egypt." He was a somebody and everyone knew it. Within probably a week's time, he went from being a somebody to being less than a nobody.

Stephen also summarized Moses' forty years in Midian, ***"When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand. And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?' But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' At this retort Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons"*** (Acts7:23-29).

Moses saw someone being mistreated and he took action. How was it received? Why?

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Can you list other times in Scripture where God's timing is different than man's?

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Moses seemed equipped with all the skills necessary to lead the people of Israel, but God took time. It took another forty years before the people would be broken enough that they could only look up. It took another forty years of "reprogramming" Moses' mind and heart.

3. Anybody

I am reminded of the saying, "Availability is more important than ability." I do not know who originally said it, but it summarizes the life of Moses. When he had all the ability, it was not time. When God wanted to use him, he made excuses. God is willing to use "anybody" who is willing!

Stephen concludes Moses' story in Acts 7:30-36, ***"Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord: 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are***

standing is holy ground. I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.'

This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?'—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years."

Who is speaking to Moses?

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What has He called Moses to do?

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Moses spent forty years in the palace. It prepared him for Egyptian politics and customs. He spent forty years in the wilderness. It is possible that the wilderness "survival" prepared him well for the last forty years.

Deuteronomy 34:4-7 closes the book on Moses' life, ***"And the Lord said to him, 'This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to your offspring.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there.' So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord, and he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor; but no one knows the place***

of his burial to this day. Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated."

What part of Moses' life do you most appreciate? Why?

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"Don't let worry get you down. Remember, Moses started out as a basket case."

LIFT YOUR EYES

FORTY: DEVOTION 1

Pastor Joshua Combs

Setting aside all of the cultural contexts of the Ancient Near East for a brief moment, simply put, we meet a man in Genesis chapter 24 who is looking for a wife. Strangely, he is looking for a wife for his boss' son, Isaac. I am sure as the son of the extravagantly wealthy Abraham, Isaac had had many ladies (with their father's prodding) vying for his affection and hand in marriage. Marrying Isaac would have equaled wealth, servants, and great herds. But Isaac had submitted to his father, who had dispatched the head of his household to the land of Mesopotamia in the city of Nahor at the well. The sun was beginning to set, so the scorching heat began to subside, and that was the time when the women of the city would come to the well to draw water. The servant knew this was a great place to meet all of the ladies of the city and Lord willing, find a bride for Isaac. The servant, however, does not simply rely on his own understanding or knowledge but begins to pray. The specificity and boldness of this prayer in inspiring. Abraham's servant realizes that without the Lord's blessing, this could be a waste of a trip. As he is finishing his prayer, Genesis 24:15 says, ***"Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah…"***

The servant had yet to finish praying, and the Lord was answering. As we pray, we must never forget that we are approaching a royal throne. ***"Let us then with confidence,"*** the writer of Hebrews states, ***"draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need"*** (Hebrews 4:16). Our prayers need not be small or timid. We approach God's throne, not as uninvited, intruding guests, but children approaching our Father who has repeatedly invited us to test the limits of His power, the vastness of His resources, and the depth of His love.

As a secondary application and challenge, we see a biblical framework for finding a wife or a husband. Here are a few guidelines we see here in the Scripture:

1. Honor your parents/spiritual leaders (24:1-11)
2. Pray – Ask God to direct your steps (24:12-14)
3. Look for someone with a servant's heart (24:14-27)
4. It is ok to look for someone you think is beautiful (24:16)
5. Watch for consistency in the person's life (24:21)
6. Honor their family (24:22-53)
7. Do not force it (24:58)

NEVER ENOUGH

FORTY: DEVOTION 2

Pastor Ryan & Cathy Story

Have you ever met someone who constantly seems negative? Negative people seem to have a skill at finding the bad in any situation that arises. It can seem that no matter what good may actually come their way, it just never seems to be enough. It does not matter what good seems to be in front of them, there is always something that could be better, cleaner, quieter, less full, more full, or any other issue they might deem as bad. While this mentality can be detrimental in itself, negativity can be abundantly even more destructive within a family. In Genesis chapters 29 and 30 we read about two sisters who are ruled by envy in their relationship with one another.

When we meet these two sisters, Jacob has been sent by his mother, Rebekah, to her brother Laban. Jacob sees Rachel, Laban's daughter, at a well and falls in love with her. Genesis chapter 29:16-17 informs us that, ***"Laban had two daughters the name of the older was Leah and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance."*** One can imagine the rift these known differences may have caused between these sisters. I am certain that most people would not want to go through life being defined by the way they look. Jacob and Laban struck a deal that Jacob would work for seven years and at the end of that time, he would get to marry Rachel. After those seven years of work had passed and the wedding was to take place, Laban switched the daughters and Jacob ended up with Leah instead of Rachel. Jacob looked at Laban and in verse 25 said, ***"What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?"*** Think for just a moment about how

this would have made Leah feel. Jacob and Laban agreed that Jacob would finish the wedding week, and then he would marry Rachel in exchange for another seven years of work. In verse 31 we are told, ***"When the Lord saw the Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren."*** Leah ended up with four sons, while Rachel had none. Genesis 30 begins, ***"When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister."***

Rachel was most likely not used to being outshined by her sister Leah. The song Never Enough sung by Loren Allred in the movie *The Greatest Showman* has a catchy chorus:

"These hands could hold the world,
but it will
never be enough,
never be enough for me.
Never, never, for me."

All I can think as I write this devotion is that this would have been Rachel's theme song. She had a husband who was willing to work for fourteen years just to be with her; she has been described as beautiful in form and appearance, but yet she finds herself envious of her sister. This envy led to a back and forth between the sisters of giving their servants to bear children for them and trading and making deals to be with their husband.

I have to believe that this was not the relationship God had intended for these sisters to have. When we approach life with this "never enough" mentality, we only bring harm to ourselves and to the others around us. People who should be our biggest supporters and standing in our corner, end up being our adversaries. Instead of letting our envy, anger, or hurt drive our actions with others we should take a note from 1 Thessalonians 5:11, which states, ***"Therefore***

encourage one another and build one another up." What power and strength can come from us encouraging and supporting one another. There is a common quote that states, "A chain is only as strong as its weakest link." Reacting in a negative fashion weakens our link in the church of Christ. This is not God's will for us. Proverbs 14:30 writes, ***"A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot."***

How different could Leah and Rachel's relationship have been if instead of reacting in envy, they reacted in love to one another? How could relationships in your life look different if you chose to respond in more peaceful and uplifting ways? How could your relationship with God be improved if it was not constantly being tested because you feel you should have something better in your life? Trust that God has given you everything you need; His grace is sufficient enough for every situation you are and will encounter.

TYPOLOGY

FORTY: DEVOTION 3

Philip Piasecki

My brother is three years younger than me. This age gap allowed us to be pretty close friends through the years. We always had our own group of friends, but we would always enjoy hanging out with each other as well. Whether it was playing one-on-one on the basketball court, or playing PlayStation against each other, we have always been very competitive with one another. The most frustrating thing for me was when he started getting older and actually getting better at me in some things! All of a sudden I did not always beat him in basketball. I had to finally come to terms with the fact that he was better than me. He went on to play some college basketball, all I ever played was intramurals. My team did win the Oakland University Intramural Basketball tournament, so I have that on my resume. There were times when I would be jealous of his talent, but for the most part, I was always very excited for him. That is why reading the story of Joseph is so difficult for me; I cannot ever imagine being so jealous of a sibling that you would be willing to sell them into slavery.

The story of Joseph has so many great moral principles we can take from it, but we must be careful that morality is not always the only thing we take from the Old Testament Scriptures. The whole Old Testament constantly is pointing toward the coming of Jesus; we just have to be looking for the correlations.

Genesis 37:28 says, ***"Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt."***

We see here that Joseph was bought for the price of a slave, does that ring any bells? Look at the account in Matthew chapter 26 where Judas is seeking to betray Jesus.

Matthew 26:14-16 says, ***"Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?' And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him."***

Here we find the Scripture where Jesus is sold for the price of a slave as well. Joseph was betrayed by those closest to him, in the same way that Jesus was betrayed by Judas. The Old Testament is filled with the foreshadowing of what was going to happen to Jesus. When we read the Old Testament, there will be new life breathed into it if we approach it through the lens of Jesus. There is so much more to the Scriptures than just morality. There is a Savior who loved us and died for us. Our desire should be to honor and glorify Him, and through that, we will live moral lives. Joseph's story is a beautiful picture of Jesus' sacrifice for us, how He loves us even though we constantly sin against Him, and how He will show us mercy when we ask for it. Let the story of Joseph help you better understand that character of our Lord and Savior.

AUDIENCE OF ONE

FORTY: DEVOTION 4

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

"From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate." Genesis 39:5-6

The main point of this passage seems quite clear. God blessed Joseph. He not only blessed Joseph, but He blessed everyone and anything around Joseph. Potiphar and his estate were flourishing because God blessed him through Joseph.

However, I think there is another aspect that is too often missed: Joseph was faithful to God. Joseph had been belittled by his brothers, thrown in a pit, threatened death, sold into slavery, taken far from home, and humanly speaking had no hope of ever seeing his dad again. All sense of normality was gone. As he served in the house of Potiphar, he was faithful. He was faithful to God; therefore, he was diligent with his work. He was a hard worker. He was a hard worker when Potiphar was watching, but he was a hard worker when Potiphar was not home, too. With Joseph in charge, Potiphar ***"had no concern about anything."***

The key to Joseph's success was that he had an audience of One. There was only One that he wanted to impress. In everything he did, he was working for God. God was the focus of his diligence.

It can be difficult to work for an unbeliever or a godless person. It can be tempting to slack off when no one is watching. It can be hard to press forward when we are not appreciated. It can be challenging to give our best when it is not acknowledged. It is easy to follow the crowd. However, Joseph knew One was always watching. He was the One Joseph strived to please.

Galatians 1:10 challenges us, ***"For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."***

As servants of Christ, we need to live it. When "no one" is watching, remember One is watching. When many are watching, focus on the One, the true and living God.

“AFTER TWO WHOLE YEARS”

FORTY: DEVOTION 5

Pastor Joshua Combs

Something was supposed to happen. Joseph was a man to whom lots of things happened that should not have seemed to. He was born the favorite son of his father and declared to be so with the extravagant gift of a coat (robe) of many colors. But Joseph’s life of luxury and privilege would come crashing down. He would be beaten by his brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused of sexual assault, imprisoned, and forgotten. Every time a glimmer of hope shines on him, there is a sudden and dramatic change of circumstances, and a seemingly more destructive storm rocks his life. Hope is hanging but by a thread.

Genesis chapter 41 finds Joseph forgotten in prison with no end in sight. He had become a trustee in the jail, but that responsibility and privilege paled in comparison to being in his father’s house or even a slave at Potiphar’s estate. A glimmer of hope came when he translated a dream for a high ranking official who had been sent to Joseph’s jail. But once that man had been restored to his position, he conveniently forgot his little stint behind bars and the people he met there, including the dream interpreter, Joseph.

The Bible (Genesis 41:1) simply says, ***“After two whole years...”*** Time had ticked by, and Joseph must have realized that like his brothers and Potiphar’s wife, someone else had mistreated him. Years would go by with no word from the palace.

The Scripture uses the word ***“whole.”*** That is just like God. He does not try us one second longer or shorter than is absolutely necessary. God’s refining process is often compared in scripture to refining

gold. Job, in his desperate plea to God, states, ***"But [God] knows the way that I take; when He has tried me, I shall come out as gold"*** (Job 23:10). We often long for glory, but the pain and trial must always come first. God was not needlessly trying Joseph. God's plan was working perfectly. God's timing was perfectly on schedule. We, like Joseph, need to trust the Lord even in the difficult years. They may seem long, but "after" is worth the refinement.

MICAH 7:18-19

FORTY: DEVOTION 6

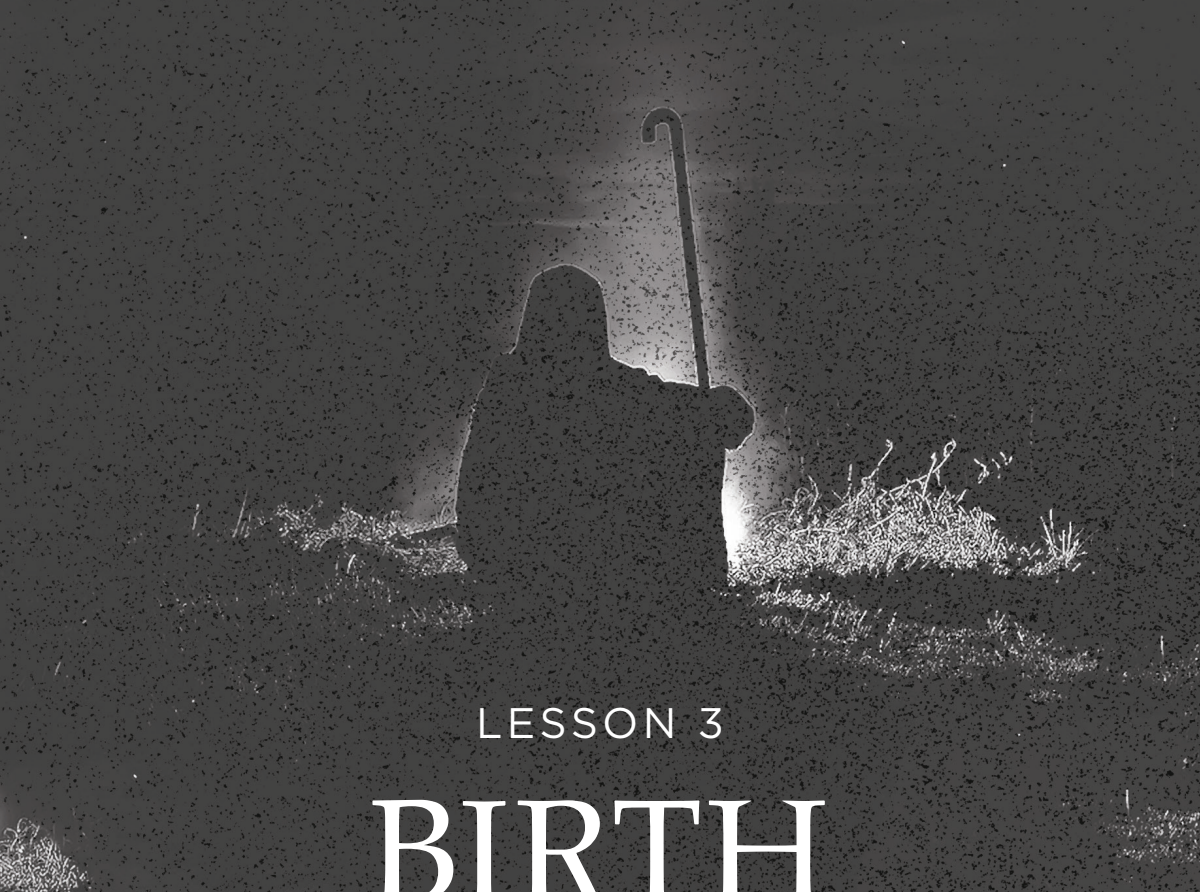
Dr. Randy T. Johnson

I am not a fisherman. I was not raised in a family that excelled at fishing. The largest fish my dad caught was a Northern Pike. We all celebrated until we found out that 19 inches was too small to keep. I remember sitting in the canoe waiting for the bobber to disappear. Putting worms on a hook was not very exciting, and I soon realized that the main bait on the lake was me; mosquitoes loved me. To make matters worse, my little sister drew back her rod to cast her line but did not look back to see if the "coast" was clear. I got hooked. I am not saying I got "hooked" on fishing; I am saying that she literally hooked my arm. A few stitches later, I retired from the fascinating sport of fishing. As if it could not get worse, my wife's dad loved ice fishing. Adding frostbite to a horrible hobby just brought a new category for a nightmare.

This week we have been focusing on how Joseph forgave his brothers. You might be thinking, "What does fishing have to do with forgiveness?" Micah 7:18-19 says, ***"Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."***

God is amazing! When we confess our sins, He does not hold it over us. He does not stay angry. He shows love and compassion. He is even willing to cast ***"all our sins into the depths of the sea."*** I want to remind you to stop fishing. Do not pull those past sins back out of the water. Let them drown.

Satan wants us to feel defeated. Remember: Misery loves company. Too often we revisit past sins and beat up ourselves. God has forgiven us, and we need to walk in confidence. God has cast our sins into the sea, so we need to put out a sign that says, “No Fishing Allowed.”



LESSON 3

BIRTH

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

I love the phrase, “You were made on purpose for a purpose.” You were not a mistake or an accident. You did not just happen. God has not, does not, and will not make mistakes. You are not some random product of chance. You were intentionally made by God in His image.

What thoughts and feelings come to mind when you read the phrase, “You were made on purpose for a purpose?”

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As I was researching this topic, I came across an interview from *60 Minutes (cbsnews.com)*. In June of 2005, Steve Kroft was talking with Tom Brady (arguably the greatest quarterback of all time). Although it was years ago, Brady had already won three Super Bowl championships. Here is a segment of the actual interview:

Kroft: This whole experience -- this whole upward trajectory -- what have you learned about yourself? What kind of effect does it have on you?

Brady: Well, I put incredible amounts of pressure on me. When you feel like you’re ultimately responsible for everyone and everything, even though you have no control over it, and you still blame yourself if things don’t go right -- I mean, there’s a lot of pressure. A lot of times I think I get very frustrated and introverted, and there are times where I’m not the person that I want to be.

Why do I have three Super Bowl rings, and still think there’s something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, “Hey man, this is what is.” I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me, I think: God, it’s gotta be more than this. I mean this can’t be what it’s all cracked up to be. I mean I’ve done it. I’m 27. And what else is there for me?

Kroft: What's the answer?

Brady: I wish I knew. I wish I knew. I mean I think that's part of me trying to go out and experience other things. I love playing football, and I love being a quarterback for this team, but, at the same time, I think there's a lot of other parts about me that I'm trying to find.

What thoughts come to mind as you read this interview? Is your story similar? Can you relate?

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Moses was born on purpose for a purpose. Exodus chapters 1 and 2 relate the story of the birth of Moses.

1. The crisis was real around the birth of Moses.

I cannot relate to the story of the birth of Moses. However, I can sense and feel the pain. The conditions and command are ruthless and evil.

Exodus 1:15-22 records, ***"Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 'When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.' But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, 'Why have you done this, and let the male children live?' The midwives said to Pharaoh, 'Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.'***

So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, 'Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.'"

What was the crisis?

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Why let the girls live, but only the girls?

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The Nile represented a lot to the Egyptians. It provided transportation, a "wall of security," food, and not only water for themselves but for their livestock and crops. It was a life source for the people. "Hapi" was the name of the "god" of the Nile. He was worshipped by the Egyptians.

Why cast the boys in the Nile?

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2. Courage was evident around the birth of Moses.

Although the crisis was real and could feel overwhelming, several women took a stand.

Exodus 2:1-4 says, ***"Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him."***

How was courage evident in this passage?

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Most people notice the obvious, Moses' mom (Jochebed). Like most moms would have if put on the spot, she was courageous in saving her son. However, there are so many courageous women involved in this story. The lead midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, disobeyed a direct order. The other midwives followed suit. Moses' mom risked her life, but so did Moses' sister (Miriam). Soon we will read how the princess and her servants got involved, too.

Who are some other courageous women in Scripture?

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Who are some courageous women of our time? Why did you choose them?

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3. The culmination was miraculous after the birth of Moses.

The next section of the story shows how God can give us more than we ask or even think (Ephesians 3:20). God steps in and saves Moses in a miraculous way.

Exodus 2:5-9 says, ***"Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, 'This is one of the Hebrews' children.' Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?' And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Go.' So the girl went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.' So the woman took the child and nursed him."***

God not only saves Moses' life, but what else does He do?

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God protected Moses, but He also allowed the parents to be involved in his young life. I think Miriam had to be ecstatic to tell her mom the news. I wonder if Jochebed was nervous at first. I imagine her approaching the princess wondering if she was going to be reprimanded or even killed. However, she found out that not only was her son safe, but she also got to nurse him. Even crazier than that, she got paid to do it. God is amazing!

Exodus 2:10 adds, ***"When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, 'Because,' she said, 'I drew him out of the water.'"***

It is interesting to realize the meaning of Moses' name. It means "to draw out." It implies drawing out of the water. I am sure Moses heard the story many times. He knew he came from the water. Ironically, there are several major events in his life where water is included. I am sure they were a constant reminder of his miraculous start.

What are some of the stories of Moses' life that include water?

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Moses was made on purpose for a purpose. He helped rescue God's people and prepared them for their next adventure into a new land.

We were made on purpose for a purpose. It has been said that there are two great moments in a person's life: the moment you were born and the moment you realize why you were born. Sometimes we get so concerned about finding out the big purpose for our life that we miss the daily challenges, opportunities, and callings.

Jesus' purpose for coming to earth was to die for our sins (1 Timothy 1:15). I am so thankful for that, but He did so much more. Every day He chose to live a perfect life so He would be an acceptable sacrifice on our behalf. He loved people, encouraged them, taught them, and healed them. He daily fulfilled His purposes for coming to earth. Every successful day culminated in the ultimate day for us.

Do not get so bogged down with the big picture that you miss today and tomorrow. Every great journey starts with a step.

What step do you need to take today? Tomorrow?

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A MONUMENTAL SHIFT

BIRTH: DEVOTION 1

Richie Henson

The life of Moses cannot be totally understood unless we take a moment to grasp the context prior to his birth. As we begin reading Exodus, there is a serious transition taking place. Joseph and the sons of Israel have all moved to Egypt, and their families have become quite large in number. At this point, Joseph and all the other people of his generation have died, and a new Pharaoh takes control in Egypt. Along with this generational transition, there is a cultural shift in Egypt.

Exodus 1:8-10 says, ***"Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, 'Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.'"***

The new Pharaoh determines the massive number of Israelites is a threat to the security of Egypt. Pharaoh decides to deal with this threat by subjugating to slavery the entirety of the Israelites. In spite of these poor conditions, the people of God continued to multiply thereby increasing the fear of Egypt. In turn, the Egyptians begin to work the Israelites even harder in an attempt to keep them from rising up and escaping. This is such a jarring change. One generation previous, Joseph was a man of high stature within the government, and now, the entire nation has been lowered to slavery.

As I read this account in Exodus, I cannot help but think of our own nation. As the church, we, at times, put too much importance on our

"Christian nation." We allow ourselves to believe that our government is devoutly Christian. We get sucked into the false sense of security that our nation and government will always support our freedom as Jesus followers.

However, I believe Exodus teaches us that things can change quickly and we must continue to put our faith, not in our worldly government, but in the Kingdom we are eagerly working to build by the power of the Holy Spirit until the coming of our Lord Jesus. Do not get me wrong, if you love to vote or engage in politics, by all means, that is your prerogative. However, I would beg us as a church, as members of God's kingdom, to focus our attention on the importance of the eternal government that will come at the return of Jesus. That we would put our hope and trust, not in our government, that could be as fickle as Egypt in Exodus chapter 1, but instead to put our hope and trust in a great and mighty King who will one day come again to rule and reign.

FINDING (HIS) GOOD IN THE BAD

BIRTH: DEVOTION 2

Holly Boston

Have you ever experienced a hostile takeover at work? We hear about them in the news but do most people ever experience this? My husband had been working for a company for about ten years. He decided he was ready for a change and after months of interviewing settled on what he thought was going to be a great opportunity. Less than six months after being with them, the company was bought out. A hostile takeover can sound like an exaggeration, but when you are in the middle of it, it feels like a pretty good description. The new owners changed the entire direction of the company, and after less than a year Greg was looking for a new job. The end result: we had to sell a beautiful new house, move to the west side of Michigan, and live in my grandparent's lake house until he found a new job. We were catapulted into a difficult two-year journey.

In Exodus 1:1-14, we see the Jewish people living in Goshen, Egypt. Decades earlier, Joseph brought his entire family out of Canaan to Egypt because of a famine. Joseph became a second ruler there. He was highly favored by Pharaoh and respected by the Egyptian people. Joseph and all his family lived well in their new home. In verse 8, we learn of their hostile take over. A new king rose up, and because he believed the Jewish nation was a threat, he looked for ways to control them. The Jewish people found themselves ruthlessly working as slaves. The king wanted to control the growth of their people in an effort to secure his position.

As I read this passage of Scripture, my attention was drawn to verse 12: ***"But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad."*** In this one verse,

we find three incredible truths about the God we serve. The first truth is that no matter what the world dishes out and no matter how painful our circumstances, God ALWAYS keeps His promises.

The promise God made to Abraham in Genesis chapter 15, Isaac in Genesis chapter 26, and Jacob in Genesis chapter 28 continued to be fulfilled in spite of the circumstances. Under incredible oppression, the Jewish nation grew tremendously.

As a new Christian, I am sure the enemy meant to destroy me and my new commitment to Christ through very difficult circumstances. My God kept His promise found in Philippians 1:6, ***"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you, will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus."*** Though there were times I was ready to walk away, He pursued me and hung on to me.

The second truth we see is that with God we can experience His blessings in the midst of our suffering. In this Scripture, we read about the growth in the physical strength of the Jewish people. Though the Scripture does not specifically say, I can only imagine the personal spiritual growth they must have experienced as they drew close to God in prayer to seek strength and understanding. In the pit of despair, believers often come to know God in a way they never have before. The biggest blessing in my two-year journey was a day to day walk with Christ. I knew Christ as my Savior prior to it all, but my pain and fear drove me to prayer and ultimately to a Bible teaching church.

The third truth is that God uses our experiences, good and bad, to prepare us for the work He has for us to do. The task of the Jewish nation was always to show the existence of the One True Living God and to be instrumental in bringing the Savior of the world, to the world. The trials of the Jewish people throughout the Bible are a

testimony to His presence, protection, provision, mercy, love, and judgment. As I reflect on those difficult years and share my testimony with others, I can personally testify to who Jesus is, how He has worked in my life, and our absolute need for a Savior. Our special task is no different than the Jewish people: to share all that He is and all that He does to a lost world. Who is better to share than those who know His love and desire to serve Him in spite of their pain?

When we are in the midst of the trials of this world, we must fight the forsaken feelings of our flesh and focus on truth, ***"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing"*** (James 1:2-4).

There is a popular saying that I have come to love: "Bloom where you are planted." Although this phrase is not in the Bible, it reminds me of the truths from this Scripture. As believers, we can grow through the tough things in this life as long as we know His promises, claim His promises, cling to Him, and look for His presence in all situations.

MIDWIVES

BIRTH: DEVOTION 3

Isaiah Combs

"Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 'When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.' But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, 'Why have you done this, and let the male children live?' The midwives said to Pharaoh, 'Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.' So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, 'Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.'" Exodus 1:15-22

This is a commonly overlooked story in Exodus because it is a little part of the awesome and immense story of Moses. I am not going to lie, I have read Exodus a few times and never gave it a second thought. But the Bible is awesome that way and the more you read, the more you see and get out of it.

I am very thankful for midwives. My wife has given birth to five children, and three of them were birthed at home. So I have high regard for the midwife profession and their willingness to come to my house whenever the babies decide to make their appearance.

This story in Exodus is the story of two midwives who followed God in their profession, and according to verse 20, business was booming, and they were blessed with families of their own. Also, because these women feared and followed God, they were an integral part of saving Moses from Pharaoh's plan to kill all the baby boys in Egypt.

It appears God was so pleased with the two midwives that He recorded them by their names. He made it personal. He noticed them and acknowledged them.

Throughout the Bible, God has proven to bless those who fear God and choose to serve Him regardless of the consequences. I believe He is still in the blessing business.

LIFE WITH PURPOSE

BIRTH: DEVOTION 4

Debbie Kerr

The "Sanctity of Human Life" has been a hot topic in America for decades and the topic grows hotter with each passing day. It has become increasingly common to disregard human life as if it is nothing. This horrific and unimaginable fact is not new; in fact, it has been around for centuries. America has made new strides recently as some states are making laws that have sparked much response and controversy in our country. States are passing laws that allow women to abort their baby right up to full term birth legally. Now other states in our union are trying to follow this same protocol. In fact, one state wants to take it a step further by allowing children to be killed after they are born. Thankfully, some states have recognized this as murder and have not passed this bill in their state. It is heartbreaking and sickening to even think about living in a world where human life is not considered a beautiful gift from God, a life to be born into this world on purpose, for a purpose.

In Exodus chapter 1, we learn about a time in history when Egypt was fighting against Israel. Israel was growing in the male population and defeating the Egyptian army. Population control is a thing, it was then, and it is now. We do not often hear those words spoken, but mercy killing and abortion has existed for many decades and are increasing at an astounding rate around the world. As we study Exodus 1:15-22, we read about Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, growing increasingly anxious due to the male population that is outnumbering and defeating his army. In an effort to remedy the situation, Pharaoh ordered two Hebrew midwives to kill all Hebrew baby boys immediately after they are born, but to allow the baby girls to live. These amazing women decided to honor God and allow the

baby boys to live. When the King questioned the midwives as to why they did this, they said that the babies were born so quickly that they could not get there in time. Pharaoh did not stop there with his efforts to control the male population, but God had a plan! There would soon be a baby boy born named Moses whom God would use to save His people from the slavery of Pharaoh and to lead them to the promised land. Because these two women feared God, it later allowed Moses to live and change the course of history for the Israelites. Do not ever doubt that God can use ordinary people to do extraordinary things when they choose to obey God rather than man. We can learn a great lesson from two midwives named Shiphrah and Puah.

Are you brave enough to take a stand and obey God rather than man?

SAFE PLACE

BIRTH: DEVOTION 5

Wes McCullough

This is one of those special Bible stories that smack you in the face with God's awesome plan. Sometimes it appears that everything in life is against you, but God guides you through step by step.

When my best friend was a toddler, he drowned in a filthy river in the summer heat. His father was able to revive him, and he was rushed to the hospital where doctors expected his best case scenario was extreme brain damage and a comatose state. God had other plans for him. My friend made a full recovery and went on to live a healthy life, play high school football, and serve in the Air Force. He and his wife now have three children.

I heard his drowning story when we were in high school, and I knew God had big plans for him. It was no stroke of luck that he had survived in such a miraculous way. My friend went through his rebellious phase, but then something changed. God spoke to him, and he listened. He began to make changes to his life; distancing himself from unhealthy friendships, volunteering in church, and going back to school to prepare for ministry. He was hired as the worship pastor at our home church and had been preparing himself to become the senior pastor one day. He has gone from a friend I felt I was mentoring to a friend I admire and in whom I can receive godly counsel.

I see in Moses' early life a similar plan from God. A little boy who was supposed to die was saved. Pharaoh decreed that Hebrew boys should be drowned in the Nile, but it was that river that carried Moses to a safe place. Moses was raised in the household that ordered

his death. Laughter is an appropriate response when you read that Pharaoh's daughter offered to pay Moses' mother to nurse him.

This story is a reminder that God is all-powerful. He is bigger than our circumstances. He can turn our roadblocks into open roads. Always trust the path on which God puts you.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." Proverbs 3:5-6

DIVINE INTERVENTION

BIRTH: DEVOTION 6

Pat Bedell

The story of how Moses was born is, in my opinion, one of the greatest stories of the Bible. The King of Egypt, Pharaoh, had sentenced all Hebrew baby boys to death. All of the newborn boys were to be thrown into the Nile to die. Pharaoh's Egyptians were on guard and had the authority to take away all Hebrew boys and take them to the river. There was a new mother who gave birth to a son. She was able to hide him for three months, but she could not hide him any longer. She made her son a basket lined with slime and pitch so it would be waterproof. She took him down to the river and set the basket on the river bank. The mother had her daughter watch over the baby boy from a distance to see what would happen to him.

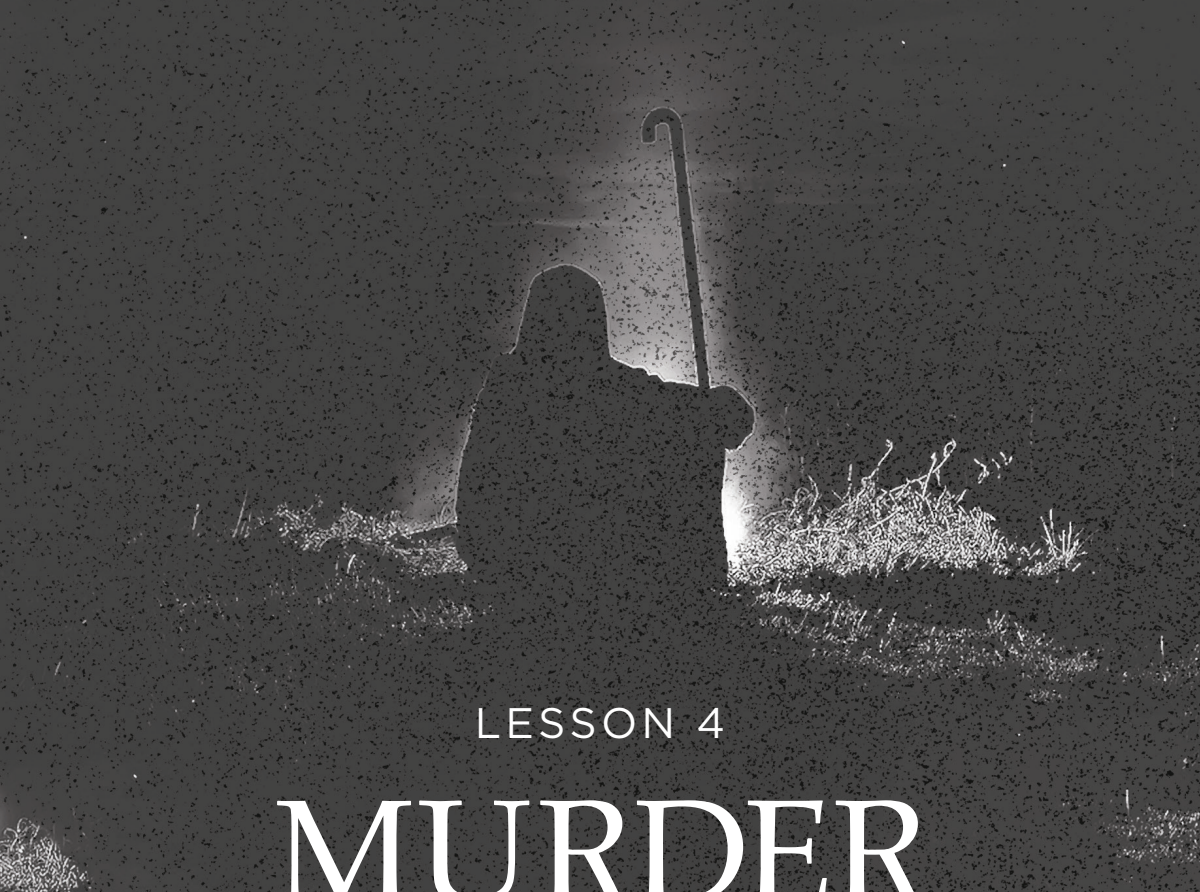
I try and put myself in the environment of that culture as best I can to understand what is happening at the moment. As a new father of a boy, I could not fathom the thought of my son being taken away at birth to be executed. The heartache of knowing my healthy son is being thrown into the water to drown is one of the worst thoughts that could cross my mind. I could not imagine going through a pregnancy thinking that we could have a girl and we can keep her or we could have a boy and he is born with a death sentence.

Of all people to come down to the river, it was Pharaoh's daughter. She was coming to the river to bathe, and when she stumbled upon the baby boy in distress, she had two options. She could follow her father's orders and throw him into the river, or her maternal instinct and compassion could take over, and she could save the baby boy. When the baby's sister saw that Pharaoh's daughter had found the baby boy crying, she quickly ran to her and asked if she should get a

Hebrew woman to nurse the baby boy. Pharaoh's daughter agreed, and it was at that point that compassion won. The baby boy was nursed to health, and Pharaoh's daughter brought the boy home. Pharaoh was not pleased with his daughter but she convinced him to let her keep the baby boy, and he agreed. She called him Moses because she drew him out of the water.

To think about the circumstances of how this baby boy survived is simply an act of God. To be born with a death sentence, hidden from Egyptian guards for three months, and then found by the daughter of the king who sentenced this boy to die, is a very bizarre chain of events. God made His way into Pharaoh's daughter's heart and convicted her to save this baby boy. He also placed in her the courage to stand up to her father, the king of Egypt. This is what made this divine intervention possible. God did an amazing work in her and allowed Moses to live and go on to do great things for God.

If there is anything about this devotion that I would want you to take away from it, it is that you should always count your blessings. Always know that someone out there is going through something worse. Pray for someone else that needs a divine intervention in the gravest way. Self-reflect and come to the terms that in the grand scheme of this world, you are more often than not living a blessed life. Do not take that for granted and always be thankful and humbled at exactly how blessed you are.



LESSON 4

MURDER

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

Everyone has a past. We all have things from our past that we wish we would have done differently. In 2012, Eric Jackson of *Forbes* wrote, *"The 25 Biggest Regrets in Life."* The first ten on the list are as follows:

1. Working so much at the expense of family and friendships.
2. Standing up to bullies in school and in life.
3. Stayed in touch with some good friends from my childhood and youth.
4. Turned off my phone more/Left my phone at home.
5. Breaking up with my true love or getting dumped by them.
6. Worrying about what others thought about me so much.
7. Not having enough confidence in myself.
8. Living the life that my parents wanted me to live instead of the one I wanted to.
9. Applying for that "dream job" I always wanted.
10. Been happier more. Not taken life so seriously.

Is there a regret you think is missing from the list?

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Moses may have had a miraculous beginning in his life, but things changed. He did something that made him re-evaluate the direction of his course. Sometimes in life, we are forced to take one step backwards.

1. Our past might have taken us one step backwards.

Exodus 2:11-15 records, ***"One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He looked this***

way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, 'Why do you strike your companion?' He answered, 'Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?' Then Moses was afraid, and thought, 'Surely the thing is known.' When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well."

What did Moses do wrong?

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Did Moses know it was wrong? How?

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We often remind those who think they are too evil for God to save that Paul (Saul) was a murderer. This is true, and so were David (Acts 7:23-30) and Moses. God can and wants to use us. Even those of us who have committed unthinkable things. God is willing to forgive; He is willing to work through us.

2. Our past might have been used to press us two steps forward.

Exodus 2:16-22 continues, ***"Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock. When they came home to their father Reuel, he said,***

'How is it that you have come home so soon today?' They said, 'An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds and even drew water for us and watered the flock.' He said to his daughters, 'Then where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread.' And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah. She gave birth to a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, 'I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.'"

Moses was a deliverer by nature. He delivered the Israelite from the Egyptian, an Israelite from another Israelite, and these daughters from the selfish shepherds. Moses was a deliverer in his own power, but he was not ready for the next stage of delivering a nation. He needed some more schooling.

What were some advantages of Moses being raised by the princess?

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What were some disadvantages of Moses being raised by the princess?

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Moses had learned the ways of the world. He needed to learn the ways of God.

Exodus chapter 2 makes an apparently simple statement, ***"But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian."*** Moses fled to Midian. A closer look shows that Midian was a land with a rich history. Genesis 25:1-2 says, ***"Abraham took another***

wife, whose name was Keturah. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah." Abraham's fourth son was Midian. Moses ran to a land full of promise. He would better understand God's promise to Abraham.

Midian was full of traditions passed on by Abraham. It would have been full of rich doctrine. It was a land that worshipped the one true God. By the way, Moses "just happened" to run into the daughters of ***"the priest of Midian."*** Moses fled to the place where he would learn about the God of his family.

Moses took one step backwards, but God used it to prepare him for several steps forward. Moses was not an overnight success. He spent 40 years in Egypt and then another 40 in Midian. The first two chapter cover 80 years.

Why did Moses name his son Gershom?

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Everyone has those times when they feel like they do not belong. We zigged when we should have zagged. It might have been a selfish choice, a lazy lack of choice, or just a wrong direction. Charles Stanley said it this way, "The difficulties we face originate from one of three sources. Some are sent to us by the Lord to test our faith, others are the result of Satan's attacks, and still others are due to our own sinful choices." It does not have to be because of sin, but our decision has affected our present position. Wayne Dyer added, "Our lives are a sum total of the choices we have made." Choices have consequences. Make wise choices.

You do not have to write out your answer, but what past choices do you wish you could change?

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What should or can you learn from that temporary detour in life?

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Two legendary coaches shared thoughts that relate to sports, but also summarize life. Lou Holtz said, “I think life is a matter of choices and that wherever we are, good or bad, is because of choices we make.” Pat Riley completes the thought, “You have no choices about how you lose, but you do have a choice about how you come back and prepare to win again.”

Let God turn your mess into a message. God can restore you from your regrets.

Max Lucado has reminded us, “The meaning of life. The wasted years of life. The poor choices of life. God answers the mess of life with one word: ‘grace.’”

HIDE AND SEEK

MURDER: DEVOTION 1

Noble Baird

One of my favorite games to play while growing up was hide-and-seek. It did not matter if I was at my grandparents, cousins, or church; I was always looking around to find the best hiding spot! I would not say I was the best, but I was never the first to be found. Although hide-and-seek is a fun, harmless child's game, as we read God's Word there are plenty of times where His people tried to play hide-and-seek. For example, Adam and Eve thought they would actually be able to hide their disobedience from God; there is David who believed he was on an episode of *"How to Get Away with Murder,"* and Ananias and Sapphira and that was just an epic fail.

Today, I want to take a look at another man who tried to play hide-and-seek and failed. In Exodus 2:11-15, we have the story of Moses killing an Egyptian officer. Starting in verse eleven, ***"One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, 'Why do you strike your companion?' He answered, 'Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?' Then Moses was afraid, and thought, 'Surely the thing is known.' When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well."*** Here, Moses is distraught at the sight of how his people, the Israelites, are being treated by the Egyptians who have enslaved them. However, he is quickly

overcome by his rage and ends up murdering the Egyptian officer. Overwhelmed with his sin, he tries to cover it up, but to no avail as it was witnessed by two other Israelites.

Moses tried playing hide-and-seek. He was overcome with rage and let it control his actions, leading to a man's death. So, he did what he thought was the quickest solution, cover up the sin and walk away. Often times as followers of Christ, we think that we are able to play hide-and-seek with our sin. Our gut reaction is to simply try to cover it up in the "sand" around us and hope no one finds out. However, just as Moses was found out by the two men, so will we. Now, I am not saying God is out to say "Gotcha!" and shame us in our sin. Instead, our sin is brought to light so that we become aware of the need to change.

Just like the game of hide-and-seek, we cannot hide our sin forever. Eventually, the sand will blow away, and the pile left underneath will be exposed. It is up to us to deal with our sin, humbly come before God, seek His forgiveness and even the forgiveness of those around us that we have hurt. Why? In 1 John 1:9, we find our answer, ***"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*** We must stop playing hide-and-seek with God. Trust me; I have been guilty of this in my own life. However, I want not simply to challenge, but encourage you this week; stop hiding your sin in the sand and simply seek Him instead.

NOBODY?

MURDER: DEVOTION 2

Debbie Gabbara

D.L. Moody said that Moses spent:
40 years thinking he was a somebody
40 years learning he was a nobody
40 years discovering what God can do with a nobody.

Though he was born to a Hebrew family, Moses spent the first 40 years of his life living like a prince, the grandson of the King of Egypt. Acts 7:22 (NASB) tells us that ***"Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and action."*** Moses was raised to think he was a somebody.

Exodus 2:11-12 says, ***"One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand."***

The Bible does not tell us how Moses came to know that he was a Hebrew, or if he always had knowledge of his true heritage. Yet there came a time when he made a choice, Moses chose God. He chose the Hebrew people, his people. He refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Moses saw the burdens of his people, and when he witnessed a slave being beaten, he intervened to help and murdered the Egyptian.

Sin does not go uncovered for long. The sands of life shift and the king soon heard about what Moses had done and wanted to kill him. The Hebrews did not understand why Moses, an Egyptian, was

interfering in their affairs and the king was ready to put Moses to death for his crime. Moses must have been in much turmoil trying to understand his role, he was a prince, yet he was also the same as the Hebrew slaves. Moses fled to Midian and would stay there for 40 years learning that he was a nobody.

Acts 7:25 says, ***"He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand."***

Hebrews 11:24-26 adds, ***"By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward."***

God had great plans for Moses from the day he was born. He chose Moses long before Moses chose Him. God would one day use this murderer, a nobody, to save His people.

It would take 40 more years for Moses to discover what God could do with a nobody.

SOJOURNER

MURDER: DEVOTION 3

Kenny Hovis

As we look at the life of Moses, we learn that he was very human, just like us. If he had a resume, it might read something like this:

- Former member of the House of Pharaoh of Egypt - Prince
- Conquering Hero
- Accomplished Shepherd
- Mountain Climber (Mt. Sinai)
- Prophet
- Published author (Pentateuch)
- National Leader (Israel)

Conversely, Moses had a number of personal issues you would definitely leave off of a resume. They included anger issues, a convicted murderer, speech impediment, self-doubt, and self-control. I am sure he often felt like in his life, he started out a “hero” and ended up a “zero.” He did not always know what he was doing, or what God had in store for him. Often in my own life, I have found myself in that same condition. I felt like God had used me in some fashion, only to be tripped up by some of the same pitfalls that beset Moses.

In Exodus 2:11-16 we find Moses, a fugitive from Pharaoh (having murdered an Egyptian), holed up in Midian. Hanging out by what was probably one of the few water sources in the area, he saw some young ladies and their sheep being bullied by other shepherds. He came to their defense, ran off the bullies, then drew enough water for all of the young ladies’ sheep. Wondering why his daughters were home from work so early, their dad asked them what happened. He was so impressed with what Moses did that he invited him to dinner. The priest of Midian, Jethro, gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses as

a wife. They have a son and Moses named him Gershom. The Bible tells us that Gershom's name means "sojourner."

The word sojourner is defined as a person who resides temporarily in a place. I believe this speaks to Moses's mindset regarding his life to this point. He has no identity. The young ladies at the well identify him as an Egyptian, but he only looked the part. He really was not an Egyptian. He was a Hebrew. He was living in Midian, had a Midianite wife, but he was not a Midianite. He named his son using a word that described how he felt. He felt like a stranger. So who was he supposed to be?

Many times we as Christians find ourselves strangers, sojourners. We may look like the world, but our actions and speech should identify us as "Not of this world" (John 17:16). Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:11-12, ***"Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."*** Because of Who we follow, we are only residing here temporarily. People should be able to see that there is something different about us. They should see that we are "set apart" (2 Corinthians 6:17). Our good deeds should point people to what separates us, the Gospel, and the Gospel, or good news, should point them to Jesus.

Moses ended up finding his identity as a man of God and went on to lead the Israelites out of bondage from Egypt. His life was filled with ups and downs, successes and failures, just like ours are.

Is your identity that of a man or woman of God? Do you think of yourself as a "sojourner" in this world, with your eyes set on your glorifying God with your good deeds so that people will know your true identity? I pray that this is our goal!

THE CURE FOR BROKENNESS

MURDER: DEVOTION 4

Pastor Ryan Story

Have you ever felt broken? Full of despair? Doubt? Have you ever done something that you immensely feared the consequences? We can all take solace in the fact that we have all been there. I believe that every person in their life has had a moment where they sat down somewhere and had that 5000-foot stare. In Exodus, Moses had one of those moments. After Moses had killed the Egyptian guard, Exodus 2:15 says, ***"When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well."*** At this moment, Moses had that "5,000-foot gaze" where a sense of overwhelmed brokenness came over him.

The Bible is not always a diary of emotions. We do not know exactly how Moses felt in between murdering a man and sitting at a well. At this time, most wells were busy areas where many people would come and visit. It is interesting that even in the midst of Moses going through an identity crisis, he put himself around people. One way to ensure that we can get over our brokenness is to put ourselves around people. I have noticed over the years when I am in that "5,000-foot gaze" state of mind, I tend to retreat mentally and physically. One cure for brokenness is to keep around people.

While reading this section, another amazing truth jumped off the pages. Moses was in the thick of it and witnesses some women who are in need of help. Exodus 2:16-17 says, ***"Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and saved them, and***

watered their flock." Even in the midst of Moses' brokenness, he saw an opportunity to serve others and took it. The second cure for brokenness is serving others.

There are times in our lives when we need to take a step back from serving others. There are seasons where we are not where we need to be in our walk with God. Taking time to allow Jesus to rebuild you in those moments is never a bad thing. However, there is something healing about not looking at yourself and looking for an opportunity to love and serve others. Philippines 2:3 says, ***"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."*** When brokenness comes over you, when you keep catching yourself in the "5,000-foot gaze," take a moment and see how you can serve another person. It could be taking a coffee to your friend or as crazy as helping at one of the many ministries we have at Church.

GOD RESPONDS

MURDER: DEVOTION 5

Pastor Ben Kirkman

"During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel and God knew." Exodus 2:23-25

In Exodus chapter two, we find the people of Israel stuck in a real-life nightmare. They were controlled and oppressed as slaves in Egypt. As we read their story, it is easy to make light of their daily hurt, because we know how the story ends. We know that God miraculously rescued them and freed them from bondage. However, have you paused and thought about how horrible their day-to-day must have been? They were real people abused, suffering, and groaning for years and years. These people are dealing with a real problem, and they were really hurting. As we empathize with their hurt, consider how hopeless they must have felt as they dreamed of escaping bondage. They were not strong enough to rebel and fight the Egyptians, nor could they count on another nation to come to rescue them. They seemingly had no hope.

We find the people of Israel so hopeless and helpless that they resort to audibly groaning and crying out for help. Who were they crying to for help? You would think (and hope) that they were crying out to the God of their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Verse 23 gives the indication that the people were just desperately groaning and crying out, hoping someone (and anyone) would hear, but as you can see, the Bible does not specifically tell us they were crying out

to God. Watching how the Israelites forget and neglect God going forward, it is definitely possible they were not crying to Him.

You can picture the scene: A massive group of people is living in a constant groan, desperate for deliverance. God in His faithful graciousness, hears them. ***"Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel and God knew."*** They may have forgotten about God, but He had not forgotten about them. The people cried out, and God heard, God saw, God remembered, God knew, and God responded. God already had every detail of their deliverance figured out; freedom was coming! The people of Israel would one day walk right out of Egypt.

We have all faced miserable days, wondering if anybody cares and if anyone can truly hear and help. We can have full confidence in our faithful, gracious God. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob sees, hears, and knows. We need always to remember to turn to Him first and trust Him to work no matter how desperate our situation.

GOD HEARS OUR CRY

MURDER: DEVOTION 6

Michael Fox

As we look through the life of Moses, we learn that God used Moses to bring ***"the children of Israel"*** out of Egypt from their slavery. Moses learned of his role for this in Exodus 3:10, ***"Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."***

Exodus 2:23-25 stated, ***"During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew."***

The covenant came from Genesis 15:18-21, ***"On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.'"*** We learn here in Genesis that God promised to deliver the Israelites, and then we see it carried out through Moses in Exodus.

In Exodus 3:7-8, we see God describe that He had seen and heard both their affliction and their cry for help: ***"Then the Lord said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land***

to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.'" Then, in verse 10 He told Moses that he would be the one to bring the people out of Egypt.

Looking through the life of Moses, and specifically in these passages, we learn a few things about who God is to us. He is our refuge, strength, and help in time of trouble. Psalm 46:1 says ***"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."*** He is the one who can truly give us rest. Matthew 11:28 adds, ***"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*** If we truly learn to cry out to God, He promises to hear our cry.



LESSON 5

BURNING BUSH

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

I enjoy the exercise, sights, fresh air, and unexpected surprises one gets when hiking. I love seeing wildlife as squirrels scamper around from tree to tree, deer tiptoe through the brush, or a fox appears from nowhere. I anticipate and appreciate reaching a destination and being rewarded with a priceless view. I love hiking and the rewards that come, but I have no interest in full-blown mountain climbing.

I am always amazed at people risking their lives by taking on the challenge of reaching the peak. The five tallest mountains in the world are not on my bucket list.

1. Mount Everest | 29,029 feet
2. Aconcagua | 22,837.3 feet
3. Mount McKinley | 20,320 feet
4. Mount Kilimanjaro | 19,341 feet
5. Pico Cristóbal Colón | 18,700 feet

In what country would you find each mountain?

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_____
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How many mountains recorded in Scripture can you name and describe a memorable event that occurred on that mountain?

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It might surprise you, but Israel is not noted as a flatland region. There are mountains everywhere. Each one brings views that cover miles and often reach into other countries. As you stand on the mountain, you need to pause and collect the profound historic stories and even miracles that took place right around your feet. There are so many

mountains in Israel that there are times when a tour guide says that this is the most likely location an event occurred.

There are a number of biblical stories involving mountains: The Ark landed on Ararat, Abraham "sacrificed" Isaac on Moriah, the Ten Commandments were given on Sinai, Moses looked at the Promised Land from Nebo and Pisgah, Elijah competed against the prophets of Baal on Carmel, the Transfiguration was probably on Hermon, Jesus prayed before His Crucifixion on Olivet (Mount of Olives) and the place of David's palace and the Temple were on Zion.

Finally, there is Mount Horeb. Exodus chapter 3 records God speaking from the burning bush. God had a special calling for Moses.

There are three truths to remember when God calls you to take on an adventure.

1. God was.

Exodus 3:1-6 says, ***"Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, 'I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.' When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then he said, 'Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' And he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God."***

What would have been your immediate reaction?

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I have a friend who always would say, “Hook, book, look, took,” when preparing or critiquing a lesson. The “hook” was the attention-getting device. The “book” was an important reminder always to examine God’s Word. The “look” was to go deeper with the truth. Finally, the “took” reminded the speaker to give the audience some practical advice they can take with them.

What was God’s “hook” with Moses?

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A fear in using the “hook, book, look, took” is that people will focus so much on the illustration that they miss the point. The burning bush got his attention, but do not miss the message. “The angel of the Lord” (found 67 times in the Old Testament) turns a normal area into holy ground. He uses normal people to do amazing deeds. Common can become holy.

Why do you think God called Moses by name?

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Finally, God tells Moses to remember the past. God identifies Himself, ***“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”*** Moses had now heard of the mighty works, direction, and most important the promise (covenant) of God. He encouraged Moses to remember the past.

2. God will be.

After identifying Himself as the God who was, He has Moses look forward to the future. God was, and He will be.

Exodus 3:7-12 adds, ***"Then the Lord said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.' But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?' He said, 'But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.'"***

What verbs are used of God in the first two sentences?

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How are these words comforting to us today?

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I have always read this phrase with fear, ***"The place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites."*** I did not find it comforting to read that God was sending them into the land of six enemies. One would be bad enough, but six? As I study this passage more, I realized God was saying that I am giving you land that is spacious and fruitful enough for even six nations. It was, ***"A good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey."***

Perspective is everything. What I saw as a challenge, God conveyed as a positive.

Where are some areas where we might lose perspective today and miss God's blessing?

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What promise does God make to Moses at the end of the paragraph?

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3. God is.

God is the One who directed the past and holds the future, but He is also the God of now. He is the God of the present. He expressed this to Moses in the next section of the passage.

Exodus 3:13-22 says, ***"Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' And***

he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'' God also said to Moses, 'Say this to the people of Israel: 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, 'I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.'" And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.' But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians."

What name does God use for Himself?

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What phrases are repeated from the earlier part of this chapter?

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Moses was being equipped as an educated man for 40 years in the palace. He decided to leave it to be a deliverer for Israel. It was not God's timing. Forty years later, after being taught the things of God by a priest and spending quiet time with God, God said it was time. He called Moses to be a deliverer for his people and His people.

What does God promise to Moses (several answers)?

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Some people are so consumed with guilt, shame, or hurt from the past that they have a hard time moving forward. Others stand still in fear of the future. Both groups miss the now. We need to embrace the present. We need to walk confidently. Seize the day.

In 1953, Edmund Hillary accomplished something that no one had ever done. He reached the peak of Mount Everest. He had to forget his past failures and those of others. He put aside the fear of failure and even death. He started with that first step in the present.

What is God calling you to do?

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"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."
Hebrews 13:8

ROCK BOTTOM

BURNING BUSH: DEVOTION 1

Max Sinclair

The story portrayed in Exodus is the story of God redeeming His children to have a relationship with Him. As Pastor Matt Chandler of the Village Church put it, "The story of Exodus is the story of us. It's the story of God drawing us out to draw us in." As we look at the story thus far, Moses had been run out of Egypt where he met a man named Jethro who was a priest of Midian. Through Moses' time there in Midian, he married Jethro's daughter Zipporah. To be a man and to take care of his wife, Moses became a shepherd for his father-in-law. While out with the sheep he came to the side of Mount Horeb, also known as the Mountain of God. As he walked around this mountain he noticed, ***"[That] the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed"*** (Exodus 3:2).

While reading this story, I could not help but think about where Moses came from to where he is now. Some of us might have gone through similar massive world changes. I mean, Moses was a prince of Egypt, he lived in palaces and had servants and personal attendants. Moses knew Pharaoh as his grandfather. Moses was living the life that we would envy, yet he saw something wrong and acted out on impulse and was forced from his luxurious life and into one of hardship as a nomadic shepherd of Midian. I do not know about you, but if I am really honest, I would be a little bitter, I would feel a little guilty from my sin, and I would have a large chip on my shoulder. Moses' life had just been turned upside down, and now he had to work and take care of that which he had responsibility for now. In our own lives, this could cause us to become blind to things around us. Personally, I know this all too well. I came from a life of being deeply enrooted in

the Bible and the church. I grew up at our Waterford location, and I thought I understood who Christ was. My life was good, and I knew it, but when it got hard, I became blind to the will of God in my life. I became paranoid that I had angered God in such a way that He had sent His plagues to hurt me. When I would turn back, I would not feel His presence, and I would not be able to see His will. I was blind to Him because I wanted that which I wanted and not what He had planned for my life.

In this story in Exodus, Moses saw this Angel of the Lord appearing to him as a fire on a bush, yet the bush was not being consumed by the flames. This extraordinary sight grabs Moses' attention, and so began his conversation with the Lord. This is Moses' rise from rock bottom.

In my life, my rock bottom was a lot different; depression and anxiety plagued my mind and drove me away from others. Being all alone in the Navy was one of the hardest things, and it was even harder when I did not know where God was. Yet, as I said before, I was not looking for Him where he was. I ignored my Burning Bush for a while, trying to find it in relationships, in books or fantasy, and even in law school, but it was right in front of me the entire time. God is trying to get your attention and trying for you to follow His will. When you have hit rock bottom there is only one way to go from there, so stop trying to dig deeper.

GOD'S WILL

BURNING BUSH: DEVOTION 2

Mark O'Connor

Would it not be great if God would show up in front of us and tell us what He wants us to do? I have spent a lot of time pondering that over the years. I have spent so much time in prayer and study, asking the Holy Spirit to point me in the right direction. From minor decisions about a situation in my family to His call for me to do ministry, I have spent time waiting, struggling, and seeking God's will.

I am sometimes envious of our Old Testament counterparts. I recently taught a series about Moses in our Wednesday night student program. We talked about God doing amazing things in messy situations. Moses' life was indeed a messy one. From birth to death, Moses faced many obstacles and challenges. He ran from God and ran to God. He tried to escape and figure things out for himself only to find God chasing after him.

Picture yourself out in the middle of nowhere, and you come across this amazing spectacle. There is a bush set ablaze, but not burning. I may question my mental faculties at that point. Just as you may be coming to grips with what you are seeing, it speaks to you. These are the things that land you in somebody's office talking about your well being today. Yet, there you are, hearing the voice of the Lord, giving you some precise instructions. Coming to understand the gravity of the situation, you begin to realize you were destined for more than what you are currently doing.

If you take some time and read Exodus chapter 3, and I encourage you to do so, there is a lot more to the story. Moses refused to believe

that God would call him in all of his mess and brokenness to do the incredible things that were in his future. However, it is not Moses all along. Moses is a vessel. The Lord could have picked anybody, but He chose Moses.

I do not know what God has in store for you. I do not even know what God has in store for me. Yet, I have come to realize in the last several years that whatever it is that God lined up for me, He could do the same thing through any guy or girl off the street. So we can fight God's plan, or we can seek it. Incredible works will be done. Lives will be changed. The Gospel will advance either because of you or despite you. I chose to be a part of this incredible journey. I fought it for a while, a long while, and I still do from time to time. However, I am thankful that, while I am pretty sure I will not see a burning bush speaking to me anytime soon, I have the Holy Spirit guiding me and pointing me in the right direction. That is how it works. It may take some time, or it may hit you very suddenly, but always be seeking to fulfill His plan.

GOOD, BETTER, BEST

BURNING BUSH: DEVOTION 3

Roger Allen

"Then the Lord said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings.'" Exodus 3:7

In the time of Joseph, a famine pushed Jacob (Israel) and his sons to the land of Egypt. It was a land where there was food and shelter. It was a place where they could feel secure from the famine around them. As they became comfortable with their new surroundings, the Hebrews grew and prospered. One day this would change abruptly when a new and fearful Pharaoh ascended to the throne. Life changed dramatically for them. Enslaved, they toiled under a new taskmaster. Yet, the Lord saw their affliction and heard their cry.

We often think of an oppressor as a person, political system, or structure that puts undue hardship on us. It comes across as unfairly treating us in a manner that keeps us from prospering and growing. Weighted, we desperately seek solutions to our position in life. Our afflictions come in many forms. Searching for acceptance, relationships, or feelings of inadequacy, we search for ways to fill that void within us. In our spiritual famine, we will retreat to our Egypt. It may be food, drugs, the lust of the flesh, or even our jobs, but we will feed our oppression. Our oppressor will eventually require all from us. We will sacrifice all in an attempt to fill the emptiness. For a brief time, we may even believe we have achieved the desired result. The Israelites felt and did the same thing.

In all our folly, the Lord sees our suffering. Whether by our hands or others, we need to be delivered from our bondage. As with the Israelites, God has sent One who will rescue us. He will intercede on our behalf as our deliverer, rescuer, and our salvation. In our brokenness, we will leave the "Land of Goshen" for the "Land of Milk and Honey." His plans are designed to bring us out of oppression into life. He is Jesus.

Goshen met the need for a time. It was good, but good was not good enough. God offers better and even best.

Jeremiah 29:11 says, ***"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."***

ANSWERING PRAYERS

BURNING BUSH: DEVOTION 4

Pastor Gareth Volz

"Then the Lord said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.' But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?' He said, 'But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.'" Exodus 3:7-12

If someone were to ask you if you believe that God hears and answers our prayers, I am sure that just about everyone reading this devotional would say, "Amen." However, have you ever stopped to consider the various ways God chooses to answer the prayers of His people? God's people had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. They had been crying out to God to deliver them, and God heard their prayers. Yet, He answered them in His perfect time and in His perfect way.

Moses was tending his father-in-law, Jethro's sheep on the west side of the wilderness around Mt. Horeb, the mountain of God (Exodus

3:1). It was there that Moses had a new encounter with God. Out of a burning bush, God spoke to Moses and told him to go to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to let His people leave Egypt. This must have come as a shock to Moses because he had once been a powerful man in Egypt but fled to the wilderness because of a crime he had committed.

I heard a sermon a few years ago on God working upstream, and Moses is a prime example of this. As a baby, Moses was miraculously saved from a death sentence on all Hebrew male children age two and under and wound up being raised by Pharaoh's daughter in Pharaoh's palace. However, as a young man, he saw one of Pharaoh's commanders beating a Jewish slave, so Moses killed the Egyptian, and then fled into the desert. Here he met Jethro, married his daughter, and worked for him as a shepherd.

Out of the burning bush near Mt. Horeb, Moses heard something I am sure he never expected to hear from God – that he was going to be used by God to answer their prayers for deliverance from Egypt. Moses tried to tell God that he did not have the ability to do what God told him to do. However, God replied that He would be with Moses.

Have you ever considered that God might choose to use you to be part of the answer to someone else's prayer? I love the quote, "God doesn't call the equipped, God equips the called." Are you walking with God, studying His Word, and talking with Him each day? He may be using the things in your life to prepare you for His answer to someone else's prayer. When He calls you, do not question Him – just submit and see what amazing things He will do that will bless you and answer the prayer of another one of His children.

PASS IT ON

BURNING BUSH: DEVOTION 5

Jen Combs

"This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." Exodus 3:15

Reading this chunk of Scripture over and over, I kept coming back to this verse. I realize that Moses is having one heck of an experience on Mt. Horeb. He was simply taking his father-in-laws sheep to be fed when all of a sudden, the Lord is speaking to him in a burning bush. God said, "Tell them I AM who I AM sent you." Moses was in awe, terrified, and I guess his jaw dropped. But still this verse kept going through my mind, ***"…this is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."*** It made me think. "What am I doing to make sure that the Lord is being remembered for generations to come?"

You see, I love moments or situations that the Lord uses me. I am amazed at the ways He teaches me. I enjoy that He gives me all of those God stories. But am I passing them on? Do I tell my kids about them? Do I share them with my friends and family? Normally I rush home and tell my husband. But is that where it stops?

I would hate for my kids to grow up and not remember the Lord because we never talked about Him and the ways He is working or moving in our home. Is the Lord something I make them just read about, or are we experiencing Him and talking about His works? I am intentional, so we can remember Him for generations to come.

I am a little way off from grandkids, but I want to be able to sit and talk with them about all of the ways I have seen the Lord be real in

my life. How about you? What has the Lord done lately? Who do you need to share it with? It does not matter if it is big or small. I challenge you to share with someone today!

THE GOD OF PROMISES

BURNING BUSH: DEVOTION 6

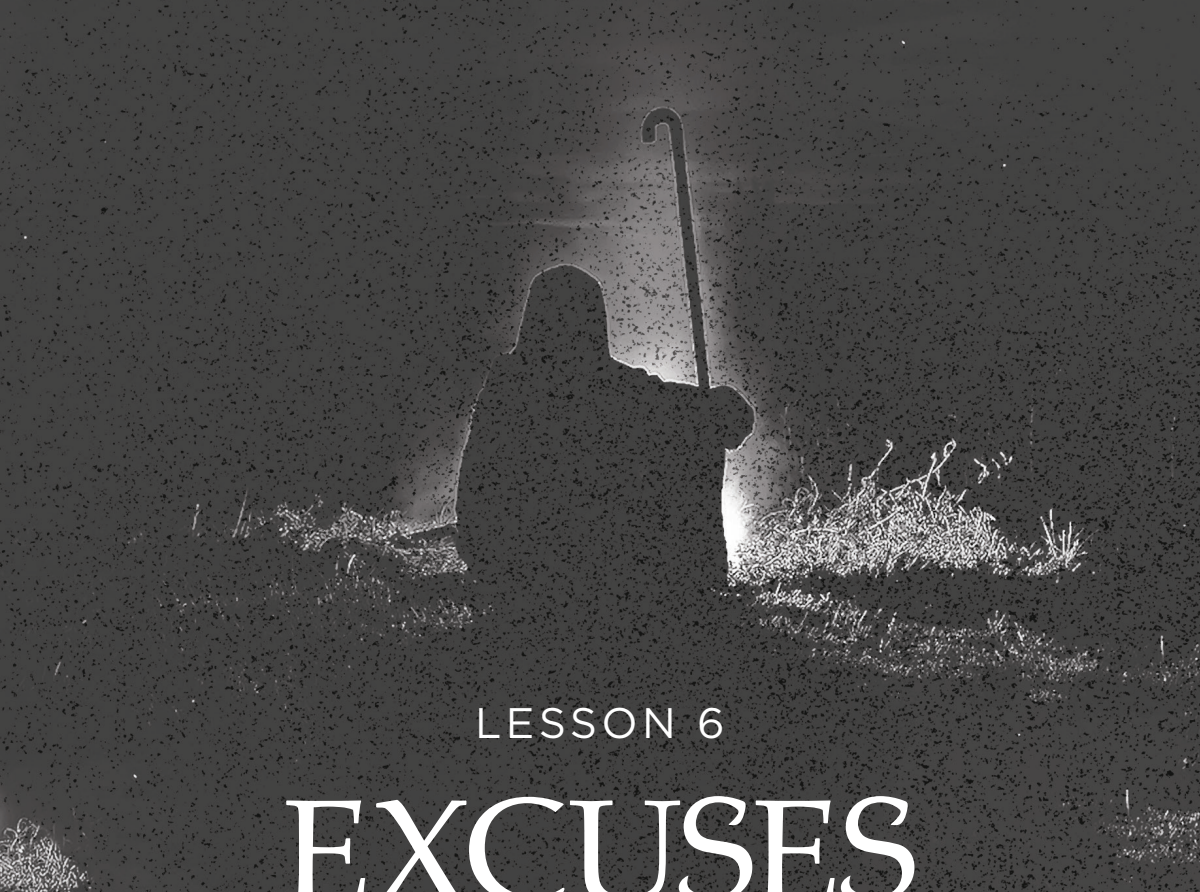
James Mann

Exodus 3:13-22 gives us a promise that God has for His people. ***"I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, and I PROMISE that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt…"*** (verse 16). In our society, promises, and even people's word, do not carry the same amount of weight as they once did. Everyone reading this can think of a time that someone made a promise that ended up not coming to fruition. This is difficult due to the fact we are imperfect beings. We are also limited in what we can actually accomplish. We have outside factors that may make it impossible to follow through with a promise. I think that we often take for granted the fact that we have a God that controls everything. This even goes for these outside factors.

We need to start looking at these promises that God makes with His people throughout the Bible and realize the weight that they carry. Joshua 23:14 tells us, ***"And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed."*** This verse shows us just how powerful these promises are. As we read throughout the Bible, we can see all of God's promises, whether they are about supplying what is needed, protection, or deliverance, and we can see them come true.

This section in Exodus is so important because it is God promising to guide His people out of Egypt. From the Israelites' point of view, this probably seemed impossible. They had been under the control of Pharaoh for hundreds of years. They got to the point where they

had lost all hope. God was able to provide them this hope. If we look through the Bible and remember the weight that His promises hold, we should be strengthened and encouraged during our times of struggle. One example I like to turn to is Isaiah 41:10, which tells us, ***"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."*** These are the kinds of promises that God has given to us, which held meaning then, should hold meaning to us now, and will continue until long after we are gone.



LESSON 6

EXCUSES

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

When I was in Seminary, I worked security from 9:00 pm to 7:30 am five nights a week. I was married, our son was born, and I was going to school full-time. One night I was totally exhausted. I called the manager and asked if they needed me. He asked if I was sick. I refused to lie, but he needed something to write down. I suggested, "Preventive Illness." He agreed, and I was all set.

On their website, *Reader's Digest* has an article entitled, *"The 34 Most Ridiculous Excuses People Actually Used to Get Out of Work."* Here are some of the actual excuses:

- "Grandma tried to poison me. Again."
- An employee got stuck in the blood pressure machine at the grocery store and could not get out.
- An employee's wife found out he was cheating, and he had to spend the day retrieving his belongings from the dumpster.
- An employee could not come to work because she accidentally got on a plane.
- An employee had to attend the funeral of his wife's cousin's pet, because he was an uncle and pallbearer.
- An employee said that someone glued her doors and windows shut so she could not leave the house to come to work.
- An employee's false teeth flew out the window while driving down the highway.
- An employee was experiencing traumatic stress from a large spider found in her home, and had to stay home to deal with it.
- An employee caught their uniform on fire by putting it in the microwave to dry.
- An employee could not decide what to wear.
- An employee woke up in a good mood and did not want to ruin it.

What are some of the craziest excuses you have used or heard?

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Excuses are not anything new. They go all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Moses was no exception.

1. Moses gives excuses – Round One.

Exodus 4:1-9 says, ***"Then Moses answered, 'But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.'" The Lord said to him, 'What is that in your hand?' He said, 'A staff.' And he said, 'Throw it on the ground.' So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it. But the Lord said to Moses, 'Put out your hand and catch it by the tail'—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand— 'that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.' Again, the Lord said to him, 'Put your hand inside your cloak.' And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. Then God said, 'Put your hand back inside your cloak.' So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. 'If they will not believe you,' God said, 'or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.'"***

What excuse did Moses give for not wanting to go deliver the people of Israel?

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Our prayer should include Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication (ACTS). It is our time of conversing with God Almighty. When I enter the area of Supplication, I do not bring requests to God because He is not aware of them or does not know the desires of my heart. I pray because He told me to. It is an act of obedience.

Moses was told to go to the leaders and speak. God did not command him to persuade them or convince them. He told him to go and speak. He even told him what to say.

Unfortunately, we give the same lame excuse today, “They will not listen.” God did not call or direct us to “save” people; that is His job. He called us to go and speak. He has even told us what to say. It is all about obedience.

Who is God calling you to go speak to?

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_____
_____

What does He want you to say?

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The topic is not ability, but availability. Can God count on you?

God gives the ability. What abilities did He give Moses?

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2. Moses gives excuses – Round Two.

Moses does not stop with just one excuse. Exodus 4:10-17 records more of the conversation, ***"But Moses said to the Lord, 'Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.' Then the Lord said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.' But he said, 'Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.' Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, 'Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs.'"***

What is Moses' excuse from this passage?

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Acts 7:20-22 challenges Moses' perspective, ***"At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God's sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house, and when***

he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds."

Why do you think Moses responded to God the way he did?

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What was God's response?

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People have always worried about what they were supposed to say. God has chosen to remind us that our part is obedience. Results are His category.

Jeremiah 1:9 says, ***"Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, 'Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.'"***

Matthew 10:19-20 adds, ***"When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."***

Luke 21:14-15 continues the concept, ***"Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict."***

How should these verses challenge and comfort us today?

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What "compromise" did God propose to Moses?

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We are often reminded that God has placed people around us. We might even go a step further and reference Esther 4:14 by saying it might be ***"for such a time as this."*** Clearly, it might be God's timing, and He is allowing us to be involved with what He has planned in someone else's life. This is so true. However, we also need to look around and see who God has placed around us as a teammate. Jesus regularly sent His disciples out in pairs. Identify the person you trust, pray together, and "target" who God wants you both to reach out to with the Good News of hope in Jesus Christ.

Set the excuses aside and watch God use you beyond yourself.

“I HAVE THE POWER”

EXCUSES: DEVOTION 1

Pastor Jayson Combs

I am an eighties kid. I would turn on the TV and watch *“StarSerach.”* I would watch shows like *“Double Dare”* and *“You Can’t Do That On Television.”* Girls wore banana clips in their hair, and I had one of those cool wrist bands that you could slap on your wrist (that was until some kid cut himself with it and we lost them all). My favorite show though was *“He-man.”* If you come into my office today, you will see my childhood He-man figures on a shelf. *He-man* would transform from a cowardly man when he would say the words “I have the power,” while holding up his sword. He would change into the great superhero that I loved.

At the beginning of Exodus, Moses has been told by God to go save the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt. Moses basically turned to God and said I do not have the power to do that. In verse 1 of chapter 4, Moses says, ***“But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice for they will say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you.’”*** Moses felt powerless.

Through the next few verses, we see God showing Moses who actually has the power. I know in my walk with Christ there are times I have been scared and felt powerless. However, it is in those times where we can really come to understand who has the power. God has called all believers to go into the world and preach the Gospel. There have been times when I have felt so powerless when giving the Gospel. God clearly tells in His words that it is not through the words that we have but through His power that people are saved. In 1 Corinthians 1:17-18 (NIV) it says, ***“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and***

eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Salvation was not because Paul was an amazing man with words. Salvation was and is because God moves with power. In 2 Timothy 1:7 (NIV), it says, ***"For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline."***

I am so glad that God reaches down and through His power and uses me. I only have that power because of Jesus. Today when you feel powerless, remember to tune to Christ and ask Him for the power to live the life that He has called you to live.

MOSES, MOSES, MOSES

EXCUSES: DEVOTION 2

LaRae Wing

So often Moses is criticized for his hesitance to serve as God's spokesman to Pharaoh. God had spoken to him from the burning bush. We think, "Wow, Moses! How can you hesitate to do everything He tells you to do? You have heard God's voice. He has spoken to you from a dry desert bush that is on fire, but was never consumed. Are you kidding me?" Not only that but God had given him signs (rod to a snake – Exodus 4:4-5, leprous hand healed – Exodus 4:6-8); yet Moses was still hesitant to believe that God could equip him to be His representative.

We wonder, "Why?" How could Moses be uncertain? Maybe his faith was weak. Maybe he was afraid because of his past (Exodus 2:11-15). Maybe he liked his life the way it was. Whatever the reason, we criticize him for just not doing what God had told him to do. Is that just like us? Are we critical despite our own weaknesses?

I specifically recall a time several years ago that God impressed me to plan a special activity for the senior women in my church, and what were my first thoughts? "I cannot do this. It is too much. I am too busy. Why me, Lord? I have never done anything like this before. I need help, a lot of help." I then immediately thought, "I cannot do this without Sherry" (my best friend and whiz at organization and timelines). How could I be critical of Moses? I was behaving just as he did.

Have you ever had doubts when you felt God's leading? Have you struggled with feeling inadequate or following through? Please remember that Philippians 4:19 says, ***"And my God will supply***

every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." We often feel this only pertains to material necessities, but when God says ***"every need"*** He means all needs - material, physical, emotional, and spiritual.

If you continue to read in Exodus, you will see that Moses, with the help of his brother Aaron, did acquiesce to his calling from God. God's faithfulness to the mission He assigned to Moses is accomplished over and over again. Also in other biblical accounts, we can see that when God's child follows His lead, there is victory and blessing (Abraham, Joseph, Gideon, David, and Elijah). If God leads you, you can rest assured that He has and will equip you.

"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it." I Thessalonian 5:23-24

EXCUSES, EXCUSES

EXCUSES: DEVOTION 3

Richie Henson

As a kid, I hated doing my homework. I felt that if I spent the whole day at school, there was no good reason for me to keep working on school work once I got home. I mean, think about it, when my parents came home from work, they did not work another two hours. I think my logic was sound, but my parents always got on me about doing my homework. So, to combat this, I began to make excuses at every turn as to why I was unable to do my homework. It even got to the point where I was flat out lying that I did not have any homework. When I think about the feelings of avoidance at any cost, I am reminded of Moses in Exodus 4:10, ***"But Moses said to the Lord, 'Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.'"***

Moses is standing before God in a burning bush, and he has the audacity to make an excuse about not being able to speak to Pharaoh. If anyone was capable, it was Moses. As we find out in the book of Acts, Moses spent the first 40 years of his life living in Pharaoh's court. He knew all the rules and regulations for interacting with Pharaoh. However, Moses was all about the excuses, I believe, because he was afraid of the enormity of God's call.

It is easy to judge Moses at this moment. We can easily assume that if God appeared to us in a burning bush, we would stand at attention and take our marching orders without blinking an eye. However, I think on my own life, and I must admit, there have been many times where God has called me to something, and I have made excuses rather than heeded the call.

Quite a few years ago, I felt God calling my family to Michigan. We were living in California at the time, and I was terrified of moving. I made an excuse after excuse to God. I told Him I had a good job and friends I could not leave. I asked God to give me some time to get things in order. However, much like God did with Moses, He continued to pursue me with the call to Michigan. Eventually, I ran from God so fervently on this matter, and I began to experience God's discipline. It was at this point, I had to stop making excuses and fulfill God's calling.

The last few years in Michigan have not been perfect, but I know this is exactly where God wants me. I can see why He brought my family here, and I am excited for all that He will do.

God calls each of us to action in our lives. He has set aside good works for us and desires for us to fulfill them to His glory and the salvation of the world. However, this call is often scary or uncomfortable. We feel unprepared or unworthy. We must continually remember that we do not have to be prepared or worthy because a great God goes before us preparing a way for victory. My prayer for us this week is that we would run after God's calling on our lives with the assurance that we need not be perfect to do God's will, we must simply trust in the plan of God.

ALL IN

EXCUSES: DEVOTION 4

Pastor Ryan Story

I graduated high school the year a revolution was beginning. The summer of 2003, Chris Moneymaker won the World Series of Poker's main event. What is so revolutionary about this is that Chris won his spot in the $10,000 buy-in tournament by winning an online poker contest. This sparked a phenomenon where any "average Joe" dreamed of winning it all, and I was included. A group of my buddies started getting together every Friday, and we all got "really good" at Texas Hold'em. We would play for hours each week, and once a month we would go to larger tournaments in hopes to make some extra money. In poker, there is a "move" that a person can do that is the ultimate gamble, the "all in." Going "all in" means you risk all of your chips, assuming you have fewer chips than the other opponents. This move can be extremely risky to use flippantly because it can cause you to go broke or give your opponent a lot more chips. So when you say you are going to go "all in," you better be ready to go "all in" with the potential consequences.

In Exodus chapter nine, Pharaoh finally is seemingly willing to go "all in" and give Moses the freedom for the Israelites. Each one of the plagues that God sent finally caused Pharaoh to say, ***"This time I have sinned; the Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. Plead with the Lord, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer"*** (Exodus 9:27-28). After seven acts of God displaying His power to Pharaoh and all of Egypt, it seemed as if the Children of Israel were about to exit their 400-year bondage. In the midst of a hail storm that had yet to be seen again, Moses was able to see past all the emotion and commotion. God gave Moses some amazing insight, and he calls Pharaoh's bluff. In Exodus 9:30-32, Moses said,

"But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the Lord God. (The flax and the barley were struck down, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. But the wheat and the emmer were not struck down, for they are late in coming up.)."

At that moment Pharaoh's "all in" did not work. The king of Egypt thought he could go "all in" with some fake repentance and lip service to God and Moses, but he got caught. The hardest part about an "all in" move in poker is that there is no backup plan. You either win big or lose big. Pharaoh was trying to win big by getting Moses to stop the hail, but Pharaoh was not truly crying out for repentance. He knew that he could still have wheat for food after the storm stopped. Sadly, this is our spiritual lives. We call out to God in extreme hardships, knowing full well we have a backup plan. We have something to which we can fall back. I ask you when you pray and cry out to God for help or rescue, are you going "all in" by only relying on Him, or are you counting on something other than God to help?

As Christ followers, we should be able to go "all in" with our trust in any struggle, situation, or storm that comes. There is never a moment where God is not in control. Even the moment we think "we lost," God is already working that out to better shape us for our future. Sadly, we struggle to have the kind of "all in" faith that we should to live with God. Imagine what God could do with a church that was not holding onto the wheat of our lives and trusted God in every area? How amazing would it be to be part of a church that gave with absolute trust that God was going to use it to rescue local families? Imagine if we served with the unwavering trust that by our efforts of going "all in" with the passion we would get to see people loved and cared for and eventually give their lives to Jesus. As Christians, we should have only the plan that God has for us, and when we trust that His plan is perfect, that is when we can confidently slide our chips across the table and declare, "I am all in."

OBEDIENCE ≠ SMOOTH SAILING

EXCUSES: DEVOTION 5

Holly Boston

Have you ever stepped out in obedience to God only to have your situation get worse? In Exodus 5:1-14, the Israelites experience exactly this. Moses, Aaron, and the people went before Pharaoh to deliver a message from God. They requested three days off of work to go into the wilderness to worship God. Certainly, a vacation to spend time with God would have been approved. However, not only did Pharaoh deny their request but he ordered additional work expectations, making it impossible to meet their quotas which led to harsh punishment. Where was God? Where was the God who saw their affliction and promised deliverance? Obedience led to suffering.

In April 1995, I came to a place where life was so overwhelming, and I needed someone to carry my burdens. In brokenness and need, I received Christ as my Savior. Over the next three years of my life, I was bombarded with trials: a cancer scare, two surgeries, job change, job loss, three major moves, and a child diagnosed with Autism. Where in the world was God? Life with Christ was not what I expected, and I was asking the same questions. However, by the grace of God, this is when my walk actually began. Over the last 25 years, God has taught me three truths about why trials follow obedience.

The first truth is the reality of persecution. In John 15:18, Jesus says: ***"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."*** Moses, Aaron, and the Israelites experienced hatred and rejection when they spoke out of obedience. As believers, we need to remember God's warning when we experience persecution and not be surprised. We need to allow it to remind us that God's

Word is truth and cling to His promises of blessing and reward. Luke 6:22-23 adds, ***"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven."***

The second truth is that we have a real enemy who ***"prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour"*** (1 Peter 5:8). Have you ever noticed that when you commit to serving or growing in Christ, you are bombarded with roadblocks? My daughter and I were involved in the Passion Play for a number of years. Every year we were stunned at the illness, injury, or circumstances that would threaten our participation in the play. I watch the same thing happen when people commit to attending a Bible study. Believer, the last thing your enemy wants is for you to grow in your faith or be used by God to build His kingdom! We must be determined and go to battle. Ephesians 6:11 says, ***"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."***

The third truth is that God allows bad things to happen to His people. Job is the most vivid illustration of this truth. God describes Job as blameless and upright (1:1) and yet He offers up Job to Satan for torment (1:8). Job suffered in ways we can not comprehend. A look at Job's story gives us three reasons God allows His people to suffer. The first is to test our faith. Job's determination to cling to his faith is noted in his statement, ***"Though he slay me, I will hope in him"*** (13:15). The second reason is to grow our faith. In 42:5, Job makes an amazing statement, ***"I had heard you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you."*** Most of what I know and believe about the Lord is from being in the pit and clinging to Him. The third reason God allows suffering is for the benefit of others. Job's friends had a front row seat to Job's suffering. They witnessed both his struggle and his faith. For unbelievers to only see the smooth sailing is to give

them a false impression of living for Christ. Be willing to show your pain.

At the end of the book of Job, we see God restore Job and all that he had lost. Free commercial: Restoration to God does not always look the way we expect. Though the Bible does not say, I imagine Job was given plenty of opportunities to share his story to others in similar situations. Do not allow your pain to be in vain. Use it to comfort and encourage others. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 we read, ***"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."***

Take away: All the trials and suffering of this life are sifted through the loving hands of the Sovereign God of the universe. There is a purpose for our pain. May we glorify Him as walk the rough roads.

PAIN AND PROMISES

EXCUSES: DEVOTION 6

Sierra Combs

Sometimes we bring a lot of pain upon ourselves. We sin, we do things we know we should not, and we have to pay the consequences. Yet other times, we just get a bad deal. Sometimes the storms of life or wrath of other people just beat down on us seemingly out of nowhere and for no reason. Maybe you are experiencing this right now. You might be trying your best, working hard, and doing everything you are supposed to do, but the trouble keeps coming.

A similar scenario happened for the Israelites in Exodus chapter 5. Here they were, a giant group of people enslaved by the Egyptians, doing their daily job of making bricks, when the trouble came. In the previous chapters, we see God telling Moses that he is the guy who God was going to use to free His people. God told Moses exactly what to do and what to say to Pharaoh, asking him to let the Israelites go so they could worship God. God even told Moses that Pharaoh was going to reject his request and make things difficult for him and the nation of Israel before the promise was fulfilled. This is exactly what happened. After hearing from Moses, Pharaoh not only rejected his request but also decided to take it out on the Israelites by making their work impossible. He immediately took away the materials they needed to make bricks while demanding they make the same amount as before. When they did not meet the quota, they were brutally beaten and abused. To say the Israelites were unhappy is an understatement. Instead of running to God or even to Moses, they instead ran to Pharaoh in hopes of finding a solution. ***"Then the foremen of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, 'Why do you treat your servants like this? No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, 'Make bricks!'***

And behold, your servants are beaten; but the fault is in your own people'" (Exodus 5:15-16). Pharaoh basically told them that it was not his problem, to stop being lazy, and to figure it out or pay the consequence. As terrified and angry as the Israelites were with Pharaoh, they were even more furious with Moses, who they had just warmly welcomed as their deliverer. When they see him they yell, ***"May the Lord judge and punish you for making us stink before Pharaoh and his officials. You have put a sword into their hands, an excuse to kill us!"*** (5:21 NLT). Here they were, wishing curses and judgment upon Moses, the one who was sent by God to liberate them. Unfortunately, bad attitudes did not stop with them. Verses 22-23 (NLT) tell us, ***"Moses went back to the Lord and protested, 'Why have you brought all this trouble on your own people, Lord? Why did you send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh as your spokesman, he has been even more brutal to your people. And you have done nothing to rescue them!'"***

We can see that when the trouble came, Moses and the Israelites did not respond well. Notice how quickly they had forgotten what God had promised them. Not only did He promise to deliver them, but He also warned them that it was not going to be a simple path. Pharaoh was not going to make it easy. It was going to take some time, and it was going to be difficult and chaotic. Even though they did not bring this chaos on themselves, they quickly let their bad attitudes and lack of faith get the best of them.

The same is so often true for us. God has given us some pretty amazing promises, all of them true and all of them worth it. But He does not promise that the road to their fulfillment will be easy. Instead, He gently reminds us that in this world we will face a variety of trials and tribulations. This world is full of trouble and chaos, some of which we bring upon ourselves and some that are a natural result of the fallen sin-filled world that we live. It is unavoidable, and the

enemy is not going to make it easy for us. But God's way is always the best way! I encourage you today to keep pressing forward. Do not forget or doubt the promises He has made to you. Trust in His perfect plan, and I promise that it will be worth it in the end!



LESSON 7

MOSES CHALLENGES PHARAOH

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

I read a story about a dad who got an unnerving phone call from his daughter's school. The secretary said that his daughter ate some sort of fungus on the playground. They had already contacted Poison Control and had saved a sample. They did not think it would be a problem. He rushed to the school.

The teacher explained that when the little girl came in from recess, her face was filthy. The teacher asked her what had happened. The little girl proclaimed, "There were free marshmallows outside!" They both then proceeded outside. The little girl pointed to the "marshmallows" on the playground bark. It turned out being a fungus called "dog vomit fungus."

After her body "rejected" the treat, the little girl was fine.

Sometimes things are not what they appear to be. Pastor Caleb tells a funny story about being duped into thinking a cheap imitation of a designer cologne was the real thing.

Have you ever had an experience with something that was a cheap imitation?

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1. Moses saw the Real Deal.

Exodus 4:27-31 records the start of Moses and Aaron as a team, ***"The Lord said to Aaron, 'Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.' So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. And Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which he had sent him to speak, and all the signs that he had commanded him to do. Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together***

all the elders of the people of Israel. Aaron spoke all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped."

The Lord had Aaron meet Moses on the mountain where Moses saw the burning bush.

What did Aaron and Moses do for the people of Israel?

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What was the response of the people?

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The people recognized that Aaron and Moses represented the true God.

2. Pharaoh did not know of a Real Deal.

Not everyone was receptive to what the Lord had to offer. Exodus 5:1-4 says, ***"Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness." But Pharaoh said, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.' Then they said, 'The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest he fall upon us***

with pestilence or with the sword.' But the king of Egypt said to them, 'Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get back to your burdens.'"

What is the first question Pharaoh asked?

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Pharaoh did not know the Lord. Let that phrase sink deep into your heart. There are people who do not know the Lord. The void in their life is enormous and growing, but they miss the offer.

3. Pharaoh denied the Real Deal.

Exodus 7:10-13 continues the story, ***"So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said."***

What was similar and different about the staffs?

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I am wary of snakes. I feel they are unpredictable and always ready to strike. I never remember the cute poem to figure out if it is poisonous or not:

> "Yellow touching red: You are dead."
> "Red against yellow can kill a fellow."
> "Red touching black: Safe for Jack."
> "Red Touch Yellow, Kills a Fellow;
> Red Touch Black, Venom Lack."

Either way, if I was Pharaoh, I would not want you to imitate something I do not like. Why did they think making cheap imitations was a good idea? Why not throw down a staff and have it be a Mongoose and make it interesting? Two negatives do not always make a positive.

How do you feel about snakes?

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_____
_____

In the end, how do you think each group responded to Aaron's staff?

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Pharaoh's wise men, sorcerers, and magicians could only offer a cheap imitation. It clearly represents the world. They were not genuine or authentic. So many words can be used to describe these fakers: fraud, imposter, pseudo, faker, pretender, juke, hoax, hypocrite, phony, and dupery.

The Bible warns us in several passages to be on the alert or reject cheap imitations. There are at least nine things of which we are told to beware:

1. False gods - ***"You shall have no other gods before me."*** Exodus 20:3

2. False prophets - ***"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."*** Matthew 7:15

3. False christs - ***"For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect."*** Matthew 24:24

4. Another Jesus - ***"For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough."*** 2 Corinthians 11:4

5. Another gospel - ***"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel."*** Galatians 1:6

6. False brethren - ***"On frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers."*** 2 Corinthians 11:26

7. False teachers - ***"But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master***

who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed." 2 Peter 2:1-2

8. False apostles - ***"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ."*** 2 Corinthians 11:13

9. Satan who deceives the whole world - ***"And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him."*** Revelation 12:9

Which of these imposters is most prevalent today?

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The world tries to fill a void that can only be supplied by the Gospel through the work of Jesus Christ. Satan wants us to think that peace, hope, and fulfillment come through relationships, possessions, titles, drugs, and alcohol. These will not satisfy in the long run.

Imitation is not always a form of flattery. Sometimes it is intended to take one down a road that has a Dead End.

FREEDOM

MOSES CHALLENGES PHARAOH: DEVOTION 1

Pastor Caleb Combs

In Exodus chapter 6, we see God speaking to Moses and telling him to go to the children of Israel and let them know that they can and will have freedom. For a few hundred years, the Israelites were slaves under Egyptian rule and were treated very harshly. From the killing of their children to their horrific work conditions, the Israelites were brutalized by their oppressors. Moses did not see himself as qualified to lead the Israelites, and yet God still chose him. I am so thankful God chooses to use unqualified people. He qualifies the unqualified and calls the ordinary to do the extraordinary! I certainly love the fact that God uses me in spite of my faults and failures, just like He did with Moses. Moses went to God's people and declared to them their freedom and that God had sent him to free them from the bondage to the Egyptians.

While this should have been a time of rejoicing, their response is heartbreaking. Exodus 6:9 (NLT) tells us, ***"So Moses told the people of Israel what the Lord had said, but they refused to listen anymore. They had become too discouraged by the brutality of their slavery."*** What a heartbreaking verse. "I am here to set you free," Moses said, and yet they refused to listen because their circumstance had become too disheartening to handle. These children of God had come to identify themselves as slaves. God heard their cries and sent a way of deliverance, yet because of their difficult situation, they relegated themselves to being in bondage forever.

The 19th century in America revealed the greatest darkness in our country's history, slavery. The American culture had permeated this

disgusting concept that whites were superior to blacks and would buy and sell human beings. However, in the mid-1800s a change began to happen, and our country was thrown into a civil war. President Lincoln passed the Emancipation Proclamation and the thirteenth amendment abolishing slavery, and yet while the slaves were set free, many stayed on the same plantations where they continued to work under harsh and brutal conditions. W.E.B. Du Bois wrote, "The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery." The American slaves were beaten, raped, killed and yet they stayed. Why? Perhaps it is for the same reason as the Israelites in Egypt. Exodus 6:9 shows us a glimpse of pain by telling us that "their Spirit was broken." They had become too discouraged with the environment around them to seek and accept their freedom. The brutality they faced was something most of us reading this will never physically understand; however, the Bible talks about a type of slavery every human being will face - the slavery to sin. The enemy wants to destroy our identity, just like the captors of Egypt and early America. He wants to take our spirit and discourage us enough to give up. But God has granted us freedom from sin by what Jesus has done on the cross. His Word tells us not to lose heart in our situations and struggles and to know that God has given us freedom.

You may know someone who struggles with this, or maybe you struggle with it yourself. The enemy has discouraged you to the point of giving up because your situation seems to have no way to get better. DO NOT GIVE UP! Jesus has set the captives free from sin and leaves the enemy with no control! His Word is full of these promises. John 8:36 says that ***"if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."*** In 2 Corinthians 3:17, it says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." Galatians 5:1 reminds us, ***"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."*** God

has removed the bondage of sin from our lives, and yet often times we run right back to it. We need to live as free men and women by the power of Jesus Christ, as free children of God.

GO!

MOSES CHALLENGES PHARAOH: DEVOTION 2

Isaiah Combs

"On the day when the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, the Lord said to Moses, 'I am the Lord; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you.'" Exodus 6:28-29

I do not know about you, but I believe the job given by God to Moses is a tough pill to swallow. Moses had basically run away from all his problems in Egypt and started a new life in the wilderness. Then God told him He wanted him to go back to Egypt. He not only wanted him to go back to Egypt but go and tell Pharaoh, the king of the land of Egypt, that God had a message for him that was going to change his economy in a big way.

God's message given to Moses was to tell Pharaoh to let His people leave. The Jewish people were slaves of the Egyptian empire, and the economic catastrophe that would follow if the Jewish people were released would be a disaster of epic proportions. Of course, Pharaoh said no, and Moses' life and the job got a lot harder.

God may have a plan for your life that may require drastic measures economically or locational. It may be hard and get harder. God told my wife and me to get out of the military after I had spent nine years of my life. It meant we would leave steady pay, retirement, and the comforts that we grew to love. Now, I would not change a thing. The path that God has taken my wife and me on has been incredible, and we are excited to see what He holds for us in the future.

God may have a plan for your life that may require drastic measures economically or locational. It may be hard and get harder. But just

like Moses, God may want you to go to a place where you are uncomfortable or uncertain. God used Moses in a great way through it, and He has great plans for you as well.

FAILURE?

MOSES CHALLENGES PHARAOH: DEVOTION 3

Jill Osmon

Do you ever feel that God has put you in a situation that you feel unprepared and ill-equipped to handle? That is where we find Moses in Exodus 6:30, ***"But Moses said to the Lord, 'Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips. How will Pharaoh listen to me?'"*** Have we all been there? We say or think, "God, I think you have the wrong person, why would anyone listen to me?" However, God with an avalanche of wisdom and patience is so kind to Moses. In chapter 7, God shows Moses and Aaron how He will provide.

First, we see that God equipped Moses and Aaron to relay His message to Pharaoh. Exodus 7:1-2 says, ***"And the Lord said to Moses, 'See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land.'"*** He not only equipped them to relay the message, but He also gave them the message to tell Pharaoh. God's ability to provide in every situation continues to amaze me. It reassures me that if I rely on Him, He will provide and equip me for anything the world throws at me.

Second, God told them how the "plan" would fail. Can you imagine being Moses and Aaron? God laid this plan out and then in verse 4; God said, ***"Pharaoh will not listen to you."*** God prepared and equipped Moses but told them, guys, it is not going to work; Pharaoh would let Israel go, but He still wanted them to go and boldly proclaim His name. Does it feel like life is that way sometimes? God asks for us to be bold, to proclaim His name and the world laughs and refuses to listen and walks away. What do we do then? We let God handle

it, just like He handled Pharaoh and the Egyptians. In the end, they knew their role was to obey, and God would take care of the rest.

God equips and provides, and even though it may seem like the end result does not make sense, God's will will always win, and His ways will always be for His glory.

WHO DO YOU KNOW?

MOSES CHALLENGES PHARAOH: DEVOTION 4

Max Sinclair

Many times in our life we have moments of great clarity and then almost immediately followed by great confusion. Our faith will be rock solid in Christ, we will know that God's will is prevailing, and we will follow it, but then just as we step out on faith and try to live by it, things around us begin to crumble. This has happened to my family and me. My wife and I stepped out on faith in what we thought was God's will and we were quite abruptly reminded that we were following what we wanted and not what He wanted.

I see in this passage of Scripture the will of the Lord quite aggressively shown to Moses and his brother, ***"The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them"*** (Exodus 7:5). That verse shows how we as Christians can forget who God truly is. He is not Zeus who supposedly throws lightning bolts from the sky, or the Egyptian god, Ra who is believed by some to live in the sun. He is not the Mongolian's Eternal Blue Sky that covers our head for us to run; God is not Mars with his mighty battle plate. He is not like the gods of the Aztec who require the still-beating hearts of their sacrifices. Our God is the Lord. Let that sink in; our God is the God who hung the stars in the sky and named them, the same God who put the hair on your head, or for some took it away. Our God is the God who gave us air to breathe, light to see, sounds to hear, and food to eat.

Over the years, I myself have forgotten those things. The simple fact that God is the Lord will elude me and I will think He is like a genie from a bottle to grant me my requests, or that He, like from the movie

"Bruce Almighty," is just a kid on an anthill with a magnifying glass trying to catch me on fire when I step out of line. No, our God is the Lord, He is and will always be the God, and there is no changing that. Think over His names today and see how they describe who He is.

YHWH-Niss'I – "The LORD Our Banner" (Exodus 17:8–15)
YHWH-Rapha – "The LORD that Heals" (Exodus 15:26)
YHWH-Ro'i – "The LORD My Shepherd" (Psalms 23:1)
YHWH-Shalom – "The LORD Our Peace" (Judges 6:24)
YHWH-Shammah – "The LORD Is Present" (Ezekiel 48:35)
YHWH-Tsidkenu – "The LORD Our Righteousness" (Jeremiah 23:6)
YHWH-Yireh (Adonai-Jireh) – "The LORD Will Provide" (Genesis 22:14)

COUNTERFEITS EXPOSED

MOSES CHALLENGES PHARAOH: DEVOTION 5

Sierra Combs

The words of God can always be trusted. That is a 100% guarantee. However, we are mere humans, and even the most trusting among us can waver in our faith. Sometimes we just want tangible proof. Because God is good and knows how we operate (because He created us!), He often confirms His truths to us in various ways. Sometimes it is through the gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit, or through another brother or sister in Christ. Other times it comes with more pizazz - like a crazy and large scale miracle. However, He chooses to do so, these signs prove that what He says is true, that He is trustworthy, and that we should listen to Him. In the book of Exodus, we see God making bold statements and huge promises. We also see Him backing those promises with the proof that He can be trusted. In chapter 8, God decides that it is time for people to start listening.

God had a big plan at hand. It was time for His people, the Israelites, to be set free from their bondage to the nation of Egypt. Their deliverance was at hand. God called up a man named Moses to be the guy to help get the job done. He also gave Moses a helper, his brother Aaron, to help accomplish the mission. Moses and Aaron knew they had a big job ahead of them. They knew that merely telling Pharaoh that God was telling him to let a couple million of his slaves go free would not be a simple thing. “Never gonna happen,” is much more likely the answer they knew they would get from the King of Egypt. Yet they trusted that God would take care of it and decided to obey the (seemingly crazy) things He asked them to do. He did not disappoint them! Today we are going to focus on Exodus chapter 7 verses 8-13. Here we see God telling Moses and Aaron

that He is going to show some proof of who He is and how much power He yields. ***"Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'When Pharaoh says to you, 'Prove yourselves by working a miracle,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.'' So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent"*** (Exodus 7:8-10).

I know we live in an age where we see movies with crazy special effects, or magic shows with incredible illusions, but this was long before all of that. This was not an illusion; it was the power of God at work. In this instance, the proof was meant for Pharaoh. He wanted to know why he should trust Moses, and why Yahweh- the true God of the Israelites- was any different than all of the gods of Egypt. Instead of being convinced, he decided to replicate it so he could ignore it. Verses 11-13 tell us, ***"Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. Still, Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said."***

I wish I could tell you how exactly the Egyptian sorcerers performed their replication. Perhaps for them, it was an illusion. Or perhaps it was the power of the enemy, Satan himself, that caused their staffs actually to turn into snakes. What I do know is that Satan is the ultimate deceiver and for every good and perfect thing that God offers, the enemy always offers a counterfeit option that will lure people away from God. You would think a stick turning into a snake and then eating all the other snakes would be enough proof to convince Pharaoh to listen to God, but yet his heart stayed hardened. Perhaps one of the reasons for that was that he allowed his heart to be content with the counterfeit.

How often do we do the same? Over and over again God proves Himself true, but instead of being convinced we make excuses. We explain the truth away, so we do not have to listen to God and do what He says. We accept the enemy's lies and in doing so miss out on the good gifts and promises that God offers us. Just like in this story, there is a big difference between God's truth and the enemy's counterfeit. The other snakes or staffs were devoured. Aaron's serpent was the only one left, leaving the Egyptians with nothing left on which to lean. Aaron was left with the support of his staff and the support of His God. Friend, do not let your heart be content with the counterfeits of this world. One day they will all be exposed. Only God's perfect truth will remain. He has proven faithful, and His plans are in your best interest. It is time to listen!

OBEDIENCE

MOSES CHALLENGES PHARAOH: DEVOTION 6

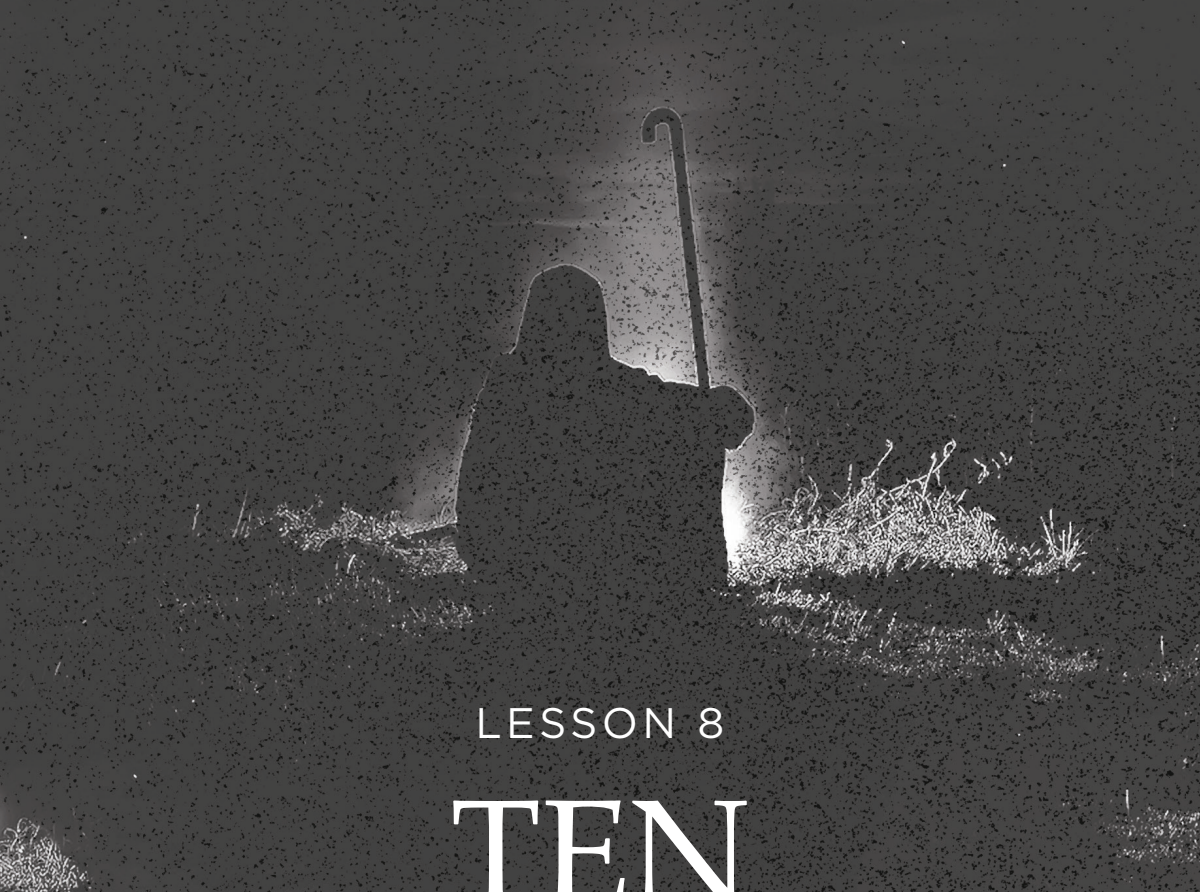
Noble Baird

Obedience. By definition, it means, "an act or instance of obeying." Naturally, after reading this definition, it then led me to the definition of obey: "to follow the commands or guidance of." Growing up as an only child, obedience was not exactly my strong suit at times. Whenever the grass was not mowed, dishes were still dirty, or there was a nice pile of dirty clothes all thrown about, I never had anyone to blame! Yet, as I grew older and understood the importance of obeying what was asked of me, I realized that they were only preparing me for being on my own and leading my own household some day.

As we continue our study on the life of Moses, obedience was the word that continually popped into my mind as I reread all that he did. In Exodus 7:8-9 God gives Moses and Aaron their next task, ***"Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'When Pharaoh says to you, 'Prove yourselves by working a miracle,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.'"*** This is the first miracle which Moses and Aaron were to perform in front of Pharaoh, in order to show that they were true messengers of God. This would then, in turn, give them credit for the request they were bringing to Pharaoh, which was to set the people of Israel free. The passage continues in verses 10-13, ***"So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff***

swallowed up their staffs. Still, Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said." Even after hearing the words of the Lord and seeing a true miracle performed right before his eyes, Pharaoh still disbelieved. Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he tried to discredit God.

At times, we can tend to push back and ignore the things that God is placing in our lives. For me, I decided to be disobedient and ignore the direction of my parents, which ended with me being sent to my room and having privileges taken away. For Pharaoh, he was disobedient to the words of the Lord, which eventually led to the ruin of his people and the death of his firstborn. However, if he had simply been obedient to the words of God and His guidance in his life, none of this would have happened to Pharaoh or the people of Egypt. As we continue on this week, we have a choice. We can either be obedient to the things that God is calling us to and speaking into our lives, or we can decide to do our own thing and disobediently ignore Him and His instructions. What will you choose: the obedience of Moses or disobedience of Pharaoh?



LESSON 8

TEN PLAGUES

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

There is an age old discussion searching as to why bad things happen to good people. It is clear that difficulties will come to anyone and everyone, but why? The Bible shows where characters were struggling for one of three reasons:

1. Poor choices
2. God was working in them
3. God was working through them to reach others

We all have gone through a difficult time, are going through one, or will go through one. So, in each scenario, I could give verses and practical steps to encourage people on how to press forward with a proper perspective.

When have you experienced a struggle or tragedy that God used for good in someone else?

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There are several reasons that can be listed for why God used the ten plagues to deliver Israel from slavery and the hand of the Egyptians.

How many of the ten plagues can you name?

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God did not give a set template for each plague. It is interesting to see the means, length, and response of each plague. This study will point out several unique features of each plague.

1. The staff of Aaron or Moses

The ten plagues are: 1. Water to blood (Exodus 7:14-25); 2. Frogs (Exodus 8:1-15); 3. Gnats (Exodus 8:16-19); 4. Flies (Exodus 8:20-32); 5. Death of livestock (Exodus 9:1-7); 6. Boils (Exodus 9:8-12); 7. Hail (Exodus 9:13-35); 8. Locusts (Exodus 10:1-20); 9. Darkness (10:21-29); 10. Death of firstborn (Exodus 12:29-32).

In the first three plagues (water to blood, frogs, and gnats), Aaron used his staff. Moses' staff was used for the plagues of hail and locusts (seven and eight). However, in the ninth plague of darkness, we read, ***"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt'"*** (Exodus 10:21). It is not clear whether Moses was holding his staff or not.

Why do you think God did not just use the staff of Moses every time?

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It is important to remember that God performed the miracles. He always was (and is) in control. Like with the Holy Grail, some people give more attention to the object than the True Miracle Worker. Moses and Aaron did not possess a magic wand. They allowed God to work through them.

2. Pharaoh's hardened heart

Exodus 8:32 gives a common phrase for the number of plagues, ***"But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go."*** Pharaoh made a choice and chose to have a cold heart to the Israelites. Finally, God has had enough, and before the

plague of boils (number six), we read, ***"But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had spoken to Moses"*** (Exodus 9:12). This sentiment is repeated in Exodus 10:20 (locusts), 10:27 (darkness), and 11:10 (death).

Can this sequence relate to people today? How or why not?

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3. Compromise

Pharaoh did not give a definite "no" answer every time. With the frogs (second plague) and the hail (number seven), he basically said, "Yes, if you remove the plague." During the discussion on the plague of the flies (number four), Pharaoh said he would give them permission to worship their God within the land of Egypt (Exodus 8:25) and then added they could go, but not far away (Exodus 8:28). With the plague of locusts (number eight), he gave permission for just the men to go (Exodus 10:11), and with the plague of darkness (number nine) he gave permission for them to go and worship as long as they left their livestock and herds behind (Exodus 10:24). Finally, with the death of the firstborn (number ten), he told them to leave.

Compromises can often be dangerous. God has called us to a life of total obedience; He has called us to holiness. However, we often choose to live the way we want, give Him a morsel of thanks by visiting the Church, and then expect His full blessing.

Can you remember a time when you made a deal with God? Did you keep your part of the bargain?

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4. Warning

God had Aaron and Moses warn Pharaoh seven times. Only for the plagues of gnats (number three), boils (number six), and darkness (number nine) do we not see a warning first. God made it clear that choices have consequences. He even told them how it would happen. Yet, Pharaoh would not humble himself before the Lord.

What warnings has God given us today?

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5. Imitators

God revealed His power and sent a warning in the form of a plague. With the water being turned to blood (first plague) and frogs (second plague), the magicians copied the disaster. If I was the Pharaoh, I do not think this would have impressed me; I would have been even more furious. During the third plague of the gnats, we read in Exodus 8:18, ***"The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they could not."*** God did not allow them to get involved. Finally, it gets worse with the sixth plague. Exodus 9:11 says, ***"And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils came upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians."*** The magicians became a distraction for the Pharaoh.

What distractions do you struggle with today?

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6. Length of time

God did not administer each plague in the same way. The fifth plague (death of livestock) and the tenth plague (death of firstborn) only lasted one night. The darkness (number nine) lasted three days, the water to blood (first plague) went for seven days, boils (number six) was short-lived, while the other five plagues seemed to last much longer. The effects were definitely long-lasting.

Why does God allow some difficulties in our lives to last longer than others?

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7. Who was affected

One of the amazing, miraculous aspects of the plagues was the distinction of who was affected. It appears everyone was affected by the water to blood (first plague), frogs (second plague), gnats (number three), and locusts (number eight). However, the flies (number four) and darkness (number nine) were not present in Goshen, and the death of livestock (number five) did not affect Israel. Interestingly, for at least the hail (number seven) and death of firstborn (number ten), God offered a reprieve for everyone. If they obeyed God (an act of faith) by finding coverage for their livestock during hail and putting blood on their doorposts during Passover, they would be saved. God offered salvation for everyone; it was not just for Israel.

In 2 Peter 3:9 we read, ***"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."***

How can this section relate to us today?

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Ultimately, difficulties come to draw us closer to God. When we are struggling due to our poor choices, it is the reminder that we cannot do it alone. We need God. We need to include Him in every decision.

Adversity may come to get our attention. We can get so busy that God needs to help us pause and focus on Him. We may be going through a quiz to prepare us for a test in the future.

Finally, God may be working through us to reach others. Our response can cause others to ask how we have peace during the turmoil. We are reminded in 1 Peter 3:15, ***"But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."*** Serving God brings peace, purpose, and joy. This closeness is a special experience.

THE FIRST PLAGUE

TEN PLAGUES: DEVOTION 1

John Hubbard

The life of Moses is a fascinating one. Today I want to take a look into a moment in his life. If you read Exodus 7:14-25, you will read the account of the first of the ten great plagues to hit Egypt. This was a huge moment for Moses. He met Pharaoh outside in a very public place and told him again that God commanded him to let His people leave. When Pharaoh refused, Aaron and Moses had faith and followed God's direction, and the Lord turned the entire Nile River into blood.

I think that because I grew up in the church and have heard these stories all my life that I was desensitized to some of them. As I studied this passage of Scripture this week, it dawned on me what a horrific event this must have been for the Egyptians, and also how God sent a clear and terrifying message to them. The Egyptians at this time viewed the Nile River almost like a god. They worshipped it; it was the lifeblood of Egypt. It provided much of their food, and it was sacred to their god, Osiris. The God Almighty of the Hebrews wreaking havoc on this powerful river must have been a terrifying feat. All of the fish in it died. They could no longer drink from it. Imagine a river of this size flowing in the dark, striking color of blood and think about how much fear that would create in the heart of these people.

I also do not think it is a coincidence that earlier in Exodus (Exodus 1:22), Pharaoh had heartlessly murdered the male infants of Israel and threw them into the Nile. When the plagues hit, the very first one is a gross display of God showing that He has control of the Nile and all that is in it. If you do some research in the coming days and read some commentaries (which I strongly encourage you to do), you will

find that when the plagues descend on Egypt, in a way it is God going to battle against the gods of Egypt and proving His power over them. Many of the plagues were direct attacks showing His power over specific Egyptian gods.

Let us never forget that we serve a powerful, holy God who will go to battle for His people and who will make His name great. There is no other like Him. Our God is the same God who turned the Nile River to blood in an instant. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We need to go into this week with a sense of awe and wonder that we serve and are loved by the Almighty God.

Jeremiah 10:6 says, ***"There is none like You, O LORD; you are great, and your name is great in might."***

Zephaniah 3:17 adds, ***"The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."***

FINGER OF GOD

TEN PLAGUES: DEVOTION 2

Josh Lahring

With the advancement of science and technology, there are many things that we think we know about the working of the world. Everything has an explanation, and this deeper understanding causes us to lose our sense of wonder for God. We know why the sun rises, the rain falls, seasons change, and how to heal many sicknesses. You name it; people will come up with all sorts of answers, explanations, and theories.

I have heard the story of the Egyptian plagues many times as a child. I always thought it was odd that God did the things He did. Why did He choose frogs and gnats? Maybe God just really wanted to annoy them. After some study, I realize God attacked the false gods the Egyptian people worshipped. The Egyptians had a god for everything, even a god with a frog head named Heqet. Knowing that God hates false worship, it makes sense why He sent plagues demonstrating the falsehood of their gods.

In our own lives, there are many times we worship things other than God. We may not even realize it, and God has to get our attention. When circumstances come into our lives, we rationalize in our minds. We come up with reasons and explanations or consider it to be a coincidence. Have you ever had something random happen and not even consider that God caused or allowed it? I know I can look back and see that I have done that in my own life.

In Exodus chapter 8, Pharaoh had his magicians recreate every plague to show that the curse coming upon his land was nothing of God. Exodus 8:6 -7 says, ***"So Aaron stretched out his hand over***

the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. But the magicians did the same by their secret arts and made frogs come up on the land of Egypt."

By plague three, the magicians realize that the plagues are of God. Exodus 8:18-20 says, ***"The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God.' But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said."***

Plague after plague Pharaoh would not acknowledge the Almighty God even when his magicians realized that it was God who was causing them.

God will remove idols from our lives. He wants all of our worship; He wants all of the glory. Sometimes when bad things are happening in our lives, it is because of God's discipline trying to rid our lives of idol worship. Do you always have an explanation for what is happening in your life instead of acknowledging that it is the hand of God? I pray that in our lives, we continually examine ourselves for idols and make sure that God is the only one we serve.

GO AGAIN

TEN PLAGUES: DEVOTION 3

Pastor Gareth Volz

God has something for each of His children to do to glorify Him. In Exodus chapter 3, Moses minded his own business, tending sheep for his father-in-law Jethro on the back side of the wilderness. God got Moses' attention by speaking to him from a burning bush. He went on to tell Moses that He had heard the prayer of His people who were enslaved in Egypt, and He had chosen him to go to Pharaoh and tell him Jehovah Elohim (the holy, righteous, self-existing God) said, "Let My people go."

The Lord God went on to tell Moses that Pharaoh would not listen to him because he had a hard heart and God would harden it further. Beginning in chapter 7, Moses went to Pharaoh and delivered God's message, Pharaoh did not listen, and God sent the plague of blood on the Nile River, Egypt's water source. In chapter 8, God sent Moses three more times to Pharaoh with the same message, "Let My people go," and three more times Pharaoh refused. These refusals resulted in three more plagues upon the people and land of Egypt: the plague of frogs everywhere, inside and outside the homes in Egypt; the plague of gnats on the people and animals everywhere throughout the land; and the plague of flies everywhere inside and outside the homes of Egypt.

Finally, Pharaoh relented and said the people can go and offer sacrifices to God in the wilderness, but not to go far. I go crazy if just one fly gets in my house, so I can understand why Pharaoh finally agreed to do what God said. What I cannot understand is why as soon as the flies left, Pharaoh changed his mind and refused to do what God said. He had seen the power of God but refused to acknowledge Him as God.

So now we arrive at chapter 9, where God again sent Moses to Pharaoh and told him to let His people leave. Moses is further told to tell Pharaoh that if he refuses, He will send a plague on all the livestock of the Egyptians, but the livestock of the Israelite slaves will not be killed. The next day the Egyptian livestock died, but nothing happened to the livestock of the Israelites.

Still, Pharaoh refused to listen to God, and Moses was sent once again to Pharaoh with this message God gave to Moses and Aaron: ***"Take handfuls of soot from a furnace and have Moses toss it into the air in the presence of Pharaoh. It will become fine dust over the whole land of Egypt, and festering boils will break out on people and animals throughout the land"*** (Exodus 9:8-9 NIV). Moses and Aaron did as God told them, and festering boils broke out on the people and animals of Egypt. However, once again, Pharaoh refused to do what God said. Pharaoh had a hard heart, and with each refusal to heed God, God made it harder.

Has God ever called you to tell someone about Jesus, and that person refused to listen to God's words? Have you ever been led to share the Good News of the Gospel to hard-hearted people? If so, we can learn a lesson from God's assignment to Moses: Do not quit! Do not give up and say, "What is the use; they will not listen?" God does not give up on us when we do not do what He says, so do not give up on others. Many will never listen, but some will.

God has extended grace upon grace to you and me, and He does not want any to perish. Moses could have been discouraged by Pharaoh's hardening heart, but the Bible never records this. Moses continued to go to Pharaoh time and time again until finally in Exodus chapter 12, after ten plagues, Pharaoh does what God said and let God's people leave.

God told Moses that the reason for all this was so that He would be glorified, and the Egyptians would know that He is God. Keep doing what God tells you to do, do not give up, and God will be glorified.

YOU HAVE TO GO BACK

TEN PLAGUES: DEVOTION 4

Pastor Ryan Story

I love student camp. Since 2010, as a Youth Pastor, I have had the amazing opportunity to accomplish our student ministries at New Life Camp and watch God use the camp in amazing ways. I have watched Jesus change peoples' lives right before my eyes. I will always have a sweet spot for working with teens, mostly because I see the amazing potential that God has given them. If you are a high school or middle school student, you are amazing! One thing I started saying to students after a few years of witnessing camp is, "You are going home Friday." I never meant this as a negative; I meant it as the reality that at the end of the week, their lives would go back to normal. If you have been part of a camp, mission trip, or anything where the "ugly cry worship face" comes out and you get that "I know the Holy Spirit is talking to me right now," you might understand why I remind these students of going back home. It is very easy to get close to God in an environment such as camp. The camp is secluded, there are minimal distractions, and everything we do for the week is to help push the focus back to God. Sadly, when most of the students go home, there is not the same "Church Bubble" around them.

Moses went through a similar situation in his life. If you recall Moses was born a Hebrew and was adopted into Egyptian royalty. At some point in his life, he realized that he was a Hebrew, who were the majority population and all slaves. One day, Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, and Moses snapped and murdered the slave master. Moses thought it was all done in secret, but the next day, someone referred to his action. Moses ran for his life in fear he would suffer the same fate as his victim. Moses eventually started a family

in the desert. Fast forward a bit more, and Moses found the burning bush when God began to give orders to Moses directly. Exodus 4:19-20 says, ***"And the Lord said to Moses in Midian, 'Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.' So Moses took his wife and his sons and had them ride on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the staff of God in his hand."*** Basically, God told Moses, "you are going home" now.

I have always been curious about what Moses was experiencing. God had to guide Moses through every step and ensure him that all things would work out right. Moses made excuse after excuse to seemingly get out of being used by God to free God's and Moses' people. I believe that is why Moses had to be told that every person who knew Moses murdered a man and the king was gone. Without this information, I feel Moses would have dragged his feet all the way back to Egypt fearing what fate awaited him.

It is hard to go back to a place, especially when that place knows all of our faults and failures. Sometimes returning is harder than going to a new place. There are many times in life where God is going to send you somewhere new, and you will have to navigate the best you can through God's plan for your life. For many of us, though, God is not trying to send us to somewhere new, but back to a place where we once were. I am not a fan of living in the past, and I believe that God can and will change any circumstance if it is His will. I can confidently say, it is hard to go back "home" in order to be used by God. In the same way, I have seen teens terrified to return home because they know it will be hard to look at friends, family members, and even themselves and show that they are now living for God. Moses went back home knowing who was backing him. If you are in the same spot as Moses where you know there is a place in which you should return, go with knowing who is behind you. Go knowing

God can change anything. Go knowing we were never meant to stay in an unnatural safe bubble. Embrace the difficulty, because that is when God can do amazing things with you and those around you.

GIVER OF LIFE

TEN PLAGUES: DEVOTION 5

Pastor James Clouse

Have you ever read *"The Giver"* by Lois Lowry? The premise of the story is that there is this dystopian society where a young child receives the feeling of emotions and memories from the past. Every emotion that has ever been felt in any specific memory the child wants to bring up, he can at any time. The Giver is the one who gives all these memories to the child. It is as if The Giver is giving life to the child. The child did not know life until he was given all these memories.

The ultimate giver of life is the Almighty God. What are some of your favorite names for God? Some of the most common include Yahweh, Abba, and Elohim. One of my favorite titles for God is El Chai. This is Hebrew for the God of Life. God is the giver of life, the ultimate authority of all life in Heaven and on Earth. But through time, there have been so many different beliefs. One of those times includes the ancient Egyptian gods and authorities.

A couple of those gods were Isis and Seth. Isis was the goddess of life, and Seth was the god, protector of crops. The early Egyptian cultures worshipped gods that had to do with pretty much anything. They had a god for every aspect of life to which they could sacrifice and pray. While growing up in the Egyptian house, Moses grew to learn about all of these different gods. So Moses was fully aware of which god handles the different aspects of life. All of the plagues that God brought down on Egypt were a direct attack on these different gods to show Egypt and the Pharaoh who really was in control.

The 8th plague, the plague of locusts, was a direct attack on either Isis or Seth.

Exodus 10:12-15 says, ***"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, so that they may come upon the land of Egypt and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left.' So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind had brought the locusts. The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever will be again. They covered the face of the whole land, so that the land was darkened, and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, through all the land of Egypt."***

The Pharaoh was quickly learning who really was in control. All through this time during the plagues, he saw that God was in control, yet his heart was hardened so much against the Israelites that he could not recognize the peril all around him.

The church today needs to recognize who the real giver of life is, and that is our God, El Chai. We seek life in so many other "gods" that we often fail to recognize that God is the true Giver.

DARKNESS

TEN PLAGUES: DEVOTION 6

Kenny Hovis

Nyctophobia is the medical term for fear of the dark. When I was a kid, I was terribly afraid of the dark. I really do not know why. It was not like my parents locked me in the basement with the lights off, or in a closet for an extended period of time. I really believe that it was more a fear of the unknown. I had a feeling that there could be something lurking in the darkness brought fear to my mind and trembling to my body. I really believe that I could feel the darkness.

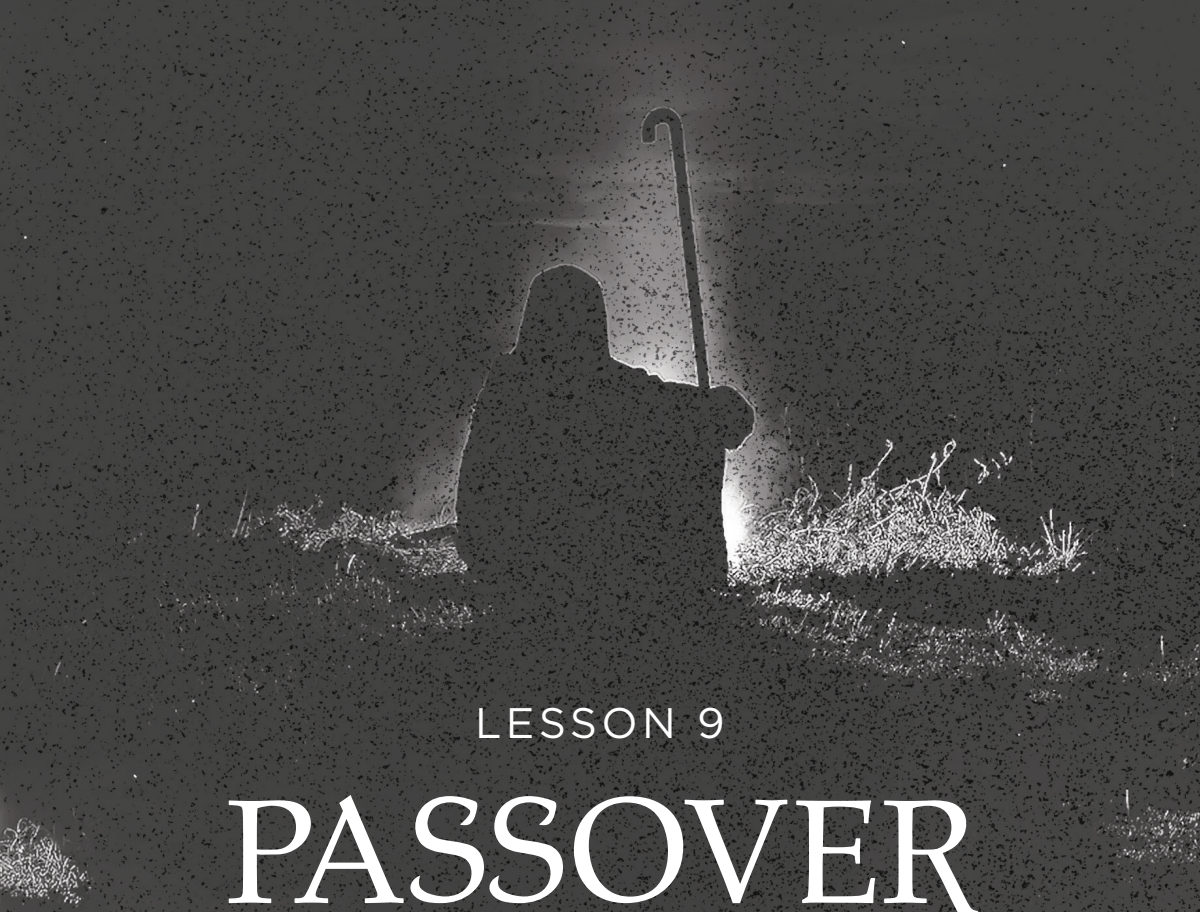
In Exodus 10:21-29, we read about the ninth plague that God brought upon Egypt in order to convince the Pharaoh to let the people of Israel leave. In verse 21, we read, ***"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.'"*** Pharaoh had eight other chances to obey God's commands but had a hard heart that was full of pride and defiance. God brings a darkness that could be ***"felt."*** I used to get scared if I had to go camping for one night, but God takes darkness to another level in this situation. Verses 22-23 tell us that this darkness that could be ***"felt"*** was to torment the Egyptian population for three days! It says, ***"So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived."*** This darkness was debilitating. They could not see anything or anyone, and they could not even move. The darkness brought a sort of paralysis.

Most of the world today lives in spiritual darkness, blinded by the lies of Satan, leading to spiritual paralysis. People walk around in denial,

with their eyes closed to the evidence of God, even in His creation. They are so blind that it is easier for them to believe that we, and all of creation, are a product of an accident, as though they believe us to be the benefactors of the cosmic lottery!

Moses is a witness to God's use of darkness to show people their need for ***"The Light."*** In John 8:12, Jesus refers to Himself as ***"The light of the world."*** It says, ***"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"*** When we accept Jesus and the redemptive work He did on the cross, we become the light to a world full of darkness. We are told this in Matthew 5:14-16. Jesus says, ***"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."***

The father of lies attempts to convince the world that darkness is the norm, and that is where they should desire to stay. We need to be a people who choose to live in the truth, the light of Christ's love, instead of dwelling in darkness. If we do not, that darkness will not only be for three days, but for eternity!



LESSON 9

PASSOVER

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

My wife and I had the privilege to be invited to some friends' house to participate in a Seder with their family. A Seder is a memorial celebration that follows specific instructions described for the Passover. It involves reading, eating, singing, eating, games, and eating.

Have you experienced a Seder? If so, what where your thoughts?

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As I enjoyed seeing the significance of the Seder meal, I was reminded that Jesus is in the Old Testament concealed, while the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed.

The Seder, or Passover, has several items or actions that point to the Messiah (Jesus the Christ).

1. Lamb

Exodus 12:1-6 gives the opening instructions in preparation for the Passover, ***"The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, 'This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.'"***

What were the qualifications for the lamb?

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What provisions were made for a small family? Why?

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I mentioned earlier that Jesus is in the Old Testament concealed, while the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed. Jesus is the Lamb of God.

Paul is very pointed in First Corinthians 5:7, ***"Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed."*** Paul was not vague. He as an educated Jew recognized Jesus as the Passover lamb. Likewise, John the Baptist referred to Jesus as a lamb (clearly referring to the Passover lamb) in John 1:29, ***"The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'"*** Actually, Jesus being referred to as a lamb is a very common occurrence in the New Testament (John 1:36; Revelation 5:6,8,12,13; 6:1,16; 7:9,10,14,17; 8:1; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1,4,10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7,9; 21:27; 22:3).

What was the purpose for Jesus being a lamb?

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2. No broken bones

Exodus 12:46 gives a particular command concerning the lamb, ***"It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones."***

Which description was fulfilled by Jesus? How?

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3. Blood

Exodus 12:7-13 describes the importance of blood within the Passover, ***"Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt."***

What was to be done with the blood?

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How does the name of the Passover relate?

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Hebrews 9:22 adds, ***"Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."***

How does this New Testament verse help reveal an Old Testament act?

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4. Unleavened Bread

The unleavened bread is called Matzah. It is a dough that is made without yeast. It bakes into a thin flatbread. It is similar to flat cracker-like wafers. The Israelites had to leave Egypt so quickly that they did not have time to let the bread rise, so they made the dough without yeast or leaven. The removal of the yeast or leaven could be a whole other topic concerning sin and approaching God in holiness.

Exodus 12:14-15 explain, ***"This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first***

day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel."

In the fourth step of the Passover Seder, three Matzot are used. They are all put together in a white bag called an Echad, which means "one" in Hebrew. This one bag has three chambers. One piece of Matzah is placed in each chamber of the bag. The Seder leader takes the middle piece, calls out "Yachatz" (meaning divide), and breaks it in half.

Many in Jewish tradition believe the three pieces of Matzot represent Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, Isaac (the second Matzah) was never actually "broken."

Knowing the New Testament, what could these three that are one represent?

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What would the broken piece of Matzah represent?

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5. Afikomen

Half of the broken Matzah is put back in the Echad. The other half is wrapped and hidden until the end of the meal. This piece is called the Afikomen. For over a thousand years, this word was used. The Israelites did not know it was a Greek word that means "dessert" and "that which comes after." A time was set when the children would

search for the Afikomen. Whoever found it was given a reward. The Afikomen was then broken and given to everyone.

How does the Afikomen represent Jesus?

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Hopefully, your list dealt with topics like unleavened, wrapped, broken, hidden, found, raised, ransom, reward, and offered to all.

“The Christian community is a community of the cross, for it has been brought into being by the cross, and the focus of its worship is the Lamb once slain, now glorified. So the community of the cross is a community of celebration, a Eucharistic community, ceaselessly offering to God through Christ the sacrifice of our praise and thanksgiving. The Christian life is an unending festival. And the festival we keep, now that our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed for us, is a joyful celebration of his sacrifice, together with a spiritual feasting upon it.” John Stott

“One encounter with Jesus Christ is enough to change you, instantly, forever.” Luis Palau

FINAL WARNING

PASSOVER: DEVOTION 1

Pastor Ryan Story

Early in my Christian walk, there was one section of Scripture that tripped me up every time I would read and study. The section that always caused me mass theological confusion was the relationship between Pharaoh and God. I never understood how Pharaoh could be so stubborn not to see what God was doing to his country and his people. God had already sent nine plagues, each worse than the last and each time through Moses, God commanded Pharaoh to let His "people go." I guess when you are born into royalty and prestige, it becomes hard to humble yourself, especially when people call you a god-king.

However, the second part of that relationship that baffles me is God's response to Pharaoh. Repeatedly through Scripture, it says that Pharaoh's heart was hardened. The final time this is said is in a fiery dispute between former stepbrothers in Exodus 11:9-10, ***"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Pharaoh will not listen to you, that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.' Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh, and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land."*** This baffles me because the God I love and serve has given me so many chances, it was hard to compute the idea of God making a person's heart and then hardening it so that they were unresponsive to God's love and grace.

Upon many years of reading and many conversations, God taught me the most amazing truth. Many people use the story of Pharaoh as a story to make our God out to be a cold-hearted overlord when that is the furthest point from the truth. The reason why God

hardened Pharaoh's heart is simple; Pharaoh's eyes, ears, tongue, nose, and everything else stopped seeing God as Lord. So, because of Pharaoh's pride, his heart turned to stone as well. Think of the distraction Pharaoh must have seen because of the hail and the locust. Imagine the smell of all the dead livestock and the water turning to blood. I could not even imagine the taste of food after frogs, gnats, and flies were everywhere. Watching as swarms of locusts ruined years of stockpiling would go beyond the point of frustration. The sight of boils on your people must have been heart-wrenching. The truth is while God did turn Pharaoh's heart to stone, God gave Pharaoh nine opportunities before God pulled out the big plague.

Take some time to read Exodus chapter 11 this week. I do not think Moses leaves in anger because he was hot at Pharaoh; I feel Moses leaves because he knows that God's plagues were getting worse and Moses did not want to see Pharaoh continue on his self-harming ego trip. When people ask me, "How could God harden Pharaoh's heart?" I am always quick to ask, "Why did God have to send eight plagues in order to get Pharaoh's attention?" I cannot imagine a worse fate than what awaits Pharaoh in Exodus chapter 12.

The truth is that God is King. God is the Father. Before I had children, I refused to say the phrase, "Because I said so." Well, I seem to say that many times when my son's pride swells up. Pharaoh refused to listen, refused to learn, and God's "because I said so" did not work. I urge you, do not let pride sneak into your life. Learn from Pharaoh and keep your heart moldable and teachable to the things God is doing.

REMEMBER

PASSOVER: DEVOTION 2

Holly Boston

Do you remember a time when God's presence, power, and provision were abundantly clear? Has there been a time when He stepped into your life, and you had no doubt He was moving and intervening in your situation? Was there a time when you thought, "No one else could have done this but God, Himself." July 2013 was a time like this for me. My son Carter, then 16, came to me and said, "I want Jesus in my heart." The prayer he spoke on his own was more beautiful than any other I had heard. This was nothing short of a miracle because Carter has Autism. He struggles with earthly, tangible relationships let alone a heavenly, invisible one. For Carter, relationships do not have the depth ours do, or so I thought. I spent years trying to share the Gospel with Carter, hoping he would come to understand the sacrifice Christ made for him on the cross only to have him sob and leave the room. I surrendered my boy to Christ, knowing He would have to intervene. Four years later, God did what only He could do and took up residence in Carter's heart.

In Exodus 12:1-28, God gave Moses and Aaron specific instructions for observing what the Jews now call the Passover. They were instructed to commemorate the night God would step in and save every firstborn Hebrew in Egypt while killing every firstborn Egyptian (verses 29-31). As I read this passage of Scripture, verse 14 leaped out at me, ***"This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast."***

God, in His infinite wisdom, was teaching them the importance of remembering His mighty works. They would need to recall God's

presence, provision, and protection as they traveled to the Promised Land.

As I studied the Israelites and their responses to trials, I realized I have a lot in common with them. They were so quick to reach for hopelessness, fear, and forsakenness and were very prone to complaining. Does that sound familiar? In chapter 32, the Israelites grew weary of waiting for Moses to return from Mt. Sinai, where he would enter the presence of God and receive the law. Feeling abandoned and uncertain, they turned to a lesser god: a golden calf. Had they forgotten God's presence and direction they had received up to this point? Exodus 13:22 tells us about His presence with them, ***"The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people."*** You would think that would be a tough thing to forget, but they managed.

In Exodus 17:1-4, we see Israel complaining because there was no water to drink. They longed for the days of Egypt when water was plentiful. Had they forgotten the slavery from which they had been delivered? Clearly, they had forgotten about the miraculous provision of manna just one chapter earlier (16:1-4)! Israel forgot God's presence, His provision, and lastly His protection. In chapter 14, we find Israel pressed between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea. They are afraid and again regretting having left Egypt, their "safe" yet enslaved life. They quickly forgot God's deliverance when death did not enter their homes but did enter the homes of the Egyptians. How quickly they forget!

You would think that mature Christians prepared to lead would be exempt from needing the constant reminders of God's faithfulness. As God's chosen leader, I imagine similar memories carried Moses through times of hardship and mutiny. When God told Moses to stretch out his arm and staff to part the Red Sea, he may have

flashed back to visions of the Pharaoh's staff being swallowed by Aaron's (Exodus 7:12) These memories probably also filled his mind when God instructed him to strike a rock in order to provide water for his grumbling people (17:6).

Our walk with Christ is no different from the Israelites journey. We also experience hopelessness, fear, and forsakenness as we pursue our Promised Land. We need to remember and take time to commemorate His marvelous works. The sovereign God of the universe that led them, provided for them, and protected them is the same God we serve today. Every day I am reminded of God's faithfulness as I watch my precious son, now 22, serve his Savior with his life. I get to witness a deep, loving relationship I never dreamed possible. This will get me through all the tomorrows.

May we cling to God and His promises, finding strength and confidence as we remember all that He is and all that He has done for us. His sacrifice on the cross alone is worthy of all of our honor, praise, and worship.

"Remember the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles and the judgments he uttered." 1 Chronicles 16:12

EXHAUSTION

PASSOVER: DEVOTION 3

Noble Baird

Exhaustion, by definition, is to be completely or almost completely depleted of resources or contents. I can remember several years ago; I received a phone call from Pastor Caleb. He informed me that the church had just been given an incredible children's play place for free! However, as with any deal, there was a catch; we had to have the play place taken apart and out of the building by the morning. So, a handful of staff and volunteers grabbed our tools and headed down to take apart this mammoth play place, that would eventually go up in our children's building in Holly. As time passed by, we finally had the whole structure disassembled and began loading it into trailers and truck beds to transport back to the warehouse. The funny thing was, the next day, we were doing our annual gathering at the Oakland County Fair Grounds. This meant, we had to unload all the trailers filled with equipment for the fair, so that we could drive them down and load them up with all the play places pieces. By the time everything was all set and done, it was about three in the morning, which meant we had about two hours until we had to begin set-up at the fairgrounds for our gathering!

In Exodus 12:29-32, we have the account of the final plague which devastated the people of Egypt. Beginning in verse 29 it reads, ***"At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead. Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said,***

'Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!'" When I read this passage, the first word that comes to mind is exhaustion. At this point, Moses has been going back and forth, pleading with Pharaoh to let God's people go; yet to no avail. It is only after experiencing the hurt of death and loss, that Pharaoh finally gives up and understands the need to obey the commands of the Father.

Although my story of exhaustion pales in comparison, the experience Moses went through with Pharaoh had to have taken a toll on him. He was given a calling from God, yet it seemed at every turn he was faced with adversity and setbacks. However, he never gave up. Moses continued to revisit Pharaoh, continued to plead with him, and never stopped following after the call that God had placed on his life. I know that exhaustion is a real thing. Life can get crazy, busy, chaotic, and the days can seem never to end. However, I want to encourage you with this little passage about Moses' journey. This is the end, which leads to the next chapter as he then led God's people out of Egypt.

Today, I hope you will reflect on this journey that Moses experienced. See how he continued to push through the exhaustion because he knew that was the calling God had placed on his life. Likewise, I pray that as you go throughout your day at work, home, traveling, and whatever it may be; that you would continue to push forward. Push through as Moses did and remember the words that David wrote in Psalm 115:1, which reminds us of why we do what we do and why Moses pushed through the exhaustion, ***"Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!"***

BUT I WILL BE WITH YOU

PASSOVER: DEVOTION 4

Debbie Kerr

The book of Exodus tells many very exciting stories. If you grew up in Sunday School in the "olden days" like me, you were most likely taught these stories in living color by way of the ever popular flannelgraph board. These "stories" are true accounts to the letter. God always has a plan, a process, and a promise. All He asks of us is to have faith and be obedient; He will take care of the rest! It was the same way with Moses.

In Exodus 3:7-12a, we read how God rolled out His plan to Moses for His people, the Israelites, ***"Then the LORD said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.' But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?' He said, 'But I will be with you.'"***

Moses felt unqualified, and questioned God's choice, "Am I really the man for the job? Who am I to do such a thing?" Does this sound familiar? Has God ever asked something of you that you felt completely unqualified to accomplish? I know I have felt that way

at times. Just last summer, I felt strongly that God was asking me to go to a ladies' prison in Ohio with our Church Prison Team. I felt completely out of my comfort zone, fearful, and unqualified. How was I going to relate to these ladies, what if it is dangerous, what if I say the wrong thing? God's reply to Moses was similar to the one I felt Him say to my fearful spirit, ***"But I will be with you,"*** and He was! It was truly one of the spiritual highlights of my life, and I could have missed an incredible blessing. There is nothing like being used by God, but it will not always feel easy or comfortable. Remember, God does the work; we are just the vessel.

"All the people of Israel did just as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron. And on that very day the Lord brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts." Exodus 12:50-51

CELEBRATION, FOOD, AND FREEDOM

PASSOVER: DEVOTION 5

Isaiah Combs

Passover is not something that is celebrated outside of Jewish culture. However, every year around the Easter season, some Jewish people (Israelites) and people they invite come together and celebrate Passover for eight days.

Passover was implemented by God through Moses in Exodus chapter 12. So the fact that people are still celebrating it thousands of years later is awesome and speaks to the great heritage of the Jewish people. The reason why Passover is important to the Jewish culture is that they are celebrating and honoring God for the awesome things He did for them.

Specifically, they are celebrating being freed from Egyptian slavery. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt for 400 years. That is a crazy long time. Then God sent Moses with demands to Pharaoh the King of Egypt. Moses told Pharaoh to let God's people leave. Pharaoh said "no" to God's demands. God then sent ten plagues to torment Egypt. God sent frogs, gnats, locust, boils, hail, darkness, and flies. He turned their water to blood, killed their livestock, and killed all the firstborn males in Egypt.

During the last plague, the Spirit of God moved over all of Egypt. The only thing that protected the Israelite firstborn was blood. God told His people to sacrifice a lamb and wipe the blood on their doors (Exodus chapter 12). This is a clear picture of Jesus in the Old Testament. Jesus died for our sins, and because of that, we are washed in His blood and are saved from death. To help better understand the Old Testament, it is good to look for Jesus.

The last plague that happened to the Egyptians, the killing of the first born, is called the Passover. Whenever the Spirit of God saw blood on the doorpost, He "passed over" their firstborn. This was the straw that broke the camels back. Pharaoh finally gave in and let God's people go. Passover is an eight-day celebration with a lot of food (What is a celebration without food?). It is a reminder of the Israelites being freed by God from slavery.

Romans 8:2 tells us, ***"For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."*** We, too, should celebrate our freedom in Jesus Christ. We were saved by His blood. We are free.

REMEMBER THAT WHICH IS THE LORD'S

PASSOVER: DEVOTION 6

Max Sinclair

While growing up, I have had a deep love for history. I am not sure exactly why I have this love, but it is something that has shaped me and molded me into the person that I am. To look at a people group and understand their background, their stories, and their culture is something that fascinates me. My parents live next to a lady who grew up in Berlin toward the end of the Second World War. I remember asking her questions about what it was like, and her story was so riveting. I recall her crying at one point, and I said that we did not need to continue talking about it if she did not want to and her reply to me was so impactful. She said, "Max, it is good to remember the past so that we will never forget it." We have heard this saying a lot from the infamous quote by George Santayana, "Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it." Yet, have we not already forgotten our past?

In this section of Exodus, we see the Lord instructing the Children of Israel on the feast of the unleavened bread. God went through and instructed all the Israelites on what to do, then He gave us the why in Exodus 13:8, ***"You shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.'"*** God intentionally wanted the Israelites to remember that which He did for them. Before I worked at the River Church, I was being mentored by the former student Pastor, and now the Burton Location Pastor, Ryan Story. I do not remember how exactly we got to the subject, but I do remember saying to Ryan that I thought it was so dumb that the Israelites would totally forget what God had done for them, how He split the sea and led them through the desert by cloud and pillar of fire. At that moment in his office, he drew a line on the wall and said,

in a few days, we will not see the line I drew, and to my surprise, he was right. After he drew that line, I did not recall seeing it, even when we shared an office while I was interning, I did not see the line he drew. I had totally forgotten the mark on the wall.

The whole purpose of the Feast of the Unleavened is to remember all that God had done for the Hebrew people to remember that through His actions, not anyone else's actions, have they been rescued and so because of that He required an offering of the first born. This offering was to consecrate, or as Matt Chandler challenges, "To set aside exclusively for a Holy purpose." We are that which is consecrated unto God at the onset of our redemption and atonement. As the Apostle Paul would say, ***"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"*** (Galatians 2:20). This imputed righteousness allows us to share with Christ His firstborn position because as Romans 8:17 says, ***"And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ."***

Now I am the son of a caterer, so I understand that it is the breakdown of leaven or yeast that allows the bread to rise. Through the decomposition, the bread becomes puffed up. This simple act shows us an invaluable lesson; that which leads to death, sin, is what puffs us up, but that which God has done for us has not allowed that to happen. Our duty as followers of Christ is to remember the Gospel, to remember His Life, His Death, and His Resurrection. Matt Chandler summarizes the reason well, "We belong to him. Our salvation was not cheap. God loved us while we were at our worst. It's so easy to forget that."



LESSON 10

RED SEA

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

There are several phrases that are used to describe two equally difficult or unacceptable choices. I have referred to phrases like “between a rock and a hard place,” “catch-22,” and “the lesser of two evils.” If you have studied Greek mythology, you might know the phrase “Between Scylla and Charybdis.” Odysseus had to take a route between the six-headed monster Scylla and the whirlpool Charybdis. I recently read about a nautical expression that caught my attention, “between the devil and the deep blue sea.”

Are you familiar with all of these phrases? Is there a different one you have used?

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The expression “between the devil and the deep blue sea” made me think of Moses at the edge of the Red Sea while the troops of Egypt approached. Moses was faced with two dangerous alternatives, and both appeared to end in death. It was his "Red Sea moment."

Every believer has a Red Sea moment at some point in his life. It is a situation from which there appears to be no escape. It is when you need to choose whether or not to have a life-threatening surgery to "save your life." During the Great Depression, many had to decide whether or not to go further in debt to save their failing business. There seems to be no solution, answer, or way of escape. Some decisions do not seem to have a bright side. It is at these times that we clearly need for God to rescue us.

What are some real life examples of being “between a rock and a hard place?”

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Exodus chapter 14 describes Moses "between the devil and the deep blue sea."

1. Problem

Moses and all the Israelites had a serious problem. Exodus 14:1-9 says, ***"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, 'They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.' And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.' And they did so. When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, 'What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?' So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly. The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon."***

What was Israel's problem?

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Describe how bad the odds were for Israel.

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2. Plead

Exodus 14:10-14 continues the story, ***"When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, 'Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?' For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.' And Moses said to the people, 'Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.'"***

What was the Israelites initial response to their tragic situation?

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Evaluate Moses' response to the people.

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When people complain, we need to direct them to the Lord. We need to be careful that we do not feed their fear, ignorance, and rebellion.

3. Presence

Exodus 14:15-20 reminds us that God is always present, ***"The Lord said to Moses, 'Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.' Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night."***

How did God reveal Himself to the people? Where was He?

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Several verses proclaim that God is always with us:

Matthew 28:20 says, ***"Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."***

Hebrews 13:5 adds, ***"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"***

Romans 8:38-39 continues, ***"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

Isaiah 41:10 also says, ***"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."***

Which verse is most comforting for you? Why?

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4. Performance Promise

It appeared the Israelites were in a hopeless situation. Although we feel horrendous, God normally only performs a miracle when a miracle is needed. God wanted to make it clear that He was the only One who could save them. He put them exactly where He wanted them. He wanted to make a point. They had to get to the point that they knew they needed Him. We need Him.

Exodus 14:21-31 describes the miracle, ***"Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them***

on their right hand and on their left. The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And in the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, 'Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians.' Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.' So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the Lord threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained. But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses."

What miracles are described in this passage?

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Too often we lack faith. We see the storm and forget the rainbow.

Romans 8:31 reminds us that one plus God is a majority, ***"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"***

Trials will come. The belief that God will not give us more than we can handle is a myth. God will not give us more than we can handle with Him. Giving us more than we can handle could be a gift. Submit to Him and look for a miracle.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."
Psalm 46:1

TRAPPED?

RED SEA: DEVOTION 1

Pastor Pat Rowland

I like watching action movies and TV shows that are more real to life, say like a historical war movie, a Jason Bourne movie, or a TV series like Jack Ryan. In those shows, there will typically be a scene that has the main character backed into a corner, and as the enemy is closing in on them, it appears there will be no escape. At least, that is what the enemy and we are supposed to think. That is the scenario of the Israelites in Exodus chapter 14. God intentionally leads them to camp in a spot where they can be trapped. Pharaoh having regretted his decision to let the Israelites leave along with Intel that they seemed to be lost wandering in the desert set out in pursuit with his great army.

Today scholars do not know the actual location of the Israelite encampment, but we are assuming that there was no escape. The Red Sea was on one side, the Army on the other, and they were not equipped or trained as an army to fight. If you are watching this movie, you know this is a bad situation. When we find ourselves "stuck between a rock and a hard place," we are prime for an opportunity for God to show up.

Sometimes God in all of His sovereignty leads us into situations that appear to be dead-ends, not only to test our faith but also to show His power and complete control over all situations. At the moment, I do not like these situations because I worry and become stressed. I do not sleep, and I am not enjoyable to be around. My default setting is to fight, to figure a way out, as I seek to rely on my own strengths, abilities, and resources. The harder I work, the more I struggle. It is only when I step aside and let God lead that the enemy is defeated. As we trust, we see that He assumes full responsibility for our needs.

In verse 4, God let us in on His plan, as He intends to use Pharaoh and this opportunity to show the Israelites that He is God and that He is with them. You will have to stay tuned to hear the rest of the story, but know this, God always seems to do His best work when we completely depend on Him.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9-11, Paul said it this way, ***"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."***

Let us go and live weak today!

INCREDIBLE

RED SEA: DEVOTION 2

Sierra Combs

"When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, 'Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?' For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.' And Moses said to the people, 'Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.'"
Exodus 14:10-14

Have you ever found yourself in a seemingly impossible situation? Perhaps even at this very moment, you feel like you have reached a dead end where there is absolutely no way out. I want to encourage you and tell you that you are not alone. Just this morning, I could not stop the tears from falling as I sat dwelling on a situation in my own life that just seems to be hopeless and impossible. Life is hard. Bad stuff happens. However, the Bible makes it clear that we have a good God on our side, ready to fight our battles.

Exodus 14:10-14 is a fascinating passage. We find the Israelites on their way out of Egypt, with the Red Sea in front of them and an angry Pharaoh and his army behind them. They are seemingly trapped, and Scripture tells us that they were greatly afraid. They

initially seem to get it right as they cry out to the Lord, but this quickly turns to panic. They complain and blame Moses, telling him that they would have been so much better off back in Egypt, despite the harsh and terrible conditions in which they had been enslaved. To them, it seemed as if God and Moses brought them out to this place just to let them die.

Have you found yourself in a place such as this? Maybe you are new in your faith and are feeling alone and afraid. Maybe you have a long history of seeing God do great things, but as soon as you reach a dead end, you panic yourself into believing that He has brought you there just to leave you. Friend, let me tell you something, God will never leave you, and He is waiting to fight your battles. In the case of the Israelites, it was indeed God who brought them to this place of impossibility, but He did so for a good reason. In the end, it was He who got the glory, and it was He who proved to be the faithful and true Deliverer, bringing their salvation. The Israelites were stuck between an army that wanted to kill them and a giant sea that they could not pass. The only thing they could do was to be still and let the Lord fight for them, and He did just that.

I encourage you to read on in the passage to see the incredible way out that God provided (He sure is creative). He did it for them, and He will do it for you. It is through impossible situations where God really shines and proves His faithfulness. All you have to do is be still and trust Him.

RESPONDING TO GOD'S CALL

RED SEA: DEVOTION 3

Pastor Gareth Volz

Have you ever felt God calling you to do something for Him? Maybe it was to work with high school or junior high school students or work for Him in the nursery. Maybe it was to lead a Growth Community or visit shut-ins. You know what God wants you to do, and you begin to serve Him, but then the unexpected occurs, and you run into a roadblock. You did not plan for it and see no way around the roadblock; you cry out to God in prayer.

Moses found himself in this situation in Exodus 14:15-20. God had sent him to Pharaoh to deliver this message: "Let My people go." The nation of Israel was in bondage in Egypt and had cried out to God. God heard their prayer, and His answer was to send Moses to lead His people to the Promised Land. Pharaoh did not believe in the God of Israel and refused to free them. God then sent plague after plague upon the land and people of Egypt, but each time Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to follow God's command.

After the tenth plague, the slaying of the first-born male in each household that did not have the blood of a sacrificial lamb smeared on the doorposts, Pharaoh relented, grieving over the death of his son, and ordered Moses to take the Israelites and leave Egypt.

God led the people with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to the edge of the wilderness. Then God did something Moses did not expect. He told him to tell the people to turn back and to camp between Migdol and the Red Sea, facing the sea. God told Moses He would harden Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh's army would pursue them, but God would defeat Pharaoh's army and show the Egyptians that He was the true God.

When the Israelites saw Pharaoh's army coming after them and the Red Sea before them, they cried out to God and complained to Moses. Moses cried out to God in prayer and got an answer I am sure he never expected. Exodus 14:15-18 says, ***"The Lord said to Moses, 'Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. Lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.'"*** Basically, He said, why are you praying? Do what I told you to do! I have got this.

When Christians serve God, Satan will always put obstacles in their way to keep them from following God's commands. How many times have you and I known God has told us to do something for Him, but when we run into obstacles, we stop and cry to God about the obstacle rather than continuing doing what He said to do? There is an old saying I love: "God doesn't call the equipped; He equips the called."

In verses 19 and 20, God tells Moses how He will equip him to lead the people, ***"Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night."*** The angel of God and the cloud and pillar of fire that led them moved and went between the Israelites and the Egyptian army. In doing so, it provided light for the Israelites to see and darkness for the Egyptians, so that neither could see the other. Then as Moses followed God's instructions, God used Moses'

simple wooden staff to part the Red Sea and allowed His people to cross it on dry ground.

The lesson we learn from this is that when God calls us to do something, we need to move in faith, believing God will remove any obstacle that is in our way, and that He will give us the tools to get the job done. After all, the Lord is the One who does it all; we simply get the privilege of being the instrument He uses to accomplish His purposes.

RELIANCE ON THE POWER OF GOD

RED SEA: DEVOTION 4

Pastor James Clouse

Can you imagine the thoughts running through the Israelites minds as they were crossing the Red Sea running from the Egyptians? I can imagine them running in fear from the Egyptians, but also looking around at the walls of water. Did they see the wildlife in the sea? Did the Israelites have second thoughts as they were running?

The point at which scholars believe the Israelites crossed the Red Sea is about 8.8 miles long. The number of people that were crossing on dry land according to Exodus 12:37 was about 600,000 men plus women and children, which, according to scholars would equal to about 2.4 million people plus livestock. At a normal pace, it would have taken the Israelites approximately 8 hours to cross the dry land in safety.

Exodus 14:21-25 says, ***"Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And in the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, 'Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians.'"***

There is a tremendous responsibility placed here on the shoulders of Moses. His leadership skills have already been put to the test by both the Israelites and God. The whole company is now running in terror from the Egyptians and their horse-drawn chariots. In the above text, we see that the Lord is faithful to those who listen and follow the leadership to which God has provided. God protected the company of Hebrews by throwing the Egyptians into panic and slowing down their chariots. It took a step of faith for the Israelites to walk onto a path of dry land with walls of water all around them. They could have just surrendered and gone back to Egypt.

In what areas of your life today are you afraid to follow the will of God? God has brought you so far in your life already just as He had brought the Israelites out of Egypt and to the Red Sea. However, at some point in our life, we need to step out of comfort to rely on God's amazing power. When we take that step of faith in our lives, God helps prepare the way by slowing down the enemy. Yet, we need to do our part to follow that will. Are you following His will or are you surrendering to the enemy?

DEATH TO LIFE

RED SEA: DEVOTION 5

John Rigg

I wonder how many people have seen Charlton Heston's portrayal of Moses in Cecil B. Demille's production of *"The Ten Commandments"* since its opening in 1956? For me, the movie's climactic scene is when Moses, with staff in hand, raises up his arms and divides the Red Sea. Only then can the enslaved Israelites escape from Pharaoh, and cross over on dry land to their freedom. Once safely on the other side, and with Pharaoh's soldiers in hot pursuit, Moses again stretches his hand over the sea, and the waters come crashing down upon the Egyptian soldiers.

Recently, I was reading the real-life account of this scene in Exodus 14:26-28 and was reminded of the reality that all the Egyptian soldiers, at least 600, died that day, ***"…not one of them remained"*** (verse 28). Although the Israelites were often stubborn and rebellious, they eventually listened to God's messenger and followed Moses through the parted waters to their new life on the other side. The Egyptians, on the other hand, after repeatedly being warned, refused to hear the words that had been spoken by Moses and entered into the judgment of God.

Of course, for us living today, the message of future judgment is in view here as we read through the account of the Red Sea crossing. Those hearing and believing in God's provision of eternal life through Jesus Christ will not enter into His judgment but will avoid the condemnation of sin, which is death, and pass to life.

Jesus Himself reaffirms this in John's New Testament Gospel. John 5:24 says, ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and***

believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."

Every time that I watch the movie or read Exodus chapter 14, I cannot help but think of those that will not pass from death to life but will enter into the judgment of a Holy God. Scripture tells us many times that the condemnation into judgment is not of God but of our own choice. John 3:18 says, ***"Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."*** Ezekiel 18:32 adds, ***"For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live."***

Our sin has condemned us all, yet through simple belief in the name of Jesus, judgment can be avoided. I wonder how many of the Egyptian soldiers would have listened to God instead of Pharaoh if they truly understood their final destiny?

I wonder how many of our friends, family, and co-workers might make the decision to follow Jesus if we were to be honest with them about their final destination?

The challenge from Exodus chapter 14 for us should be this. As God's messengers, how can we be intentional about telling someone that God's desire for them is to ***"turn, and live,"*** and that there is a way to pass from ***"death to life?"***

Remember, not everyone died that day at the Red Sea, only those who heard and refused to listen.

Has everyone you know and love heard?

#NOTMYJESUS

RED SEA: DEVOTION 6

Max Sinclair

"Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses." Exodus 14:30-31

With this study of Exodus, we get to see a lot of aspects of the Lord that we may not have wanted to see. We see His divine election of the people of Israel as His Holy Nation, we see the casting down of the gods of Egypt and the Lord's divine authority through the plagues, and we see the Lord's Power over His creation as He parts the Red Sea. All of this, however, some would argue, is not in character of the God in the New Testament who is rich in love and slow to anger, or even His Son the second person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, who did not come to condemn the world but to save it.

Now this Devotion is going to be very pointed, some might not like what I have to say or possibly agree with it, but I feel like it needs to be said. God does not care what you think of Him. As Hebrews 13:8 would say, ***"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."*** We do not get to change that. We do not get to decide who our God is. If we do that, we are worshiping a false idol and an untrue god. Now I will not negate His love, grace, mercy, and amazing irresistibility but at the same time we can never forget that God is just, He is wrath, and He is to be feared.

At this point, the children of Israel feared the Lord. They have seen His just and awesome power displayed to all the world that He is the

Lord, the divine authority, the King of kings, the Lord of lords. Even though they see this power of the Lord displayed, in a manner of days, they decide to build a golden idol of a calf and worship that. Is that not what we do as Christians today? Do we not go through a moment of fear and uncertainty only to be reminded of the realness of God and His undeniable sovereignty and then completely forget Him?

When I returned back to civilian life after my four years of service in the United States Navy, I asked Pastor Ryan Story to mentor me. In our meeting, I asked the question, “How could the Israelites forget how awesome and how powerful our God is and worship false gods or idols?” Ryan turned in his chair and with a pen drew a line on his office wall, “In a few weeks you won’t remember that mark was even there. It has become a permanent part of this room.” To my surprise, he was right. The mark became commonplace, it became ever-present and permanent, and I paid it no mind. Now, I am not saying that I should fear the pen mark on a wall in some office at our Holly location, but I am saying that we should fear our complacency with the Lord. God is not some genie that gives us three wishes, nor is He the conveyor belt of Blessings. God, YHWH, Jehovah, Adonai, is the Architect of the Universe, the undeniable sovereign of all creation. With this title and His authority, fear should be given, a total submission should be observed, and praise will be His.

I love you, and I know that the Lord loves you as well, but it is time that we take a realistic approach to the God that we serve. Yes, He is love, and His divine love also has divine justice and wrath. Yes, He will bless you, but He will also punish you. In Francis Chan’s book *“Crazy Love,”* he states, “I sometimes struggle with how to properly respond to God’s magnitude in a world bent on ignoring or merely tolerating Him. But know this: God will not be tolerated. He instructs

us to worship and fear Him." That is the God whom we serve, and it is about time that we realize that.



LESSON 11

WATER, MANNA, & QUAIL

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

January 1, 2000, at 12:00 am (midnight) all computers and corresponding services were potentially going to collapse. It was not viewed as an exciting new beginning to the year, decade, century, and millennium.

I purchased the rights to name a star on January 1, 2000. Star number 075-686 with the celestial address of 03 hours 01 minutes 26.827 seconds and declination of + 22° 13' 31.48" epoch 2000 is known by the name Angela Renee' Johnson.

Do you remember (or heard) any stories about Y2K (1-1-2000 at midnight)?

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On the naming a star certificate, I added Philippians 2:14-15, ***"Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.' Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky."***

Some people can find a way to complain about any and everything. They tend to drag others down. However, there are others who appreciate a glass that is half full.

Do you brighten a room as you enter or because you left?

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Zig Ziglar has said, “Be grateful for what you have and stop complaining - it bores everybody else, does you no good, and doesn’t solve any problems.”

Exodus chapter 14 records the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. One would expect the next few Bible chapters to be about victory, praise, thankfulness, and worship. That is not the case. Everywhere the Israelites go, they find a new excuse to complain.

God continued to bless the Israelites in spite of their constant complaining. While on the run, the Israelites experienced God perform even more miracles.

1. God made bitter water fresh.

Moses led the people from the Red Sea into the wilderness. A problem arose. Instead of trusting God, the people grumbled. Exodus 15:22-26 says, ***“Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’ And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the Lord made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, saying, ‘If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer.’”***

What was the problem and how was it resolved?

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What promise does God make with the people?

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It is believed there were about two million people traveling with Moses. I imagine there would have had to be quite a large source of water. The whole process would have taken some time. The miracle was witnessed and experienced by all.

2. God gave manna and quail.

Even though the people saw God provide escape and water, one might expect that the people would trust God. However, they complain again. Exodus 16:2-8 records, ***"And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, 'Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.' Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.' So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, 'At evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the***

glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against the Lord. For what are we, that you grumble against us?' And Moses said, 'When the Lord gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the Lord has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the Lord.'"

How many times is a form of the word "grumble" used in this passage?

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How did the people describe life in Egypt?

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What did God promise?

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Who were the people grumbling against?

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How does this relate to us?

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Exodus 16:13-14 gives a great summary statement, ***"In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground."***

Verses 15-18 explain the gift of breakfast, ***"When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, 'It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent." And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat."***

Verses 19-20 give further instruction, ***"And Moses said to them, 'Let no one leave any of it over till the morning.' But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them."***

Verses 22-26 give an exception clause, ***"On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, he said to them, 'This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning." So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. Moses said, 'Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field.***

Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.'"

How is faith and trust displayed in this passage?

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How is it clear that the manna was from God and for Israel?

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3. God gave water from a rock.

At the very next location, the people complain again. They have no water. Obviously, water is essential, but a request and a complaint are two entirely different attitudes. Exodus 17:1-7 records, ***"All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, 'Give us water to drink.' And Moses said to them, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?' But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, 'Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?' So Moses cried to the Lord, 'What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.' And the Lord said to Moses, 'Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it,***

and the people will drink.' And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'"

Describe the miracle.

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By complaining, what were the people saying about the Lord?

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Complaining does not take much talent or effort. Dale Carnegie said, "Any fool can criticize, condemn and complain - and most fools do. But it takes character and self-control to be understanding and forgiving."

Contentment is often viewed as the opposite of complaining. However, that seems too passive. The antonym of grumbling should be complimenting. By "complimenting" God we worship and praise Him.

It becomes clear that the opposite of worshipping God (complaining) is to worship self or Satan. Complaining is not an isolated "mild" sin. It is a blatant assault on God. Harry Ironside said, "We would worry less if we praised more. Thanksgiving is the enemy of discontent and dissatisfaction."

This section of Scripture is so pivotal that several other biblical authors used it to teach practical lessons: Deuteronomy 6:16; 8:2-5; Nehemiah 9:19-21; Psalm 78:12-31; 81:1-16; 95:7-11; 105:37-42; 106:13-15; 136:16; Jeremiah 2:6; Ezekiel 2:6; Hosea 13:5-6; Amos 2:10; 5:25; John 6:25-59; Acts 7:36; 13:17-18; 1 Corinthians 10:5; and Hebrews 3:7-19.

“God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.” Augustine

FROM PRAISE TO DISTRESS

WATER, MANNA, & QUAIL: DEVOTION 1

Josh Lahring

I like to think that had I seen the Red Sea part open, that I would totally trust God and all His ways and that I would always believe that He will make a way. There is no way there could ever be any doubt after seeing something like that, right? However, this is not the case. I have personally seen God do miraculous works in my own life and yet when another circumstance comes up, I am quick to forget that God was there for me before and He is with me now.

After the Red Sea parted and they had crossed over on dry land, Moses and the people of Israel sang a song to the Lord. At the end of the song, it says, ***"You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established. The Lord will reign forever and ever"*** (Exodus 15:17-18).

Moses was proclaiming the promise of God was true! God said He would bring His people into the place which He had made for them. Then only three days later, Moses is crying out to God to save them from death.

Exodus 15:23-25 says, ***"When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What shall we drink?' And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet."***

We often think that since we believe the promises of God that He should be there making our path easy. Why was the water not just drinkable when they got there? God knew they were thirsty since they had been in the wilderness for three days without water. Think about if the water had been good to drink right when they got there. Would they even have acknowledged or thanked God for it? No. They would have been happy that they had found the water just in time before they died. God wants us to rely on Him for all our needs totally. He wants us to cry out to Him and need Him more than anything else. Then when He moves, we will fully realize that it was only through Him that a way was made and that He is the only one that deserves all the glory!

To God be the glory!

STANDING ON THE PROMISES

WATER, MANNA, & QUAIL: DEVOTION 2

John Hubbard

The Israelites up and down relationship with the Lord in the Old Testament is so fascinating to me. The Israelites witnessed incredible miracles from God so many times but then were so quick to turn from Him and chase false gods. They would eventually return to God and experience these incredible spiritual moments with God, but no matter how much He manifested His power to them, they always seemed so quick to doubt Him when faced with any trials or even when they just got "bored." Looking through the Old Testament, you can see this pattern repeated seemingly countless times. It is easy to read this and disconnect yourself from the story. It is easy to read this, shake your head, and think, "Man, these guys were such idiots." It is easy to read about the Israelites making the same mistakes over and over and feel that this story is a bit redundant, but we know that all Scripture is God-breathed. Every line, every verse, and every word is placed there intentionally by Almighty God. In 1 Corinthians 10:11 (NKJV), Paul says, ***"Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition."*** I have read over Exodus 15:22-27 so many times and never really paid much attention to it or tried to thoughtfully consider what God's purpose was in inspiring Moses to write it.

At first glance, this seems pretty par for the course for Israel if you are familiar with the pattern of the Israelites. The passage finds the Israelites in the wilderness, they had been walking for three days, there were somewhere around two million of them, and they were running out of water. They come to a place called Marah and found water there, but the water was bitter and undrinkable. The people were desperate and started grumbling against Moses. Moses cried

out to the Lord for help, the Lord gave Moses instructions (which Moses followed), and God made the water drinkable for the people. It is important to notice the context surrounding this passage. The Israelites had just experienced God's miraculous and powerful parting of the Red Sea that saved them and destroyed the Egyptians who were attempting to bring them back into captivity. The beginning of chapter 15 is a beautiful song of praise about God's glory and power. They are singing and praising their wonderful God who rescued them, and then a couple of days later, they have completely lost faith and are grumbling against God's faithful servant who was leading them.

Are we like the Israelites? In a sermon Pastor Josh preached during the prayer series (titled *"Temptation"*), he talked about how after we experience these spiritual highs, these mountain top moments with God, we often then will face trials or temptations. This was true for Jesus after His baptism, where the people heard the audible voice of God, declaring that Jesus was His Son. Jesus was then immediately tempted by the devil. The Israelites had just experienced the incredible parting of the Red Sea where God powerfully showed that they were His people that He loved and would protect them. Yet, just a few days later when they were faced with hardships, they despaired. Let us not fall into the same trap the Israelites did. God never promised us that life as a follower of Him would be easy. In fact, He promised the opposite. In John 16:33 (NIV), Jesus states, ***"In this world you will have trouble."***

What God promises is that He will be faithful (1 Corinthians 10:13: Hebrews 10:23). He promises that He has overcome the world (John 16:33). He promises that He will never leave us in times of trouble (Matthew 28:20: Deuteronomy 31:6: Isaiah 41:10). Next time you feel that you are entering into the wilderness and are stuck in the land of bitter water, next time you feel desperate and do not know

how to respond, please remember what you know to be true. He is faithful, He cares for you, and He has not left your side no matter how alone you may feel.

SIX WEEKS

WATER, MANNA, & QUAIL: DEVOTION 3

Pastor Ryan Story

At this point in society, I am shocked that you cannot get a Ph.D. in complaining. If you spend any time on social media, all you see is people complaining about schools, police departments, roads, neighbors, and even weather. If you stand in line at a grocery store for more than five minutes, you can hear someone complaining from a distance. If the internet goes down, people are complaining. If schools call for a snow day, people are complaining. However, if schools remain open during snowy conditions, people are complaining. If someone's church is too small, people are complaining. On the flip side, if churches are growing too fast, people are complaining. Ironically while I type this, I realized I am complaining about complainers!

The nation of Israel had a major issue; they complained about everything. The Israelites endured slavery for more than 400 years, and the moment they were free from Pharaoh is the moment God, Moses, and Aaron began to hear grumbling. Exodus 16:1-3 says, ***"They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, 'Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'"*** I am not perfect, and I complain and grumble about certain issues as well; however, I did some research to see how

long it took the Israelites to turn against Moses and Aaron. By most scholars' account, it took the Israelite six weeks to start grumbling! We are one chapter removed from the Israelites singing a song about how God used Moses to free them from Egypt. The Israelites are one chapter removed from hanging out in an oasis paradise with enough water, springs, and palm trees to comfortably encamp the entire nation. It took them six weeks to go from praising to grumbling! It took just six weeks!

Complaining is toxic to our relationships with our children, our friends, our spouses, our church, and even the poor teenage barista that got yelled at today because there was too little cream in their frappe. Above all of that, complaining is horribly damaging to our relationship with God. While God still blessed the nation of Israel and provided for them, it does not take away from the lack of trust the Israelites had in God and in the leadership that God placed over them.

So what do you complain about? Do you think that the mild inconvenience that you are complaining about is outside of God's control and outside of God's plan for your life? Yes, that traffic jam was an inconvenience, but maybe it was God giving you 30 minutes to listen to a sermon. That boss of yours might be a difficult person to work with, but I bet dollars to doughnuts you do not complain when you get that paycheck. The music may be too loud for your taste at a weekend gathering, but it helped to get a young 20-year-old connected with the church because of his love for music.

We complain because we do not always see the whole picture. Exodus 16:4 has an amazing phrase that has brought me comfort in the times I want to start complaining. It reads, ***"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, I am about to..'"*** While it is important to know that God sent manna down from the sky, the really important thing is that God was doing something. The Israelites could only see

from their perspective; they were so focused on the last six weeks they could not see that God was about to do something again. The Israelites were sure that parting the Red Sea was the only miracle; they could not see what God was about to do. So next time you begin to complain, think to yourself; what is God about to do with this?

LEAP OF FAITH

WATER, MANNA, & QUAIL: DEVOTION 4

Wes McCullough

If you have ever needed confirmation that God will supply your needs, Exodus 16:13-36 is the perfect Scripture to affirm your belief. Sometimes God arranges things so clearly perfect, but our human minds cannot rationalize what happened.

Here is a quick recap of this passage:
The Israelites have been delivered from Egyptian slavery and are about to spend significant time in the desert where there is not much to eat. God does the impossible and sends manna, a flakey and sweet wafer-like substance, every morning. Everyone gathered as much as they wanted for the day, and the manna melted away. If manna was kept overnight, it spoiled. These rules applied for six days of the week. On the Sabbath, however, no manna came. Everyone was instructed to gather two days worth the previous day. Only then would the manna last two days.

Some people will struggle to comprehend this situation. On only one particular day does the manna not spoil. There is no logical explanation here; it is simply God being God. He is not bound by the laws of nature, time, or logic; He is infinite in all aspects.

A classic movie scene from *"Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade"* comes to mind. As the movie climaxes, Indiana is making his way toward the Holy Grail and must make a "leap of faith" to cross a bottomless void. From his perspective, the task seems impossible, but he puts disbelief aside and steps out in faith.

Our minds will never be able to comprehend the fullness of God's power and wisdom. We like concrete truths. We like to feel in control

of our situation and future. When our perception of control wavers, we are prone to worry, and the Bible is clear about that. Matthew 6:25-27 says, ***"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"***

God has promised to supply our needs. Put your worry aside and focus on serving Him. Matthew 6:33 says, ***"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."***

ROAD TRIP

WATER, MANNA, & QUAIL: DEVOTION 5

Jen Combs

Lately, I have been plunking my way through the Old Testament. Sitting here reading and re-reading Exodus 17:1-7, I cannot help but laugh. I feel like it is me having a conversation with my kids on a road trip.

Here is how my mind raced:
"All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, (In other words, me trying to "herd" my "cats" or kids out the door, in stages) ***according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink*** (Holy Smokes, I walked out the door without snacks or drinks packed for our road trip!). ***Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, 'Give us water to drink'*** (No explanation needed. Just think about five kids in a minivan on a 20-hour road trip, with everyone asking for something to drink, over and over and all at different times. Maddening, right?). ***And Moses said to them, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?'*** (Me turning around yelling, "Do you want me to pull this car over? Stop hollering!"). ***But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses*** (Me) ***and said, 'Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?'*** (I can hear one of my kids, "Why did you take us from our comfy house and go on this forever long trip with nothing to drink, I am going to die!"). ***So Moses cried to the Lord, 'What shall I do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me!'*** (My same response with an added, "Have I neglected to ever feed or water you in all of my 16 years of mothering?"). ***And the Lord said to Moses, 'Pass on before the***

people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel (I am going to get your Dad.) ***and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock of Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.' And Moses did so, in the sight of the Elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'"*** (I am thinking about naming my van Massah and Meribah, it means quarreling and testing. I am pretty sure my kids quarrel and test me every time we are in it).

Now we can laugh at the comparison of the whiny, stubborn people of Israel and our kids. However, in actuality, this is so the Lord and me. How many times have I wondered if He was with me? Even when He has proved Himself faithful over and over, I still question things on my journey. Then there are the times I start to take control myself because maybe He just does not have me and my circumstances on His list of priorities.

Even though I know He is with me, why do I doubt? Why do I question? One commentary I read said that in less than six months' time the people of Israel had witnessed ten plagues, the pillar of cloud and fire, the opening and shutting of the Red Sea, the miraculous sweetening of the water, and the sending of food and meat from Heaven. How soon we forget. One of the lessons God has been teaching me over the last three years is to be steady in the Lord. I need to do this regardless of my circumstances or feelings. I challenge you with that today. Be steady. He is with us. He has got us. Do not be whiny.

SHAKE YOUR HEAD

WATER, MANNA, & QUAIL: DEVOTION 6

James Mann

As we enter into Exodus 17:1-7, we come across the people of Israel leaving the Wilderness of Sin. This is one of the many times where we come across the people of Israel questioning Moses and God. In the previous chapter of Exodus, we see these same people complaining about the lack of food, and now they are complaining about the lack of water. This is one of those "shake your head" moments where you question whether the Israelites will ever learn to put their faith in God. Moses takes this opportunity of frustration and turns the situation back on the Israelites by asking, "Why do you test the Lord?" Why, after being delivered from the hands of Pharaoh, would these Israelites continue to question God's plan for them? The exciting thing is, God still takes care of His people even after they question Him. Even after they question His motives, God still uses Moses to go upon the rock and strike water from it. We know this is not the first time that we see the Israelites questioning God, and as we continue to read, we will see this is definitely not the last time either. This moment is brought up again in Deuteronomy 6:16. After God fulfills all of His promises to His people, Moses brings up the foolishness of God's people for ever doubting Him.

We often read through the Israelites time in the wilderness and laugh at how blind they are to God's presence and plan for their lives. We get frustrated to see how many times people can ignore God when times get challenging. We are able to feel these emotions because we are reading about the story after it has already taken place. Now change your point of view for a moment. Pretend you are reading the story of your life. Pretend everything you have ever done is laid out before you in the form of a book. Would you read through and

feel proud of your walk with God from cover to cover? Even though I laugh at the way the Israelites act, I believe my life would look a lot like this. When times get challenging, we either work in one of two ways. We either act like the Israelites in verse three and question God and quarrel with one another, or we act like Moses in verse four and lean on God in our times of need. In this passage, we see Moses stand out from the pack by showing the real qualities of what a leader looks like. I pray that in your times of trouble and need that you act like Moses did here, and ask God for His guidance in what is going on in your life.



LESSON 12

RAISED ARMS

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

Bill Withers wrote a fun song, *"Lean on Me."* It is one of those songs that when you hear it being sung or just hear the title, you start singing along. This part of the lyrics has a good message.

Lean on me, when you're not strong
And I'll be your friend
I'll help you carry on
For it won't be long
'Til I'm gonna need
Somebody to lean on

I like how it emphasizes helping a friend and allowing a friend to help us.

Can you think of another song that highlights the value of friendship?

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_____
_____

In Exodus chapter 17 we are introduced to Amalek. This nation was named after the grandson of Esau. They did not fear God, and they preyed on Israel. Deuteronomy 25:17-18 says, ***"Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary, and cut off your tail, those who were lagging behind you, and he did not fear God."*** They targeted those who lagged behind: the weak, aged, sick, and injured.

Israel is again being challenged by the army from Amalek. This chapter displays five actions that should be taken when attacked by the evil one.

1. Stand Up

In Exodus 17:8-9, Moses has the Israelites take a stand, ***"Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. So Moses said to Joshua, 'Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.'"***

The battle was about to begin. In one corner you had Amalek. It was a people who not only did not fear God but were reckless and were now attacking the people of God. In the other corner Joshua (whose name means "the Lord saves") took a stand. This dispute went back to the twin brothers, Jacob and Esau.

How can the actions and character of one generation affect their descendants?

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2. Look Up

Difficulties will come. We need to remember to look up to God to see what He is doing. Sometimes difficulties come and knock us down so far that the only place to look is up. This can be a blessing.

Verses 10-11 continue, ***"So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed."***

Describe what is happening in this battle.

_____

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_____

The staff was a reminder of God's past power. It was used for the plagues, the exodus, the crossing of the Red Sea, and water from a rock. By the way, it was also used to help Moses walk. It was not a magic wand. It was a symbol to put all focus on the Almighty God.

Douglas Stuart wrote, "It was important that the Israelites understand unmistakably that the only reason they could win against the Amalekites was that God was fighting for them, giving them the victory."

How was it clear that God was involved in the battle?

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God could have eliminated or misdirected Amalek on His own. However, God allowed and expected participation by His people. Their obedience and actions were important.

How does this concept relate to believers today?

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3. Team Up

Verses 12-13 take one back to the song, *"Lean on Me."* We need each other. Moses was in a bind and needed help. God placed two

men to be there for him. The passage says, ***"But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword."***

Most people recognize Moses' older brother Aaron, but this is the first time we are introduced to Hur. The Jewish historian, Josephus recorded that tradition says Hur was the husband of Miriam (Moses' older sister). A deeper study does not help much. It just shows there are two other men named Hur mentioned in Scripture, but either way, God used Aaron and Hur to fulfill His work.

What different roles are involved in this battle?

_____
_____
_____

Teamwork is crucial. Everyone has a role. We need to know our role. Furthermore, every role is vitally important.

What is your role in serving the Lord?

_____
_____
_____

Who are the two friends you could count on to "hold up your hands?"

_____
_____
_____

Who are some people who could count on you to "hold up their hands?"

_____
_____
_____

4. Write Up

Journaling can be very therapeutic. It is good to document victories and tell others. We need to notice that God is involved in our lives and write it down so we can remember His goodness in the future. These are the stories that need to be passed on to the next generation.

Moses writes down the events and talks about it with Joshua. Verse 14 says, ***"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.'"***

Write down a situation that is one of your "God stories."

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_____
_____

How can journal entries like this be helpful in the future?

_____
_____
_____

5. Lift Up

It was common to create and name an altar in honor of the Lord. It was a way of worshipping God. Verses 15-16 say, ***"And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The Lord Is My Banner,***

saying, 'A hand upon the throne of the Lord! The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.'"

I like sports. Ever so often after a momentous victory, the team might carry the coach off the field. They literally lift him up. Moses does this by creating an altar. He names the altar, ***"The Lord Is My Banner"*** which literally means "Yahweh is my signal pole." It is like trying to tell everyone how great God is by printing it on a banner and lifting it high on a pole for all to see.

What are some ways to worship God?

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Larnelle Harris wrote a song that better summarizes this passage more than *"Lean on Me."* He entitled the song, *"The Lord Is My Banner and Shield."*

My enemies have surfaced
They're too numerous to count
They sound the call to arms
Thinking I have no way out
But instead of retreat
I raise the flag of victory
My battle is the Lord's
He's the one who fights for me

The Lord is my banner and shield
And at the mere mention of His name
All my enemies are stilled
When I lift the shield of faith
His power is revealed
Oh for the Lord is my banner and shield

STANDING IN THE BATTLE

RAISED ARMS: DEVOTION 1

Debbie Gabbara

Sometimes we all need help. Over the last few years, I have had two knee replacement surgeries. They each required months of physical therapy. In the beginning, my leg was very weak, and I needed help to stand and do the required exercises. I was so thankful for the physical therapists that would come along side me and literally hold me up. When I was not able to stand on my own, they were there to support me.

Moses was a great man of God. He went to God in his time of need. In Exodus chapter 17, we find the Israelites in battle, and Moses standing with his arms held up in appeal to God for help, ***"Moses' arms soon became so tired he could no longer hold them up. So Aaron and Hur found a stone for him to sit on. Then they stood on each side of Moses, holding up his hands. So his hands held steady until sunset"*** (Exodus 17:12 NLT).

If you keep reading the story here in Exodus chapter 17, you will find that whenever Moses' arms were up, the Israelites were winning the battle against the Amalekites and when they came down, the battle would shift, and they would begin to lose ground. The Bible does not say that Moses asked for help. His friends saw that he had a need and were there to support him. Aaron and Hur saw that Moses needed help and found a way to be there for him.

People all around us are struggling in the battles they are fighting. Every day we hear about hardships in the lives of those that we know and love. That means that every day we have the opportunity to be a help to someone in some way. As we all know, it is hard to ask

for help. Aaron and Hur were watching and saw that Moses needed them. If we are keeping watch, we will find ways to be a help to those around us. Sometimes we are needed to pray and encourage someone, and sometimes we are needed to stand in the battle with them and hold them up.

Proverbs 11:25 says that whoever brings a blessing will be blessed, that when we water, we will be watered. God blesses us when we bless others! Galatians 6:2 says that we obey the law of Christ when we share each other's burdens.

Aaron and Hur stood strong in the battle as they supported their leader and friend. Who has God put in your life to whom you can be a blessing?

"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope, comfort you and strengthen you in every good thing you do and say." 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 (NLT)

WE NEED GOD, AND EACH OTHER

RAISED ARMS: DEVOTION 2

LaRae Wing

"Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. So Moses said to Joshua, 'Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.' So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword."
Exodus 17:8-13

"Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends."

This line, made famous in a song by *The Beatles* in 1967 (Yes, I am that old), certainly rings true with me. Have you ever over-committed yourself and basically could not physically or mentally complete the task without help. Honestly, there have been periods in my life when precious godly family and friends have been my lifeline. These situations have been entirely my fault because I have a hard time saying "No." I do not stop to think about asking God about it, or even think about all my other commitments. I just say, "Sure, I can do that." Then reality hits and I scream for help. They come to my rescue. Oh, I have been blessed many times in this way.

There have also been times when I was plugging along trying to complete a task that I did not realize was too big for me, and some

great friends would just show up to help. They saw that I was struggling when I did not, and they came alongside and supported with physical help, words of encouragement, and needed suggestions to make the job easier. I knew I had received grace upon grace; blessing upon blessing.

In the verses from Exodus, we see Moses following the command of God. Moses was once again trusting and depending on God, knowing that God was the only One with the power to help them overcome the army of Amalek. Moses' obedience and dependence on God was a great example to the Israelites. It made them realize that God alone was truly able to provide for all their needs. From the time Moses was called by God at the burning bush until this time of the battle, a wonderful relationship had been developed between Moses and his Father God. He had learned that God would never leave or forsake him (Hebrews 13:5) and that God would show him great things when he called upon Him (Jeremiah 33:3). Moses knew he needed to know God and that his relationship with God was paramount in his life.

That is so true for all of us. We need that close, personal relationship with our Heavenly Father (Psalm 23; Proverbs 18:24), and He desires a close relationship with us (Leviticus 26:12; Matthew 11:28). How do we develop a relationship with God? We do it just as we do with others; we spend time with God. We do that through prayer, reading the Bible, and meditating on the Scriptures. It is the sweetest, most fulfilling, and the best relationship we can have.

Likewise, we see in Exodus chapter 17 that God had brought to Moses' life people who would help him in time of need. Moses' relationship with Aaron and Hur was one that resulted in assistance and support when needed. As the Scripture stated, Moses would be on the hill holding up the staff God had given to him. It would be a

reminder of all the great things that God had done with that staff in the past, and a sign to the Israelite army that God was in the midst of their battle. As the battle continued throughout the day, Moses' arms grew tired. As long as he held the staff high, the Israelites won the battle, but when his arms began to sag, the Amalekites began to win. Realizing their leader was becoming exhausted during this difficult battle, Aaron and Hur came to the aid of Moses. They gave him a place to sit and held up his arms. Moses needed support, and they gave it.

It is wonderful when friends jump in to help when we need it. Just think about our leaders in the church whom God has called specifically to minister to us. What an encouragement we can be if we come alongside to support them. We need each other. That is the way God made us. He created the Church for us so that we can support and serve one another. God has promised to supply all our needs (Philippians 4:19), and many times, He uses others to supply those needs.

How can you be the hands and feet of Jesus to others today? Can you offer assistance to others with help, encouragement, Scripture, and prayer before they ask? Look around. Who needs relief, comfort, and support? You could be the difference between a loss or a win in someone's battle.

BEING THE SECOND CHAIR

RAISED ARMS: DEVOTION 3

Max Sinclair

Throughout middle school and my freshman year of high school, I was in the school's band, and I played the trombone. I was not really good, to be honest, I had a hard time reading sheet music, but I knew how to fake it. I sat at the second chair and would be able to use the corner of my eye to see what the first chair player was playing, and I would mimic the slide placement for the instrument making the same note. Now I am not ashamed of my inability to play, but one time, I was promoted to the first chair by a fluke instance. This now brought my insecurity to light, and immediately I realized that I could not pretend to play anymore. I could no longer hide my inability and had to realize that I was not first chair material. I had to come to grips with the fact that I did not possess the skill or ability to be the first chair trombone player for my school's band. I still do not know how to play the trombone, but the truth that hurts to say is sometimes I need to understand that I am not going to be number one.

Exodus 17:8-13 tells the infamous story about the defeat of the Amalekites by God's power displayed through the Israelites. The story starts with Amalek raising an army and marching against the Israelites. Moses tells Joshua to choose men and go out and fight with Amalek, and while they fight, Moses will held the Staff of God in his hand while standing on a hill overlooking the battle. Joshua did as Moses instructed and went to battle. As Joshua went into battle, Moses, Aaron, and Hur headed up to the hill. As the battle raged down below, whenever Moses held the staff aloft, the Israelites would start to win, but as soon as he put the staff down, they would begin to lose. The battle went on for such a long time that Moses' arms grew

tired, and his arms would fall. Aaron and Hur went and hold up his arms and even put rocks under them so that the Israelites would win. Eventually, the Amalekites were defeated, and the children of Israel had victory over their enemies. This awesome event shows that it is ok to be the second chair, to not be the leader, and to not be the one in the spotlight.

Over the past few weeks, I feel as if God has really been working in me to reveal my pride and correct it. It has hindered me in the past and has brought me to some of the darkest places I have ever been, all because I thought I knew what was best. I tried to be the first chair of my life, I tried to be the star of the movie of my life, and I realize that it is not about me. In this story, we see that it was not Joshua's supreme fighting prowess, Moses was not strong enough to hold up the staff for very long, and that Aaron and Hur were smart to find something to help Moses hold up his arms. However, they still did not win the battle. What we need to focus on and look to in this instance is that the battle is the Lord's.

A few hundred years later, we will see a man, who would later become King of Israel, say the same thing to a giant who stood opposed to God at the Valley of Elah. In 1 Samuel 17:47, David shouted, ***"And that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand."*** The battles that we face are already won. We do not win them. Often we sit back in fear and run. We retreat, falter, and fail, but the simple fact is we are not the hero of this story. Christ is the Hero of the story, He is the first chair, and He is the one who brings victory. It is not us nor our actions. In the start of Galatians 2:20, the apostle Paul said, ***"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."***

HERDING CATS

RAISED ARMS: DEVOTION 4

Richie Henson

All over the world, there are idioms for pointless endeavors. In America, one of the most used is “herding cats.” Others I have heard are “nailing Jell-O to a tree” or “trying to squish water.” At some point or another, many of us have used a phrase like this in reference to a situation or circumstance that just seems pointless. As I read Exodus and look specifically at the life of Moses, I often think of these phrases. Moses, by the power of God, leads an entire nation out of slavery just so they can complain about the way in which God is rescuing them. As the leader, Moses was overwhelmed by the difficulty of “herding” these people to the promised land.

As if matters were not difficult enough, as we come to Exodus chapter 17, the nation is confronted with their first major battle. It is in this battle that the Israelites win as Moses raises his staff (if you have not read this amazing account, I encourage you to read Exodus 17:8-13). At the end of the battle, Moses is instructed by God to take a written account declaring that God will blot out their enemy (Amalek) and then, Moses builds an altar.

Exodus 17:14-16 says, ***“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.’ And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The Lord Is My Banner, saying, ‘A hand upon the throne of the Lord! The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.’”***

In life, we are continually confronted with difficulty. There is always a situation or circumstance that seems to be more than we can handle.

I think Moses knew this better than most. He saw that there was no way to succeed. However, Moses chose to build an altar, to make a stand, that the Lord is his banner. That is to say; the Lord is his rallying cry.

Moses continually needed the Lord's provision to accomplish all things as a leader. Our lives are no different. Unless we continually look to the banner of the Lord, that is salvation and righteousness, as our rallying cry, as our hard fast line for daily battle, we are doomed to drown in waves of anxiety and defeat. However, as we submit our will to God and put our faith in the battle cry that is Jesus' name, we can live as conquerors.

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Romans 8:37

THE LORD IS MY BANNER

RAISED ARMS: DEVOTION 5

Donna Fox

When I became a grandmother for the first time, a dear friend at work gave me a "Grandmother Gift." I had never heard of such a thing, but it was the sweetest thought. Enclosed in the gift bag was a book for Grandma to write all the memories she has with her grandchild. It suggested items like a favorite book read together or the first trip to the park or zoo, were to be written in the book as a forever memory (We need to admit as we get older, our memory is not as sharp as it once was).

Sometimes we take a picture or write it in a journal, but it is always important to remember special events or life occurrences and pass them along to the next generation.

There are different ways of preserving a memory. Another example is when my father passed away, friends at work got together and gave me a lawn decoration that would always remind me of my father each time I saw it. Memories are important – to remember our failures and to learn from them, but more importantly, to show future generations our successes and how God was in control.

Such was the case with Moses in Exodus chapter 17. God had commanded Moses to go to the top of the hill, raise his staff high, and He (God) would help Joshua and his army defeat the Amalek army. Moses' arms grew tired. As the staff dropped, the Amalekites prevailed. When the staff was raised again, Joshua and the Israelite's prevailed. So Aaron and Hur each held up one of Moses' arms until sunset, the Israelite's prevailed, and the army was victorious. Moses was told by God to write this memory down on a scroll (Exodus

17:14) and as a way of remembrance. Moses obeyed, built an altar, and named it Jehovah Nissi, or ***"The Lord is My Banner"*** (Exodus 17:15). The name proclaims God's leadership and protection of His people.

Joshua's army had defeated the Amalek army, with the help of Moses, Aaron, and Hur, but more importantly, with God's intervention. God told them what to do, and they would win. They obeyed, and they won. They wanted to leave a permanent marker of this event. The altar named, ***"The Lord is My Banner"*** would be for all to see, not to forget this event, and to remember God's involvement. It was the first time God showed the Israelite nation that He fought for them, He led them into battle, and He protected them. He was their banner.

It is fun for me to look at that book with my grandson and share special memories together. However, it is more important that I share other memories – the times God protected me, guided me, and loved me through the many trials in my life. I want him, and all three of my grandchildren, to see God's providence in my life and to see, ***"The Lord is My Banner."***

ARMS RAISED HIGH

RAISED ARMS: DEVOTION 6

Isaiah Combs

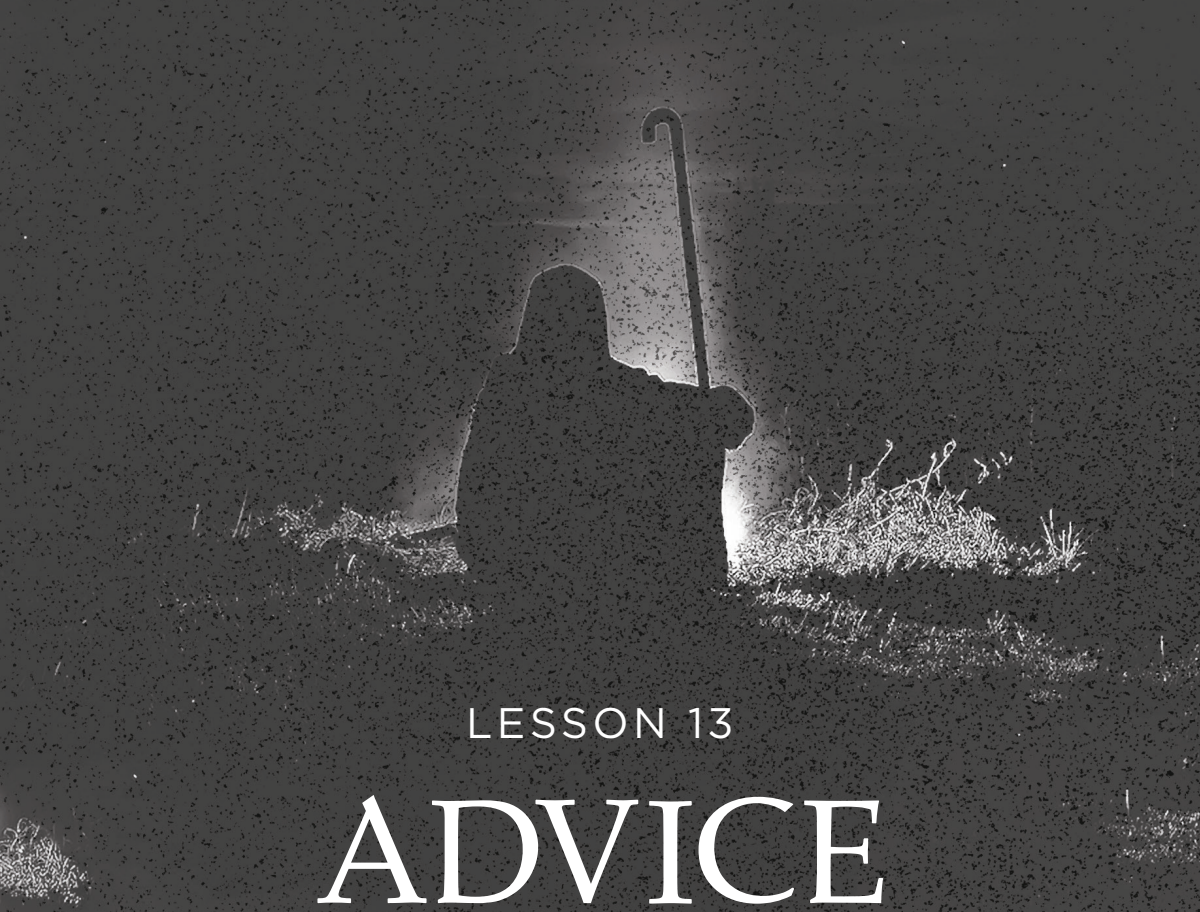
The story of Moses, as told in the book of Exodus, is an awesome story of God's power and love for His people. God used Moses as an instrument for His will to the people of Israel. I like to say that God has a plan and a purpose for our lives, and this is especially true in the life of Moses.

Moses was saved from genocide as a baby. He grew up in royalty. He killed a man and then fled to the wilderness to be a shepherd for 40 years. Then God sent him back to Egypt to deliver a message to the Pharaoh and used Moses to set the Israelites free from 400 years of slavery. He then was put in charge of millions of people who were now homeless and traveling across the wilderness on direction from God who is in the form of a cloud that they follow by day and a pillar of fire they follow by night. They followed God through the wilderness for 40 years. This is not even the full story of Moses. I recommend sitting down and reading Exodus and seeing all the awesome and crazy things that happened to and through Moses.

One of the awesome "God stories" that happened to Moses was when a guy named Amalek and his army decided to pick a fight with God's people (never a good idea). God promised Moses and his people a victory only if Moses could hold up his staff, the same one he used to split the Red Sea, over his head. Could you imagine how tired Moses would have been to do that all day? I know I could not do it all day, and neither could Moses. So God sent Aaron and Hur to help him hold his arms up in the air. The Israelites won the battle against Amalek.

He then tells Moses to write this as a memorial or testimony to the next in charge of the Israelites, Joshua (Exodus 17:14-16). God wanted the leader and people of Israel to know that the promises of God are real, and sometimes what God wants you to do is going to be hard. It is going to take some effort and some strain. It might be like holding up a staff for a whole day. However, God will send you people to help you and hold your arms up for you. God has other people like Aaron and Hur. It is nothing that Moses did to win the battle with Amalek.

It was all God and His power. God will send you the help you need so you can finish your task.



LESSON 13

ADVICE

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

You may not recognize the name Maximilian Adalbert Baer Jr. He is widely known for playing Jethro Bodine, the dimwitted nephew of Jed Clampett on *"The Beverly Hillbillies."* He had me laughing a number of times.

Jethro is not a common name. It is a powerful name as it means "excellence." That is a positive reminder that there are times when good is not good enough.

When you think of Jethro, your mind might recall the TV show *"NCIS"* with Leroy Jethro Gibbs, retired NFL Dallas Cowboy defensive tackle Jethro Pugh, or the British band *"Jethro Tull."*

Can you think of anyone else with the name Jethro?

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The most famous Jethro for me was Moses' father-in-law. He was a shepherd and priest of Midian. He may have been influential in teaching Moses Israel's legacy, God's promise, and His expectations for His people. Exodus chapter 18 points out that Jethro also helped train Moses for leadership. There are two key elements of "excellence" that are displayed in this passage.

1. Be willing to speak into someone's life.

Exodus 18:13-23 records an interaction between Jethro and Moses, ***"The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, 'What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning***

till evening?' And Moses said to his father-in-law, 'Because the people come to me to inquire of God; when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make them know the statutes of God and his laws.' Moses' father-in-law said to him, 'What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone. Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God, and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do. Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace.'"

It can be hard to challenge someone we love. Some fear they will lose a friendship or someone will be mad at them. Others give the excuse that they did not ask for advice or that they will not listen. Jethro stepped up, and instead of complaining, he gave suggestions.

Do you like how Jethro challenged Moses? Why or why not?

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What was Jethro's advice?

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Jethro also takes time to list credentials or qualifications for a leader. The list seems similar to the one listed in Acts 6:3, ***"Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty."***

What qualifications does Jethro list for those who will assist Moses?

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After examining both lists, where do you need to focus for growth?

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"It is one of the severest tests of friendship to tell your friend his faults. So to love a man that you cannot bear to see a stain upon him, and to speak painful truth through loving words, that is friendship." Henry Ward Beecher

Nathan challenged David knowing it could cost him his friendship, position, and even life. We read in 2 Samuel 12:7-9, ***"Nathan said to David, 'You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as***

much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.”””

What was the situation that caused the concern (2 Samuel 12:1-6)?

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Who do you have in your life that you feel obligated to be willing to challenge if the need arises?

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Proverbs 27:17 says, ***“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.”***

2. Be willing to let people speak into your life.

It can be difficult to challenge others, but it can be even more difficult to allow someone else to speak into our lives. We may have a friend or two that we trust, but Moses allowed his father-in-law to challenge him. Exodus 18:24-27 shows how he listened without being defensive, ***“So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And they judged the people at all times. Any hard case they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves. Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went away to his own country.”***

What are ways some people react to criticism?

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Who do you have in your life that you can trust would challenge you if the need arose?

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"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." Helen Keller

Although Queen Esther may have felt safe, secluded, and comfortable, she was willing to listen to the advice of Mordecai. Esther 4:13-14 reports, ***"Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, 'Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?'"***

What was the situation that caused the concern (Esther 4:7-12)?

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Did Esther immediately comply (Esther 4:15-17)?

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"He is your friend who pushes you nearer to God." Abraham Kuyper

DEAR ABBY

ADVICE: DEVOTION 1

Pastor Manning Brown

If there is one thing the world is not short on, it is advice. I remember when I was growing up, the newspaper had a daily dose of advice from *"Dear Abby."* People would write to "Abby" (which was not even her real name) asking for advice on a wide range of topics, but usually about relationships. Nowadays, the advice is only a few clicks or keystrokes away on the internet, and there is no limit to the types of advice that can be given. The problem with advice, particularly if it is on the internet or other "third party," is that often it is coming from someone who knows little to nothing about the situation. In those cases, the advice is at best useless, but at its worst destructive. For advice to be valuable, it needs to be coming from a perspective knowledge or experience of the situation.

Exodus chapter 18 is titled "Jethro's Advice." Jethro was Moses' father-in-law and a priest of Midian. He certainly had the experience and perspective to be in a position to offer Moses advice. Verse one says the Jethro had ***"heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people."*** The rest of the chapter outlines the situation, and the advice Jethro was able to offer Moses. However, this first verse sets the qualifications for Jethro to give bona fide advice. We are often asked for advice or see a situation where our advice might be useful. Yet, that does not always mean we are qualified to give it, or even if we are, should give it. God had worked miraculously delivering the Israelites from captivity in Egypt. This was a fact, and Jethro knew it. Knowing this and the law, he saw a situation that his advice might relieve some of the burdens that rested on Moses.

My sons, now both grown, will call and ask me for advice. Before I give it, I first ask them if they really want my opinion or are they just wanting me to agree with a decision already made. If they are seeking my advice, I try to get the full picture of the situation. If it is something I feel I can offer useful advice on, I then try to look at the situation from a biblical perspective and answer it accordingly. There has yet to be a situation they have encountered that cannot be tied to something for which the Scripture has an answer. I start from the perspective that "God knows." By turning to Scripture, like Jethro, I can say first, "I have heard what God has done." From there, I will offer my opinion and perspective, but leave them to make the decision that needs to be made. Psalms 119:105 says, ***"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*** God has given us His Word to direct our paths. It is advice that can be trusted.

REMEMBER THE LORD

ADVICE: DEVOTION 2

Shawna Johnson

Is it easier for you to recall what you ate for dinner last night, what you wore this past Tuesday, or what verse the pastor talked about on Sunday? I have a confession, and without serious thought, it is difficult for me to remember any of those! I have a terrible memory; I need constant reminders; forgive me if I missed your birthday. My desk is full of post-it notes, and Siri should probably get a pay raise for how often I ask her to remind me of something. If you can live without constant reminders, please, teach me your ways!

I am thankful for the Bible and its constant reminder of our need for the Lord. So often we work hard to get things done or give advice, forgetting first to pray, seek, and remember the Lord. As much as I wish I could say I always remember and put the Lord first, that is not always the case. I need constant reminders, even in this area of my life; the reassuring thing, so did many others in the Bible. Moses' own son was a constant reminder of the Lord.

Exodus 18:4 says, ***"And the name of the other, Eliezer (for he said, 'The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh')."***

Every time Moses called his son's name, he would be reminded of God's goodness, protection, and provision.

I sometimes contemplate getting a tattoo of a Bible verse, or an image representing a Bible story. It needs to be something that when I see it, I remember the Lord. So far, no tattoo, however, I did ask one of my beautifully talented friends to create a work of

art I could keep in my office. I assure you she delivered. Sitting on my desk is an 8x10 painting of Deuteronomy chapter 8 handwritten, with “Remember the Lord” spelled out in beautiful tiny forget-me-not flowers in the foreground; a constant reminder as I am working, to remember the Lord.

What do you do to ensure you are remembering the Lord and putting Him first? Do you have a routine you have made into a habit? Do you have a child with a biblical name? Have you tried post-it notes everywhere? I am thankful for a church that is constantly focused on the Lord. Find friends and community that point you to Him. We are a family here! We get to help each other!

MOSES TELLS OF GOD'S GOODNESS

ADVICE: DEVOTION 3

Jill Osmon

We love good storytellers, writers of books and stories, and speakers that can capture us with their words. We find in Exodus chapter 18, Moses told his father-in-law all that God had done. Verse 8 says, ***"Then Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them in the way, and how the Lord had delivered them."***

We love good stories, but do we love to tell the best story? Do we tell the stories in our lives that show God's goodness even in the most difficult times? God tells us to rejoice, to tell of His works and goodness. Psalm 105:2 says, ***"Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!"***

Moses had been through some pretty epic things, things that would cripple most of us. He experienced the good, the bad, and the devastating and yet when he sat and told the stories, God's goodness abounded. It is a good reminder for us that even through difficult times, God is good, and when you come out on the other side, His goodness is what we should not forget.

Psalm 145:5-12 says, ***"On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over***

all that he has made. All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your saints shall bless you! They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your powers, to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom."

We need to remember these verses when we are on the other side of a difficult season, that we remember to tell of His goodness.

WHO IS YOUR ONE?

ADVICE: DEVOTION 4

Max Sinclair

It is extremely difficult working for a church. I say that with all joking aside; this is one of the most difficult places that I have ever had the privilege of working. I say that even though I served four years in the United States Navy. I love this job, being a part of a thriving ministry, and helping people get connected to our Lord, but the one thing I miss is being a light to others. Think about it; every day I work and see pastors and ministry leaders who know Jesus, preach His Gospel, teach, encourage, and strengthen me in my own beliefs. I do not come into contact with a lot of people who do not know the Gospel or do not know who Christ is. Now for some of you, my situation is your dream, being that it is a place where you do not feel ostracized because of your beliefs, or that you know all of the people you see daily know Jesus and their salvation is secured. Oh, how I envy you. You have the opportunity to share the Gospel with others that do not know. I know what you are probably thinking, "Max, don't you get to do that?" Yes, but not every day, and not all the time. My week is made up of meetings with those who know Christ, and other ministry leaders to coordinate efforts to teach the Gospel or create lessons effectively. Most of my day is spent on the phone, behind a computer screen, or at lunch with a young adult or another volunteer.

Recently, I have been convicted of my time and how I spend it. I feel like I can do so much more, and not only more ministry but also with whom I minister. I pray every day that I can be effective with the meetings that I have and that I can see the fruit in the work that I do. With that prayer, I feel that the Lord has revealed something that I lack and that needs improvement. At The River Church, we hold ourselves to our core principles that we believe wholeheartedly is the mission of the Church, and that is Reach, Gather, and Grow. I know

how to gather; I am required to do that because I am in charge of our gatherings at our Waterford location to a certain extent, and I love to lead growth communities and to be able to teach the Word of the Lord to young people. Yet, I am at a loss when it comes to Reach. Every so often with our Young Adult program, we will have a large "Reach" event where we encourage our young adults to invite their friends from school or work so they can hear the Gospel, but we only see a few people come on top of the steady number. I know numbers are not everything, and that is why I titled the devotion, "Who is your one?"

In North Carolina, there is a church pastored by Pastor J.D. Greear called the Summit Church, and in January of 2019, they started a campaign to see 1,000 people in their community come to know Jesus as their Savior. They called it the "Who is Your One?" campaign, and it is very self-explanatory. Who is the one person around you with whom you can share the Gospel? In the story in Exodus, we see that Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, comes and sees that our God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Great I Am, is the true God of all. He sacrificed unto the Lord and said, ***"Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people"*** (Exodus 18:11). As powerful and important as Moses was, his significant contribution was the salvation of his father-in-law. That was his one, and he was able to share the "Gospel" with him effectively.

In our life, we need to find that one. It is the one person who we could share the salvation message with and see their life be changed for the better. Now there is a tactful way of doing it other than being that pompous Christian who beats everyone over the head with the Bible or just how good they are, but rather about how they care about people. We can share food with them, invite them over to your home, and love them.

I have known Christ, or better yet, have known the Christian lifestyle for all my life. I grew up attending Church services at Waterford when I was a child. I recall being in our student leadership group as well as small groups and attending our camps. It was great, and it really cemented who I was. When I was 19, I joined the Navy after a failed stint at Liberty University, and while I was in that dark hole of the world, where seeing Jesus was hard and understanding who Christ is even more difficult. I knew I was a Christian, but yet I did nothing about it. Now close to three years after the fact, I regret not sharing my faith.

I feel like the scene at the end of *"Schindler's List"* where Oscar Schindler looks at all the expensive things he owns and contemplates how many more he could have saved from the concentration camps. I could have been a light to the people I served my country with, but instead, I hid and kept it to myself. I failed for four years to spread the Gospel. Do not do what I did because you are scared. In 2 Timothy 1:7, the author writes, ***"For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."*** Do not be afraid, but rather go forth with the confidence that the Lord has given us.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

ADVICE: DEVOTION 5

Pastor Pat Rowland

A few years ago, I was at a conference and was first introduced to this idea of "Emotional Intelligence." I do not recall much of the talk given by Jeff Henderson, Pastor of Gwinnett Church (Georgia), but I will never forget this challenge. He said to ask someone, "What is it like to be on the other side of me?" You cannot ask that to any one person. You need to ask someone who knows you, and someone you trust enough to whom you will listen.

In Exodus chapter 18, we learn that Moses had a man in his life that he trusted and respected enough to listen to his thoughts of being on the other side of himself. Jethro was Moses' father-in-law, who was also a Priest and a very wise man. He visits Moses and the family, and out of his concern for his son-in-law, he makes an observation.

Moses was carrying a great bit of responsibility day in and day out as God's chosen leader of the Israelites. All day, every day, the entire nation is looking to him and seeking his counsel and direction. Exodus 18:13 says, ***"Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening."*** As soon as he arrives at the office, people are already lined up to meet with him and to receive instruction. I do not get a sense that Moses was at all bothered by this or even complained about it. He would listen, provide counsel, and use the opportunity to teach people about God's Word. I think he loved his job because he loved God and God's people. There was absolutely nothing wrong with what he was doing.

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, had a different perspective. ***"Moses' father-in-law said to him, 'What you are doing is not good. You***

and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone'" (Exodus 18:17-18). Jethro, being a leader of his own people, was more than likely familiar with the situation. He, more than anyone, understood the responsibility that Moses carried and felt led to intervene. When we are in the middle of the situation, we cannot always see what we need to see. Taking a step back, getting a break or inviting in a wise consultant, gives us a different perspective. Do you have a Jethro in your life? Do you have someone you trust enough to observe you and respect enough to listen to them?

LEADERSHIP

ADVICE: DEVOTION 6

Michael Fox

One thing I have learned, and am thankful for is that I cannot do everything myself. I have always struggled with letting others do things; I struggle with knowing it will be done right. I have been blessed with wise counsel over the years, and have begun to learn the value of investing in others.

As we work through the life of Moses, you will see these same lessons learned by Moses as well. Moses was taught by his father-in-law, Jethro to do this very thing.

Exodus 18: 24-27 records, ***"So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And they judged the people at all times. Any hard case they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves. Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went away to his own country."***

If you read the entire chapter of Exodus chapter 18, you will find Moses tasked with leadership over a group of people, and Moses was sought out to help interpret the Scriptures when people had trouble with one another to give advice on how to handle their problems. It says Moses sat ***"morning till evening"*** (Exodus 18:13). It was too much for him to do himself, and he was spending all of his time on this one task.

He listened to his father-in-law, who was giving him wise counsel and godly advice and found other leaders to manage smaller groups

of people. As David Guzik writes, “This was good for the leaders Moses chose. Capable men were given real responsibility and had the opportunity to serve God’s people in meaningful ways and further God’s work.”

We read in 2 Timothy 2:2, ***“And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”***

“It is better to set a hundred men to work than to do the work of a hundred men.” D.L. Moody



LESSON 14

TEN COMMANDMENTS

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

A friend of mine knew a professor who was known for mocking God and anyone who believed in Him. He would hold up a Bible and treat it like a fable book full of flaws. At the start of a new semester, a student went up and challenged the professor in private. He said, "You say the Bible is full of errors; can you identify one?" The professor said, "There are two sets of Ten Commandments, and they contradict each other."

Exodus chapter 20 and Deuteronomy chapter 5 both record Ten Commandments. Why are there two sets of Ten Commandments (Hint: Moses was the most sinful man of all time; he “broke” all Ten Commandments in four seconds)?

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The next key section in the life of Moses was God giving him the Ten Commandments. Zig Ziglar gave a great reminder, “If God would have wanted us to live in a permissive society He would have given us Ten Suggestions and not Ten Commandments.”

It is helpful to view each of the Ten Commandments.

1. Put God first.

“You shall have no other gods before me.” Exodus 20:3

The word ***“before”*** literally means “to my face.” This verse does not imply that there are other gods. It is commanding that we do not place anything else to the level of God (face to face). The word was also used in Hebrew in referring to someone taking a second wife while the first is still alive. We should not have another god.

2. Praise and worship only God.

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." Exodus 20:4-6

God tells us not to make an idol. It is crazy to think a man could make God. That is so irrational. Yet, we do it.

How else can someone make an idol of God other than with a physical object?

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3. Keep God's name holy.

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain." Exodus 20:7

God's name is often misused. It is uttered in a flippant way. This is wrong.

In what ways can we respect the name of God more?

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4. Keep the Lord's day special.

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."
Exodus 20:8-11

This commandment was not new. From the start of creation, God modeled the concept of working six days and resting the seventh.

What are some advantages of keeping a Sabbath day?

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It is believed that the first four commandments were on one tablet, while the other six were on a second tablet. It is an interesting division. Noah Webster said, "The duties of men are summarily comprised in the Ten Commandments, consisting of two tables; one comprehending the duties which we owe immediately to God-the other, the duties we owe to our fellow men." Rick Warren agreed in saying, "Four of the Ten Commandments deal with our relationship to God while the other six deal with our relationships with people. But all ten are about relationships."

Even though the Israelites had multiplied the Ten Commandments to about 613 commandments, Jesus summarized them into two. Matthew 22:37-40 records what Jesus said when He was asked

what was the greatest commandment, ***"And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.'"***

Summarize the two commandments.

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5. Honor your parents.

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." Exodus 20:12

Ephesians 6:1-3 repeats the commandment, ***"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 'that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.'"***

What is the difference between obeying and honoring?

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6. Do not harm anyone.

"You shall not murder." Exodus 20:13

I think it is easy to pass right on by this command. We say, "I have not done that," and for some reason, we start feeling pretty good

about ourselves. In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus gives more insight to the command, ***"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."*** Our emotions can get so stirred that we hate someone. Jesus reminds us to be careful.

Does someone's name come to mind when you think of hate?

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I have found one of the best things to do for those who get under my skin is to pray for them and possibly even do something nice for them. I replace hate with love.

7. Love the one you marry.

"You shall not commit adultery." Exodus 20:14

Again we quickly check this one off the list, but again Jesus clarifies the expectation. Matthew 5:27-28 says, ***"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*** We need to avoid certain situations, places, and sites. The battleground is often in the mind.

What safe guards can be put in place so you do not fall?

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8. Do not take anything that is not yours.

"You shall not steal." Exodus 20:15

9. Tell the truth.

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Exodus 20:16

10. Do not be jealous of what others have.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's." Exodus 20:17

So many of these verses are basic common sense. We need to treat others the way we want to be treated. A friend recently directed me to 1 Peter 4:8 ***"Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins."*** As we discussed it, I realized I viewed this verse as past tense. However, it is also future tense; love will keep us from wronging others.

Which commandment do you need to work on now?

_____
_____
_____

What changes will you make to ensure change?

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_____

In conclusion, Bill Bright said, “I remember when Ronald Reagan was president he said ‘if the American people obeyed the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule we wouldn’t have any problems.’ The first time I heard him say it I thought, ‘That’s too simplistic.’ There are complicated problems back there. But you analyze it, he’s right.”

WORSHIP

TEN COMMANDMENTS: DEVOTION 1

John Rigg

"You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." Exodus 20:3-6

God had just delivered what would come to be known as the Ten Commandments to Moses at Mt. Sinai. As instructed, ***"Moses went down to the people and told them"*** (Exodus 19:25). Right from the start, God reminded the people that He is ***"the LORD your God"*** and that He alone has brought them ***"out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery"*** (Exodus 20:2).

You would think that Moses would not even have to mention the first two commandments in light of the latest events. Think about it; God had just recently parted the Red Sea so the Israelites could pass from a life of bondage into freedom, while simultaneously crushing Pharaoh's army that was in hot pursuit. Then amazingly, God revealed Himself at Mt. Sinai with ***"thunders and lightings and a thick cloud…and a very loud trumpet blast so that all the people in the camp trembled"*** (Exodus 19:16). Nevertheless, Moses would soon realize that although the people had been removed out of the Egyptian culture, the Egyptian culture had not been removed out of the people and there was a need for "The Law."

Moses was leading a people that had just been freed from a culture where many gods were worshiped, and if one of those gods did not produce what you wanted, then you just made up another god. Centuries later, the Apostle Paul would address the theology of false gods and the worship of man-made idols in his letter to the Romans, ***"Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things"*** (Romans 1:22–23).

It is so easy for us today to look on this time in history and say to ourselves, "What fools!" "How could anyone ever believe in more than one god or bow down to man-made things?" However, in the New Testament, the time in which we live, the term idolatry is directly linked to covetousness. Colossians 3:5 says, ***"Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."***

Moses and the Israelites may not have had to worry about having too much stuff while wandering the Palestinian desert. However, we do. By worshiping the false god of self, we fall prey to bowing down to materialism. If we are willing to be honest, our homes are filled with all types of possessions. We continue to build bigger and bigger houses that contain more space in order to store all the stuff we need to keep the "god of self" happy. We may not call it worship but think of all the time we spend on maintaining our possessions. One of the definitions for idolatry is when worship or divine honor is paid to any created object other than God. Even the word worship has its origin in the word "worth" or value. So, in essence, we could determine the object of our worship by evaluating on what we spend most of our time, talents, and money. Fortunately for us, embedded in the commandments of God, we can see the result of choosing idolatry (loving stuff) or loving Him.

Exodus 20:5-6 says, ***"You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."***

Just as in the days of Moses, the generations of those that follow will either be cursed or blessed by what they are learning from how we live our lives.

No other gods.
No carved images.
It is a choice.

FRIVOLOUS?

TEN COMMANDMENTS: DEVOTION 2

Pastor Gareth Volz

Exodus 20:7 says, ***"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."*** This is a familiar verse to most Christians, especially those who have been raised in a Christian family and attended church most of their lives.

When I first thought about writing a devotion on this commandment, I felt, "What an easy assignment – the Lord said do not take My name in vain, and if you do, I will hold you guilty for doing so. Swearing is wrong, so do not do it! Assignment completed." At least that was my initial thought.

The Holy Spirit whispered that I needed to dig deeper into what God was saying in this verse. What does it mean to take the name of the Lord my God in vain? "Vain" in Hebrew means "empty or worthless of value." It is used in Psalm 127:2 to describe worthless works, in Jonah 2:8 to describe worthless idols, and in Ezekiel 12:24 to describe false prophecy. So, in addition to being a warning not to curse or swear, it also means not to use the Lord's name in an empty or worthless manner.

I began to think, have I ever used the Lord's name in a worthless manner? What would that look like? Then it hit me! When I pray to the Lord, do I realize that I am talking to Almighty God, the Creator and Sustainer of everything? Is the focus of my conversation on the fact that He is omnipotent [all powerful] and omniscient [knows everything]? Do I really believe that He hears my prayers and will answer them in His perfect time and way? If not, then I am using His name in an empty, worthless manner.

When a family member or friend has a health issue or is going through a tough time, and I say I will pray for them, do I really pray for them? Is my prayer for them one that comes from a heart that yearns for God's best for them, or do I just rattle off some phrase because I said I would? If that is the case, then I used His name in an empty and worthless manner.

When I am startled by something, do I ever utter the phrase, "Oh my God" or some similar phrase when I am not thinking of God at all? If so, I am using His name in a frivolous manner – an empty and worthless manner.

It is easy to sometimes be like the Pharisee's prayer comparing himself to the tax collector in Luke 18:10, and say, "Lord I thank you that I am not like those other people that swear and take Your name in vain." Any time I use the Lord's name in a casual or trivial manner violates His command in Exodus 20:7. The Lord's name is holy and powerful, and I need to hold it in reverence at all times.

As the Lord's child, I never want to use His name in a disrespectful manner. He deserves always to be exalted by our use of His name.

REST

TEN COMMANDMENTS: DEVOTION 3

Isaiah Combs

I struggle with resting. I am not talking about sleeping but resting. I enjoy napping, but with five kids that is not a given. When I finally lay my head down at night, I fall asleep with no problem.

I am talking about resting from work and the busyness of life. I love to be busy, and I love that I get to serve God with my life in full-time ministry. The work of the Lord is never done, and if you allow it to, it will consume you and your life.

Resting is important. Yes, work, kids, life, and fill in the blank are important. However, we as followers were called to rest. We can define our use of rest as a resetting, unwinding, getting perspective, spending time doing nothing, or hanging out with your family.

I struggle with resting, and I believe it is me not trusting God and telling Him He is not in control, and I need to work like a maniac to make up where He is lacking.

God created everything in six days, and on the seventh day, God rested (Genesis chapter one). God is purposeful in everything He does, and everything in the Bible was put there on purpose for a purpose. God rested on the seventh day. This means that we, as followers of Christ, should take time once a week to rest and give God the glory for the week.

Exodus 20:8-11 further supports my argument for a day of rest. God commanded the Israelites (His chosen people) to create a Sabbath, a day of rest that would honor God in accordance with the rest day God took on the seventh day after creation.

Exodus 20:8-11 says, ***"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days, the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."***

Some people make the argument that Sundays are the day that God wants us to rest. It can vary for each of us.

- God rested on the last day of the week, and that day is Saturday, not Sunday.
- He actually did not say what day to rest.
- My work week starts on Tuesday and goes through Sunday. Sunday is usually my hardest most stressful day. It is work for me.
- I take my Sabbath, or rest day, on Mondays.

Taking a rest day is hard, and if you want to implement this in your life, it is going to take real commitment. You may have to turn off your phone, get off social media, tell your boss you cannot, and actively choose not to plan things for your day of rest.

DESERVED RESPECT

TEN COMMANDMENTS: DEVOTION 4

Roger Allen

Imagine finding out you were born under a death sentence because of your ethnicity and gender. Your parents were hiding you for as long as possible from the authorities. Finally, realizing that they could no longer keep you safe, your mother took action. She swaddled you and put you into a small basket made of bullrushes, you floated on the Nile River. That is how Moses' life began (Read Exodus 2:1-10).

We know very little about Moses' parents. Assuming they are like most, we can imagine that they were protective of their children. Their goal was raising them in their ways, customs, and instilling in them the faith they had in God. Yet for Moses, he never got to experience the nurturing of his birth parents. His connection with his family is at best, viewed from the outside. Still, Moses came to know who he truly was. Possibly from his mother, sister, or by God himself, Moses knew he was a Hebrew. In Exodus 2:1, we find that both parents are from the house of Levi. Unnamed, it will not be until Exodus 6:20, that his parents' names are finally revealed to us, ***"Amram took as his wife Jochebed his father's sister, and she bore him Aaron and Moses, the years of the life of Amram being 137 years."***

As we can see from the text, Amram took his aunt Jochebed, as his wife. A short while later in Leviticus 18:12 and 16, we find that this is strictly forbidden. What is actually happening here? If we read the whole story of Moses, we quickly realize that his destiny is not determined by his birthright. God's plan for his life would supersede any detrimental effects of being born a slave. Eventually, he would lead his people out of bondage and would introduce the commandment that the father and mother shall be honored, ***"Honor***

your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12).

Considered the first commandment of the second tablet, the fifth commandment brings together the conduct towards our familial relations. It is telling us to do more than obey but to adore those who give us life. This is for the people who have looked after us (even if it was just a short time) with reverence and respect. They are the ones who have kept us safe and have given us instruction so that we may prosper. It is to those that sacrificed so we may have life. What greater love is there? Just as Amram and Jochebed, protected their son Moses, we see the reason why we must honor them. They put it all on the line for him.

As our parents age, we owe them the honor and respect they deserve. It may be taking time out of our day to check on their well being, taking them to lunch, or just conversation. We should not consider this as a chore, but a celebration. God has not commanded that "if" our parents should be honored, but "how" they should be honored. Even if they struggled in the parenting role, we should find the grace and the love that God has commanded. There is a promise that is attached to this, and we would do well to listen to it.

PAID THE PRICE

TEN COMMANDMENTS: DEVOTION 5

Noble Baird

In Exodus 20:13, we are given the account of one of the Ten Commandments. The commandment is, ***"You shall not murder."*** There are many times throughout God's Word, where I wish I could see a snapshot of people's reactions to things that happened. For instance: David killing Goliath with a slingshot, Daniel just chilling with the lions in a pit, seeing the Red Sea part, or Samson's skill with a jawbone; and all of those are just in the Old Testament! Yet, I cannot help but wonder what Moses' reaction was as God was writing out this commandment, knowing that he had already broken it.

Back when I was in fourth grade, my school bought new desks for all the fourth and fifth-grade classes. One day, not long after purchasing them, some classmates and I realized that with a metal ruler, you were able to cut into the rubber side that was all around the top of the desk. You can see where this is headed. Whenever we were bored, we simply took out the ruler and began cutting the edge of the desk. However, it did not take long before my teacher noticed the cuts alongside the edge of the desks, my desk in particular. That afternoon, I was surprised to see my parents arrive at the school to pick me up and they took me to my classroom. As we walked in, my teacher was sitting down, thanked my parents for coming on short notice, and I began to piece everything together, realizing the jig was about to be done. Needless to say, I owned up to my mistake, and my parents paid for a new desk. I am pretty sure I was not allowed to watch TV or stay up late for quite some time.

I am sure if we are all honest, we know exactly how Moses felt in that moment of failure. We have all messed up, whether on purpose or

not, and we have all been caught for that act we did. Yet, it is pretty cool how just like my parents eventually forgave me for my mistake and paid the price, Christ did the same for Moses and us! Over the span of Moses' life, there is no doubt that this was not the only time he broke God's commandments. Fast forward a couple of thousand years later, here we are just as guilty with the same sinking feeling Moses probably experienced that day up on the mountain with God. Yet, we are reminded of God's grace and mercy to us all as we see in Romans 5:8, Paul writes, ***"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."***

THE FINAL HOUR

TEN COMMANDMENTS: DEVOTION 6

Pastor Chuck Lindsey

"You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."
Exodus 20:14-17 (NKJV)

Commands are everywhere: "Hardhat required past this point," "Seatbelt required," "No texting and driving," "Do not operate a motor vehicle while taking this medication," and "Do not touch this or it will kill you and hurt the whole time it's doing so." These kinds of rules are in place for obvious reasons. If you go against them, it might not go well for you.

The Law of God was put in place in the same way. They are not just what God wants us to do; they are what is best for us to do. The person who has false gods in their lives violates the first and second commands and will find themselves owned by those "gods." The person who ignores the command against murder will obviously bring great consequences upon their lives. The person who dishonors their father and mother will bring great brokenness into their families. Ignoring any of the "10" is not only sinful but will also have natural ramifications in a person's life.

The last four commands are perhaps most obvious in their consequences.

The command to not commit adultery is protection against great harm. It is a command that, if followed, will keep a mountain of pain

and trouble from crashing down on us. When followed, it allows a marriage to thrive and become the blessing to both the husband and wife that it is intended to be.

The command not to steal not only keeps a person from prison, but also protects us from the sneakiness, lying, manipulation, and continual discontentment that accompany those caught up in this sin.

The ninth command protects us from becoming liars. To ignore it is to become a person who cannot be trusted.

The command to not covet is a protective command to be content and happy with what we have. What a protection this is to the person who is careful to obey it in a world that knows nothing of the simple joy of not needing anything. Following this often results in thankfulness in our lives. Ignoring it causes a person to chase and spend their lives on all the wrong things.

Following the commands of God is not only right, in terms of right and wrong, but it is also the “right” way to live life. To ignore any command of God is to bring great pain and trouble into our lives. So, God set out rules for our protection and blessing. Our inability to keep these commands perfectly (as God requires) shows us that we are lawbreakers and reveals our need to be saved. Therefore, like everything in Scripture, the Law of God ultimately points us to our Lord Jesus Christ to find all that we need.



LESSON 15

BROKEN TABLETS

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

Opposites attract and sometimes they even attack. My wife and I have been married for more than 35 years. We dated for about seven years before that. We have known each other for four decades and are still learning how to work together better.

One of our differences is how we give a farewell wish to one of our children. As our son or daughter is leaving to go do something, I say, "Have fun," and my wife says, "Be careful." We have done this since they were young. I find it humorous.

Which of your parents was the "fun parent" and who was the "strict parent?"

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_____
_____

Which do you tend to be like?

_____
_____
_____

What is the strength and weakness of both?

_____
_____
_____

Ideally, both parents would know how to be both fun and strict. We need to know our boundaries and how to set guidelines and expectations for others while still finding and making time to enjoy life and each other. Our children want to have fun, but they also want stability, structure, and to know someone cares about what they do.

Exodus chapter 32 shows how this balance can be seen in teams other than just the mother and father. Aaron and Moses were brothers. They were also leaders. In essence, they had a couple million "children" they were responsible for their well being. This chapter details a major fall in leadership with horrific consequences.

1. Idolatry

As Exodus chapter 32 begins, we realize Moses has been up on the mountain with God for 40 days. Verses 1-6 share the chilling details, ***"When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, 'Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' So Aaron said to them, 'Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.' So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!' When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.' And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play."***

Why did the people turn to idolatry? How does this compare to our lives?

_____

_____

_____

What were Aaron's negative actions and positive actions? Why did he do them?

_____
_____
_____

Verses 7-14 contain a conversation between the Lord and Moses. The Lord is furious about how they ***"have corrupted themselves"*** (verse 7). He refers to them as ***"a stiff-necked people"*** (verse 9), which is a reference to an animal fighting the yoke. The Lord concludes that His ***"wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them"*** (verse 10). He suggests destroying His people. In an interesting twist in the conversation, Moses reminded the Lord of His covenant and ***"the Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people"*** (verse 14).

How were Aaron and Moses like the "fun parent" and the "strict parent?"

_____
_____
_____

What forms of "idolatry" tempt us? Are we allowing it in our homes?

_____
_____
_____

2. Infliction

Sin has consequences. The law of cause and effect steps into the scenario. Infliction, punishment, or discipline have to take place. Verses 15-20 record the start of the consequences, ***"Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets***

of the testimony in his hand, tablets that were written on both sides; on the front and on the back they were written. The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, 'There is a noise of war in the camp.' But he said, 'It is not the sound of shouting for victory, or the sound of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing that I hear.' And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it."

What actions did Moses take?

_____

_____

_____

Was Moses justified in his actions? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

Verses 21- 29 continue the punishment for sin. Aaron blames the people and even suggests that the making of the calf was miraculous, ***"So I said to them, 'Let any who have gold take it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf"*** (verse 24). Moses then draws a line in the sand. Moses says, ***"Who is on the Lord's side? Come to me"*** (verse 26). The sons of Levi stepped forward. Moses ordered them to take their swords and kill their fellow kin who have chosen to follow other gods. Verse 28 says that about three thousand men died. They even had to kill close relatives. It was horrendous. Sin has consequences.

Normally when we speak of anger, it has a negative connotation. However, there is a righteous anger. In John chapter 2 and Matthew chapter 21, Jesus clears the Temple. Jesus, the One who never sinned, experienced anger.

Mark 3:1-5 describes another time when Jesus was angry, ***"Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, 'Come here.' And he said to them, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored."***

Why was Jesus angry?

_____
_____
_____

What did Jesus do?

_____
_____
_____

There are other verses that do not condemn all anger:

"Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger." Ephesians 4:26

"Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense." Proverbs 19:11

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." Psalm 103:8

What are some guidelines for anger?

_____
_____
_____

When should we get angry? Any specific situations you should be facing now?

_____
_____
_____

3. Intercession

Exodus chapter 32 closes with Moses being willing to stand in the gap, ***"The next day Moses said to the people, 'You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.' So Moses returned to the Lord and said, 'Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.' But the Lord said to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.' Then the Lord sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made."***

What did Moses offer to do?

_____

_____

_____

Moses is a major player in the Bible. His name is listed 796 times in the Bible being found in 31 of the 66 books. With all of his references, this is one of his most heroic moments. He offers to give himself up as a ransom for the people. Psalm 106:23 refers to this moment, ***"Therefore he said he would destroy them - had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them."***

Moses was a type of Christ. Although Moses was willing to be exchanged for others, he could not offer eternal life on his own merits. Jesus does. Hebrews 7:25 says, ***"Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."***

Isaiah 53:12 adds, ***"Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors."***

What has Jesus offered to do?

_____

_____

_____

"Jesus Christ carries on intercession for us in heaven; the Holy Ghost carries on intercession in us on earth; and we the saints have to carry on intercession for all men." Oswald Chambers

EYES UP

BROKEN TABLETS: DEVOTION 1

Pastor Ryan Story

Recently, I had another "life of a dad moment." I cleaned my children's playroom the other day. After I completed the monumental task of sorting out and organizing an unprecedented amount of Avengers action figures, PJ Masks buildings, Paw Patrol vehicles, Legos, and random toy weapons, the room was looking good, and I decided to make lunch for my sons. Within the amount of time it took me to make two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, my sons tore their playroom apart again.

I learned a valuable life lesson that day; if you do not have your eyes up, ruin can destroy what you have taken your time building. In a Christian sense, sin can, and will, enter your life if you are not paying attention, and it can destroy your life. I have always cataloged sin into two major issues, pride and idolatry. I believe every sin has its roots in these two major issues. Putting self first, desire, envy, and a list of sins too long to count, find their source in pride. Concerning idolatry, I lump any sin that has me taking God away from being God. Any time we worship an object, activity, person, or passion above God is idolatry.

Moses ran into the sin of idolatry in a major way in Exodus chapter 32. Preceding this chapter, Moses was on the mountain talking to God about how to rule over the nation of Israel. God instructed Moses with the Law, and Moses carved the Law out on the stone. While Moses was putting forth the work, God told Moses that there was a major issue brewing at the foot of Mount Sinai. Exodus 32:8 says, ***"They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden***

calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" Whenever I picture Moses at this moment, I can not help but see Charlton Heston (being Moses) being angry at a planet filled with ape overlords.

The severity of idolatry is terrifying. There is no major indication what prompted Aaron to decide to lead the idol worship. Aaron was always pretty upright in his walk with God. Moses even trusted Aaron. Yet, idolatry still snuck into his camp. As people who are attempting to walk as close to God as possible, we must take heed of this story. Even the first priest can fall victim to putting objects above God. Why would we think we would be any different?

Idolatry can sneak into your camp. There is nothing wrong with a job, but your job can become the object of worship more than your creator. Sports are fun, but they can consume a family quickly. I love my family, but I can start putting my wife or children's happiness before that of my Jesus. Idolatry sneaks in faster than it took my boys to destroy a freshly cleaned room. Keep your eyes open to what is in you and your family's life. Are you devoting more energy and effort into a job, person, hobby, or passion than you are for loving Jesus? This is serious; do not overlook the slightest discrepancy. Once that idol enters the camp, it will destroy everything you have built, or even scarier, God may be the one with the sledgehammer. God does not take kindly to other things being worshiped more than Him. Keep your eyes up on Jesus, and make sure your focus and adoration is fully and properly devoted to the one who deserves it.

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols." 1 John 5:21

HIS REPUTATION

BROKEN TABLETS: DEVOTION 2

Holly Boston

Do you think God has a sense of humor? Whenever I stop and really think about the fact that I am Director of Women's Ministry, I immediately laugh and think, "Wow does God have a sense of humor!" It is the only logical conclusion when you consider that throughout my childhood and adolescence, I could not stand to be around girls. The drama, the backstabbing, and the rumor mill were more than I could take, and subsequently, I preferred hanging out with boys. As I got older, my parents tried to impress upon me that this was unwise and could result in me having a bad reputation. My dad's words haunt me to this day, "Holly, you are judged by the company you keep."

This is not an outdated concept — many of the decisions we make every day rest on reputation. We look for clothing with name brands and cars that are known to run long while requiring the least service. We choose reputable colleges, prestigious careers, and churches that are known by their reputation. Reputation is a very important factor and shapes our daily decisions.

Believer, are you concerned about God's reputation? In Exodus 32:1-14, we read about a conversation Moses had with God. While Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Law from God, the Israelites grew impatient and decided to collect all the gold and fashion a golden calf to worship. Their corruption and idol worship resulted in God's decision to consume or eliminate them. I found Moses' response astounding. Moses expressed concern for God's reputation if He were to carry out His plan. Moses was concerned that Egypt would believe God intended to lead them into the mountains to kill them.

My response would have been quite different. I believe I would have said, “I am tired of these people. They deserve the wrath of God. Please remember me and spare me and mine.” Moses was first and foremost concerned with God’s reputation. When I talk to God, I do a great job of praising and worshipping Him and thanking Him for the cross with the daily grace He extends to me. However, when it comes to His actions, my requests come from a selfish heart. I want my will and my way.

Believer, do you profess to be one of His? Do you remember you are saved by grace through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9)? If so, do you understand that you are now His ambassador and representative (2 Corinthians 5:20)? Do you tout attending church regularly, attending Bible study weekly, and praying daily, but what does your walk look like? Do your words, actions, and reactions reflect well on God? You are one of His representatives; therefore, God’s reputation is impacted by your life. Does your life draw others to Him? Your reputation is His reputation.

What if you are the only Bible they read? Your choices impact God’s reputation every day and can affect others’ eternal choices. God is judged by the company He keeps.

May we be determined to make Him look good!

A COW?

BROKEN TABLETS: DEVOTION 3

Isaiah Combs

My parents were really busy people and still are. When my brothers and I were too young to watch ourselves, my parents would bring in a babysitter to watch us. I want to give a quick note and apologize to our babysitters. We are and were three very type A, rambunctious, and annoying kids.

My parents would leave us with these poor people, and we would go crazy. My Mom was great and ran a very tight ship. The three of us were very aware of what, where, and when we were supposed to do things. So we took full advantage that the babysitter was unaware of Mom's strict rules and guidelines. We would basically do whatever we wanted to do and try and get away with the craziest things.

That is what is happening in Exodus 32:15-20. Moses was up on top of the mountain while the Israelites were camped at the base of the mountain. Moses was up there on top of the mountain speaking to God and getting the Ten Commandments. On his way back down, he hears a crazy sound. It was the sound of the Israelites worshiping a golden image (The idol was a cow made of gold. Why do we worship creation and not the creator?). They created it from the gold of their sons' earrings. By the way, when I was a kid, I wanted earrings. So, I used this to convince my parents that boys in the Bible had earrings. It did not work.

This story is just like my Mom when she would get home from whatever she was doing. She would either see the devastation that we caused or our poor babysitter would tell her all the terrible things we had done while she was out. This is what Moses was feeling. He

was furious, and he punished the Israelite by melting the golden cow down and making them drink it.

Just like the Israelites, when Moses was up on the mountain talking to God, we have a choice of who we are going to worship. On Sundays, when going to church and worship God, we have a choice. During the week, when we are away from everyone, we choose who we are worshiping. Is it your job, money, wife, kids, yourself, or God?

Who are you worshiping when no one is looking?

LOVINGLY WARNED

BROKEN TABLETS: DEVOTION 4

Debbie Kerr

"For they said to me, 'Make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'"
Exodus 32:23

Everything rises and falls on leadership. If we do not have good leadership, we start to flounder and lose focus. All throughout Scripture, we see the example of leadership. Some of the leadership is good, and some are not so good. For the believer in Jesus Christ, our ultimate authority (leader) is the Word of God. Secondly, we are given Pastors (also known as under-shepherds), parents, government, and others. There is always a chain of command, and that chain begins with God. Today's passage definitely depicts poor leadership.

In Exodus chapter 32, we see poor leadership in action as things start to fall apart because their leader Moses had been away too long. Aaron was second in command, but under his leadership, the people became impatient, self-absorbed, and bored. When we are left to ourselves too long, the temptation can creep in to search for other things or people to satisfy us. We tend to worship them. The people of Israel were no different than we are today. If we are not careful, we can easily fall into the enemy's lie that we need something more. We may begin to search for a feeling or a sign, or something a little more sensational. We think we have got this; we feel we do not need to go to church and be with the Body of Christ. We try to reason it out and justify worshiping so many other things than the God of the Bible. Often times, our lives begin to fall apart too.

My husband and I recently watched a very compelling and convicting documentary regarding the state of the American Church in our generation. Sadly, in many Bible-teaching churches, the Gospel is being added to or changed. It is no longer about Christ alone for salvation. The cross and the shedding of Jesus' blood for our atonement isn't exciting enough because there is no instant gratification or physical manifestation. This teaching is not new, but it is evolving into a more extreme level of false teaching and is considered one of the fastest-growing movements in Christianity. Some churches even teach the idea that when you witness, you should not tell people they are sinners, or that they need to repent. They are taught only to tell them how much God loves them. While that is a true statement, it leaves the lost person with only partial truth. It is about Christ alone; it is not about us! The Gospel is not a message that Christ died to make us happy, healthy, and rich. Jesus said to find our life, we must lose it and die to ourselves daily. The minute we make it about us, we are worshiping a different Gospel, a different Jesus. Humanity is born with a God-given, innate need to worship! Everyone worships something or someone.

Our enemy, the devil, knows the truth and how to twist it. He only had to change what God said ever so slightly to deceive Eve. So listen carefully, know God's Word, seek the truth, and walk in it. Pray that God will keep you from being deceived because the Bible warns about this in the last days. A false god in any shape or form is an idol. Consider yourself lovingly warned.

We are reminded in 1 Timothy 4:1, ***"Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons."***

CLEANING HOUSE

BROKEN TABLETS: DEVOTION 5

Wes McCullough

"Moses saw that Aaron had let the people get completely out of control, much to the amusement of their enemies. So he stood at the entrance to the camp and shouted, 'All of you who are on the Lord's side, come here and join me.' And all the Levites gathered around him. Moses told them, 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Each of you, take your swords and go back and forth from one end of the camp to the other. Kill everyone—even your brothers, friends, and neighbors.' The Levites obeyed Moses' command, and about 3,000 people died that day. Then Moses told the Levites, 'Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of the Lord, for you obeyed him even though it meant killing your own sons and brothers. Today you have earned a blessing.'" Exodus 32:25-29 (NLT)

This is such an intense passage. Can any of us imagine being this obedient to God? It is a true nightmare to consider. A more likely choice we would have to make today is to remove toxic influences from our lives. If you struggle with drugs, it will be much harder to get clean if you hang out with other addicts. If you are convicted about alcohol consumption - avoid bars, the liquor aisle, and perhaps friends who are always drinking or asking you to join them at the bar. If your conviction is profanity, you will have to get away from people and places where that language is used.

A good friend of mine had a "return to God" moment several years ago. He decided it was time to repent and rededicate his life to God. He had to make tough choices and separate himself from close friends because they would pull him away from godly living. He also chose to remove media and other things that did not honor God.

One of my favorite Bible stories is contained in 1 Kings chapter 18 - Elijah versus the prophets of Baal. The Israelites could not decide if they followed God or Baal, so there was a sacrifice showdown. God showed up in an undeniable and incredible way that day (I would love to see this portrayed in film one day!). After the Israelites are reminded that God reigns supreme, all the prophets of Baal are round up and executed. They led people away from God and had to be removed as influencers.

Be careful about the influences you allow in your life. Honor God with your choices and be obedient. Following God will often mean making personal sacrifices, but God will honor your obedience.

"Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life." Proverbs 4:23 (NLT)

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments." John 14:15

3,000 DEAD

BROKEN TABLETS: DEVOTION 6

John Hubbard

I noticed something that I never noticed before in the story of the golden calf at Mount Sinai. I remember that Moses was so mad when he got back that he threw the tablets down and broke them. I remember that he melted the calf down, ground it up, sprinkled the gold dust into the water, and made them drink it. However, I did not recall that Moses had all the sons of Levi kill 3,000 of the men right after all of that. The crazy part about that display of violence is that Moses had just pleaded with God a few verses earlier. He pleaded for God to spare them rather than wipe them out for making the calf and being a "stiff-necked people." However, when Moses comes face to face with their sin, he is forced into action. Exodus 32:30-35 says, ***"The next day Moses said to the people, 'You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.' So Moses returned to the Lord and said, 'Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.' But the Lord said to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.' Then the Lord sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made."***

It is hard to believe that Moses would offer himself up in place of the people who have just sinned so greatly against God. Perhaps Moses felt he had dealt with enough of their punishment, and now he could try to persuade God to go easy on the rest of the Israelites.

I cannot help but feel like Moses is coming to God and saying, “Hey God, I dealt with this sin in my people. Really, I have handled it. Are we good?” In a surprisingly, gentle way, God tells Moses that justice will always be brought by God alone, and it will always come exactly how and when He decides. Moses brought his own justice by way of the Levites, but God blots them out of His book and later on brings a plague to them. How many times do we try and play God when people close to us sin? We are instead called to love and point people to Jesus. We can leave justice to God.



LESSON 16

SHINING FACE

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

I was watching a high school basketball game with Pastor Caleb and Pastor Pat from our church. Pastor Caleb nudged me with his elbow and said, "Jimmy King is sitting behind us." He did not need to explain anything. We all knew Jimmy King was part of Michigan's "Fab Five" college basketball team. They were a treat to watch.

Pastor Pat grabbed his phone and discretely did an over-the-shoulder picture of Jimmy King. It was not a selfie, but he may have added that later. Pastor Caleb's son went and greeted the "star" and was warmly welcomed. He then asked if his dad would take his picture with him. Pastor Caleb has a picture of his son with Jimmy King.

It is interesting how an event like that can make you feel good.

Who are some celebrities you have met? Is there an interesting story about the encounter?

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Moses had a special encounter that not only made him feel good, but it changed his life. Exodus 33:18-23 records, ***"Moses said, 'Please show me your glory.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.' And the Lord said, 'Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.'"***

Exodus 34:6 adds, ***"The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.'"***

What was Moses' request?

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How did God answer Moses?

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Please underline these phrases:
"Glory passes by."
"I have passed by."
"The Lord passed before him."

Dr. David Garland, Professor of Christian Studies at Baylor University, points out that the term for "to pass by" is used three times in Scripture. He calls it a theophany. He goes on to say it is those unique and defining moments when God made "striking and temporary appearances in the earthly realm to a select individual or group for the purpose of communicating a message."

1. The Lord "passed by" Moses.

The Lord appeared to Moses in a special way for a specific reason. The Lord was letting Moses get to know Him better or deeper so Moses could better communicate with the people. This intimacy brought clarity and confidence. The last half of Exodus 34:29 says, ***"Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because***

he had been talking with God." Moses was shining. His face was literally bright. The people noticed and were ready to listen.

What affect does our time with the Lord have on us?

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2. The Lord "passed by" Elijah.

Elijah watched God show up on Mount Carmel and defeat the false gods and their 850 prophets as He devoured the altar with fire. One chapter later, Elijah is spiritually drained. In 1 Kings 19:9-12 we read, ***"There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He said, 'I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.' And he said, 'Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord.' And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper."*** The Lord appeared in a specific way to let Elijah know that He was with him and that his work was not done.

What does it mean to be spiritually drained and how can it make us vulnerable?

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How can knowing the Lord better help us handle victories better?

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Please underline the phrase ***"the Lord passed by."*** How did the Lord reveal Himself this time and why do you think He did it this way?

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3. The Lord "passed by" Peter and the disciples.

Dr. Garland's insight on the concept "to pass by" brought a richer meaning to the account of Peter walking on water. Mark 6:45-52 says, ***"Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.' And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened."***

The last line is amazing, ***"For they did not understand about the loaves."*** They not only saw the feeding of the 5,000, but they also participated in it. I am sure each one ate as if the boy's lunch was only

for them. They are confused, so Jesus ***"meant to pass by them"*** (please underline the phrase again). He was walking toward them. As He got closer, they started speculating. The Gospel according to Matthew even records Peter's response. Peter walked on water.

Jesus was not racing the disciples across the Sea of Galilee. He was not looking to pass them on the turn. He wanted to reveal Himself in a special way to Peter and the disciples. They saw the bread, Him walking on water, Peter walking on water, and how the wind ceased. He revealed Himself so they would know Him in a special way. He chose them to know Him better so they could tell others who He is.

How can storms in our lives help us better know God?

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How does knowing God better help us in those storms?

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Acts 4:13 is a verse that should be a goal for all of us. It says, ***"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus."***

What is the supreme compliment given about Peter and John?

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What does it mean to be with Jesus? What are some ways we should do this?

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How can people know you have been with Jesus?

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Paul said, ***"That I may know him and the power of his resurrection"*** (Philippians 3:10a). That should be our daily goal, too.

STANDING IN THE GAP

SHINING FACE: DEVOTION 1

Pastor Pat Rowland

I often wonder where I would be if it were not for people that went before others on my behalf to vouch for my character and ask for mercy. I have never been a person that has done things terribly wrong, but I have had my moments of idiocy. For example, there was the time in college I was pulled over in the early morning hours just outside of the college campus. I will spare you the details, but I was going pretty fast and tried to duck down a side street to avoid being pulled over and having to pay the expense of a speeding ticket. I know it was not really my finest moment, because speeding was the least of my problems when I was pulled over 100 feet from my apartment. If it was not for a campus police officer that had known me well enough to vouch for my character, I might have been arrested for failure to stop. Instead, I parked my car and walked to my apartment with only a warning and a deep sense of gratitude to both officers.

It was Moses in Exodus chapter 34 who stood in the gap for the Israelites pleading before ***"a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation"*** (Exodus 34:6-7). Moses knew that God was frustrated with his people and rightfully so; as a matter of fact, Moses was upset as well. However, he approaches God placing his own character and reputation on the line for his people.

Exodus 34:8-9 says, ***"And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. And he said, 'If now I have found favor***

in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.'"

God is just, and what the Israelites deserved was not God's mercy. Moses asked for His favor to be extended to his people, in a representation of what Christ has done for us. We do not deserve God's favor, but just like the campus police officer did for me 25 years ago, Jesus did for us 2,000 years ago. Where would we be without those that have gone before us?

PARADISE

SHINING FACE: DEVOTION 2

Josh Lahring

Years ago, I was up north in Paradise, Michigan, camping in a remote cabin out in the woods. There was no electricity and no city lights around for miles, so at night it was pitch black. One night, I was outside and could not help but just gaze at the stars. There was not a cloud in the sky, and the stars were so bright, you could see the Milky Way Galaxy so clearly. It was an incredible sight. It was the glory of God on display. I remember the feeling of being in such awe of how amazing our creator God is and just worshiping Him and giving Him glory at that moment.

Psalm 19:1 says, ***"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork."***

Have you ever had a moment where you have been in awe of the glory of God?

It is when your mind cannot comprehend it no matter how hard you try. Every day we live, we should be in awe of His glory and to see it on display. Moses desired to see the full glory of God so much that he asked God to see it. God allowed him to see his back only, for if he saw His face, he would die (Exodus 33:20). Once the Lord descended on a cloud, the Bible says, ***"And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. And he said, 'If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance'"*** (Exodus 34:8-9).

His response to the glory of God is to fall on his face and worship. He asked for God's presence to be in the midst of them and to have mercy on them. The glory of God humbles us to our knees so that we realize who we are and how holy He is. It is amazing that this perfectly holy God has made a way through His son Jesus for us to know and experience His presence.

Do you take time to stop and recognize God's amazing creation? Are you recognizing and acknowledging His involvement in your life?

Enjoy some "Paradise" even now.

COVENANT

SHINING FACE: DEVOTION 3

Pastor Manning Brown

Covenant is a word used throughout the Bible, but so much more than a word. *Merriam-Webster* defines a covenant as a usually formal, solemn, and binding agreement; a written agreement or promise usually under seal between two or more parties, especially for the performance of some action.

There are covenants between individuals, organizations, and so many more. Much of what we do in life requires contracts or covenants: from renting a house to buying a car. When you borrow money from the bank, you are essentially entering a covenant stipulating that the bank will lend you so much money with a set of terms (finance rate, length of the loan, and other details). When you sign that loan agreement, you are legally bound, and failing to meet those terms can mean loss of possession, and possibly jail time. My son, who is a police officer, told me that warrants could be issued for failing to pay a debt owed as a result of a settlement in civil court.

Throughout the Scripture, God uses covenants between Him and man. God made a covenant with Noah, that God would not destroy the world again by flood, and that through Noah and his family, God would preserve man. God made a covenant with Abraham, that if he left Israel and followed God, and led his family in the ways of the Lord, God would bless him with land and bring blessing to his family and to all of humankind through his family. There are many more covenants throughout the Old Testament.

As is often the case with contracts, they can be breached or broken. The first covenant to be broken really goes back to Adam and Eve,

where God instructs them not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge. That covenant was broken, and its result was the fall of man. There are repeated instances where God has established a covenant, and man, not God, has failed in keeping with the terms of the covenant.

However, the New Testament tells us of a new covenant. As Jesus broke the bread and drank the cup, He established a new covenant. Through His death, burial, and resurrection, reconciliation with God is made perfect to those who place their hope and trust in Christ. God has and will always keep His covenants; that gives a fallen man eternal hope.

NO PERFECT CHURCHES

SHINING FACE: DEVOTION 4

Richie Henson

There is an old quip that used to get passed around the church, "If you find a perfect church, go ahead and join it, it won't be perfect anymore." The fact is, the church is made up of imperfect people trying to live by the Spirit to fulfill God's purpose. Even though we may all agree churches are not perfect, it can prove difficult to live with grace and mercy towards each other.

As we study the life of Moses, I think we see a picture of this. Israel continually messes up. They get off course, and Moses becomes frustrated. Moses complains about the people, and God demonstrates His love and goodness by giving grace.

In Exodus chapter 34, Moses returns back up Mount Sinai to get a new set of stone tablet commandments. I imagine this was not a fun walk up the mountain. If it were me, I would struggle to want to make this trip a second time as I thought about the idolatry that happened on the previous occasion. However, Moses is obedient to God and takes the stone tablets up the mountain a second time.

At this point in his life, Moses is clearly at a breaking point of frustration. I think we have all been there with our church before. We feel upset or hurt by something that does or does not happen. Maybe it is a program we loved is no longer happening, the bathroom is painted a new color, or an idea we have does not get the backing of the church. Whatever the case may be, most of us have times or places where we feel downtrodden within the church. Even though our natural response, as was Moses in chapter 33, is to ask God what in the world is going on, God makes a huge point to Moses and us in chapter 34.

Verse 10 says, ***"And He [God] said, 'Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.'"***

No matter how we feel about the peripherals of the church, we must always remember that God has made a covenant with the church. It is a covenant established by the blood of Jesus to work in and through us to accomplish an awesome work. It is easy to fall into the trap of frustration and complaining like Moses, but we must continually remember and recognize that God has established this church and we must submit to His will and purpose focusing on what is actually significant - to reach the world, gather together, and grow in the Word.

CONVERGENCE OF APPEARANCE

SHINING FACE: DEVOTION 5

John Rigg

Have you ever been to a shopping mall or walking a busy city street and encounter an elderly couple wearing matching shirts? Probably your first thought is, "Oh, how cute! That couple is adorable!" Then you realize that their mannerisms are eerily similar, and upon the further study, you notice that even their facial features resemble each other. Suddenly, this couple is no longer cute; they are creepy! So, you shake off this encounter, and then it happens again. You spot another couple with matching shirts, like mannerisms, and yes, they even look alike! Fortunately, there is nothing of which to be afraid. Apparently, science has labeled this phenomenon "convergence of appearance." Studies show that the longer couples are together, the more likely they are to resemble each other. Really, it is true, I think? You should Google it.

Genesis 34:29-35 informs us that Moses, with the second set of the tablets of the Testimony in hand, came down from the mountain once again to read the Law of God to the people. Unknown to Moses, however, was that the glory of the Lord was upon his face as he began to talk with the people. When the people saw the glory of the Lord on Moses' face, they were afraid to come near. Now every time the children of Israel saw the face of Moses shining with the glory of the Lord, Moses would cover his face with a veil until he would once again return and speak with the Lord.

I admit that I know very little about the subject of "convergence of appearance," but I could not help but think about this phenomenon as I was reading about Moses' forty days and forty nights on the mountain with God. Much like the couples who look and act like one

another; Moses' time with God left him mirroring the glory of God. Nevertheless, because of the Law's inability to give full access to God, Moses placed a veil over his face symbolizing restricted access. Full access and full glory would be future events brought about by Jesus' work on the cross represented by the tearing of the veil at His crucifixion (Mark 15:51-54).

The Apostle Paul eludes to this event in Exodus to help us understand the full access we have to God and the transformation that occurs when someone puts their faith and trust in Jesus, ***"Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord"*** (2 Corinthians 3:16–18 NKJV).

The way I see it, it is all about "convergence of appearance." The more time I spend with the resurrected Lord, the more I become transformed into His image. The greater the time with the Lord, the more I look and act like Him! However, notice it is not overnight. It is from glory to glory. Being transformed is a process!

So, with whom are you spending most of your time?

Chances are you look just like them.

MOUNTAINS

SHINING FACE: DEVOTION 6

Mary Jane Johns

Currently, we are driving through the mountains of Yellowstone Park in Montana and Wyoming to visit our son, Logan who is working here for the summer. I cannot express how breathtaking the views are! Logan is stepping out of his comfort zone to lead people, work hard, preach sermons, and lead worship at the park. It has been a growing experience. Logan is surrounded by an extremely liberal and godless people who do not even know or understand that they are lost. He has also met some Christians that are on fire for God and Christians who loosely follow Jesus and are involved in partying. This has been a disappointment to him, yet he still loves. People are important, but they are not where our hope is found. God's faithfulness, steadfast love, beauty, and grace have been evident and life-changing to our sweet son! After this summer in the mountains, I dare say, Logan will not be the same young man he was when he left.

After driving through the mountains, hiking through the rough terrain, and huffing and puffing up the steep slopes (the altitude thing is legit), it is so fitting that I am reading about Moses' mountain experience. As Moses was hiking, I am sure he witnessed similar valleys, rivers, and incredible views like we are seeing.

The highest point in Yellowstone is 11,372 feet. I would love to tell you that we conquered it, but alas, there is just no way (Once again, I blame the altitude, not the fact that I am completely out of shape). Mount Sinai, in Egypt, is 7,497 feet. Moses did hike this. In the Old Testament, God chose this mountain to speak to Moses by giving him the Ten Commandments. However, more importantly, God revealed Himself to Moses.

In Exodus 34:29-35, it says, ***"When Moses came down from the Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the Lord had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him."***

If we are willing to face it, the human being is naturally sinful, vain, lost, hard-hearted, and godless. We all have seen the reckless partying first hand, and the Israelites were not the exception. They had been caught worshipping an idol of a silly golden calf, for goodness sake. Yet, God called Moses to serve these people. When he brought the Ten Commandments down the mountain and spoke to the people of Israel after this encounter with God, he was completely unaware that his face was different. Moses had seen the absolute beauty and glory of our living God and was demonstrating obedience in sharing what had been commanded to him. It actually terrified people to look at his shining face. He put a veil or cloth over it when he spoke to the people so they would not be afraid. What does the glory of God look like? I think this is just beyond my simple comprehension, but I truly believe that God gave Moses an altered appearance on his skin so that the people would know and understand that Yahweh had

spoken to him and that these Ten Commandments were for real, “So listen up.”

Here is what I think:

• People matter, so love unconditionally (No matter how pagan they are). Be bold. Do not put a veil over the hope we have in God.

• Be the voice, the very skin that shows His power, beauty, and forgiveness. Be that light to both those who claim to know Jesus but just “do not get it” and those who are not there yet. We need to allow a completely holy God to make us different, so we do not “blend” into sin.

• In 2 Corinthians 3:7-18, Paul says basically that Moses was not alone. Jesus also had a big experience on the mountain. Moses shining face was just a taste of what was to come through Jesus Christ. Have confidence and rest in this truth.

After we spend time with God on the mountain or valleys low, we need to take a beat, reflect, wonder, and then shine.



LESSON 17

TABERNACLE

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

The brain is only about three pounds in weight, and yet it directs all other functions while we are awake or sleeping. We are fascinated with it and even strive to mimic it through technology. Just when we think we have made some progress, we realize men are from Mars and women are from Venus. We often are not on the same page.

It even goes deeper than that. Nobel Prize winner Roger W. Sperry is credited with what we would refer to as left brain vs. right brain theory. He observed that people who used the left side of their brain more tended to think in the realms of logic, sequencing, linear thinking, mathematics, facts, and thinking in words.

Ann Pietrangelo wrote in *HealthLine,* "The right brain is more visual and intuitive. It's sometimes referred to as the analog brain. It has a more creative and less organized way of thinking." It operates more in the realm of imagination, holistic thinking, intuition, arts, rhythm, nonverbal cues, feelings visualization, and daydreaming.

Are you more of a left brain or right brain thinker?

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How can each serve in the church?

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Starting in Exodus chapter 35, Moses conveys to the people what God had instructed him concerning the building of the tabernacle. In studying the passage, the concept of giving is prevalent in at least three ways.

1. Give of your finances.

Moses speaks on behalf of the Lord asking the people to give of their resources.

Exodus 35:4-9 records, ***"Moses said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, 'This is the thing that the Lord has commanded. Take from among you a contribution to the Lord. Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the Lord's contribution: gold, silver, and bronze; blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen; goats' hair, tanned rams' skins, and goatskins; acacia wood, oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, and onyx stones and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece.'"***

After the debacle of the Golden Calf, what was the response of the people to Moses' instructions from the Lord about the tabernacle?

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What kind of articles were requested? Why were the items so extravagant?

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What was to be the attitude of their heart in giving?

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God challenges us to not only be generous but to go a step further. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 9:7, ***"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."***

Charles Spurgeon challenged, "In all of my years of service to my Lord, I have discovered a truth that has never failed and has never been compromised. That truth is that it is beyond the realm of possibilities that one has the ability to out give God. Even if I give the whole of my worth to Him, He will find a way to give back to me much more than I gave."

2. Give of your time.

In Exodus 35:10-19, Moses asks for them to get involved in the building of the tabernacle, ***"Let every skillful craftsman among you come and make all that the Lord has commanded: the tabernacle, its tent and its covering, its hooks and its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases; the ark with its poles, the mercy seat, and the veil of the screen; the table with its poles and all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; the lampstand also for the light, with its utensils and its lamps, and the oil for the light; and the altar of incense, with its poles, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the door, at the door of the tabernacle; the altar of burnt offering, with its grating of bronze, its poles, and all its utensils, the basin and its stand; the hangings of the court, its pillars and its bases, and the screen for the gate of the court; the pegs of the tabernacle and the pegs of the court, and their cords; the finely worked garments for ministering in the Holy Place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests."***

The Lord was very specific in what He wanted. Verses 20 through 29 record how the people went and gathered the items. They then came with a ***"willing heart"*** (verse 22). In this short section, the word "all" is used seven times. Everyone got involved. They gave of their resources, efforts, and time. Finally, verse 29 says, ***"All the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them to bring anything for the work that the Lord had commanded by Moses to be done brought it as a freewill offering to the Lord."***

What kind of offering did the Lord desire?

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How can this apply for today?

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Corrie Ten Boom reminds us, "The measure of a life, after all, is not its duration, but its donation."

3. Give of your talents and special gifts.

Exodus 35:30-36:7 gives specific instructions to the point of identifying particular people, ***"Then Moses said to the people of Israel, 'See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft. And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab the son of Ahisamach of the tribe***

of Dan. He has filled them with skill to do every sort of work done by an engraver or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of workman or skilled designer. Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whom the Lord has put skill and intelligence to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the Lord has commanded.' And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the Lord had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work. And they received from Moses all the contribution that the people of Israel had brought for doing the work on the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, so that all the craftsmen who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task that he was doing, and said to Moses, 'The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do.' So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp, 'Let no man or woman do anything more for the contribution for the sanctuary.' So the people were restrained from bringing, for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more."

What skills did Bezalel and Oholiab possess? How did they obtain these skills?

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What kind of offering was given? What were the results?

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What should be done if our church had excess offerings today?

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What do the last two words of the section, ***"and more,"*** mean? What would that look like today?

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Amy Carmichael said, "You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving."

"One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want." Proverbs 11:24

SERVANTS OF THE LORD

TABERNACLE: DEVOTION 1

Max Sinclair

I never truly understood the Church, or the Christian way of life till I was 22 years old. I had grown up here at our Waterford location when it was still Faith Baptist, I remember having Pastor Josh as the Children's Pastor, and he would take us to Ceasarland to have fun. I remember going through Pastor Jayson's Youth Group and leadership. I remember going to Church. I remember these things, but I never truly understood them; I never truly got the point. For a while, I thought that it was something you needed to do, and you needed to go to, but as I got older, I fell away from that. I knew the stories of the Bible; I understood some passages of Scripture. I had an elementary grasp of the concept of salvation and the other "Christianese" words, but to say I understood the Church, I would be lying if I said that I did. It came to a head when I realized truly what salvation is, and why it is so important. Finally, I realized I had done nothing to earn eternal life, but it was given to me by God's infinite mercy and grace. The price of my sin was paid for by another, and because of that, I am indebted to Him with my life or as the apostle Paul would say, ***"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"*** (Galatians 2:20). At this point, as I cried on the floor of a bathroom 2,376 miles away, I truly understood what the Church is.

As we have studied the book of Exodus and the life of Moses, we start to come to the end. God has given His people the Law and the rules in which they are to worship Him. In Exodus chapter 35, we have at first the command of the holy day and recognition of the Sabbath; then God tells Moses how to build the tabernacle. Now for many, this word is foreign, and it was for me too, but tabernacle in Hebrew means "dwelling-place." This was to be the portable house

of the Lord and a place for the people to meet with and worship Him as they wandered in the wilderness. Moses is told by the Lord on how it is to be built, much like how God told Noah how to build the Ark. Specific things were required for its construction, and Moses listened and relayed this information to the children of Israel.

After they had heard what Moses had said, Exodus 35:21 (CSB) says, ***"Everyone whose heart was moved and whose spirit prompted him came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work on the tent of meeting for all its services, and [to make] the holy garments."*** At this moment, the people of the Lord were moved in such a way that they went forth and did what the Lord had commanded. That is what we, as the Church, are to do. Too many times, I see people who walk into the doors of our location, week after week, and I see them sit in the same seats talk to the same people, but they never serve. As the church, we are to give back. Jesus did not say, "Go and sit in a seat on Sunday, have Christian radio presets in your car, and pray before your meals if you can remember to do so." No, He said to go and make disciples of all nations. As a church, we are not to be encouraged on Sunday, and that is it, we are to go and bear fruit, go and be moved by the Spirit and bring forth offerings to Him. We are to offer our lives up in service to Him. We need to stop just being with Church people, and truly become servants of the Lord.

“YOU HAVE SKILLS”

TABERNACLE: DEVOTION 2

Taylor Hundley

If I were to ask you to build a house completely by yourself, even though I offered to provide you with some of the tools you would need, but not all of them, you would probably call me crazy. You are one person, being asked to complete a job that requires many, and you are not provided with everything needed. How successful would you be?

In Exodus chapter 36, we read about the construction of the sanctuary, which was a place to worship and meet with God.

Exodus 36:2 says, ***“And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the Lord had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work.”***

The Lord placed individual and unique skills into each person, so they could work together for a great purpose. He did not give all the necessary skills to one person. Not one person was asked to build this alone. Not one person was more significant than the other. Hearts were stirred, and people willingly obeyed and took action.

In chapter 39, we read that the people of Israel accomplished what the Lord had commanded.

Exodus 39:43 says, ***“And Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it; as the Lord had commanded, so had they done it. Then Moses blessed them.”***

Their willingness to work and utilize their God-given skills resulted in accomplishing what God had commanded. God equips each one

of us with different tools and skills for a purpose. Be willing to seek and use what He has placed in you, to serve the Lord, and obey His commands.

As a worship leader, playing instruments and singing are tools that I use to worship the Lord. I am blessed to be involved in this ministry, connect with others, and serve the Lord while doing so. Joining other voices and instruments, to lead others into worship is amazing and important, but there are other ministries of equal importance. There is the children's ministry, recovery ministry, outreach programs, and a host of others. God has placed different callings, skills, and interests in each person. How incredible is that? The next time you feel like you are of less importance because you are not successful or do not feel called in a certain area of ministry, remember that He did not create you to do it all.

We are not called to do it all, but we are all called to walk in a manner worthy of our calling. Locate your God-given skills and use them.

Ephesians 4:1-7 says, ***"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift."***

IDENTIFY THE NEED

TABERNACLE: DEVOTION 3

Roger Allen

With the explosion of non-profits over the last thirty years, grant writing has become a sought after skill. Because of this, many colleges now offer certificate programs in this very employment field. Each year billions of dollars are given out to successful grant writers. In order to be approved, there are few absolutes that must be accomplished. First, identify the need and then build your proposal from there. However, what should be the first consideration typically gets overlooked. Paying special attention to the grants specific requests is paramount to being successful. Following them would seem to be the logical step, but for whatever reason, many writers seem to fail, and billions are left at the table. For such a relatively easy task like following the rules, many seem to drop the ball.

Exodus 40:16 says, ***"This Moses did; according to all that the Lord commanded him, so he did."***

In the making of the Ark of the Covenant, Moses was given a specific set of instructions to follow. From the wood to the overlay, everything used in the making of the Ark was asked for by God. Even the decorative work on the lampstand was done to perfection by craftsman that were handpicked by the Lord Himself. As we see, Bezalel was called by name, in Exodus 35:30, to be the lead builder for the construction of the Tabernacle. Moses attended to each minute detail as the Lord had instructed. As we read about Moses, it becomes abundantly clear he is obedient. Through the whole story of his life, we find him following God's leading. When he was called to shepherd the people out of Egypt, he obeyed. Through all the griping, hardship, and lack of faith on the peoples part, Moses

continued in obedience. When we study the life of Moses, we see in him as a prophet, one who through obedience, intercedes for the people. While not perfect, we see him as a foreshadow of Jesus. He was the giver of the law that the people should follow. He was a man worthy of being heard and obeyed. He was a prophet who would be a liaison between the people and the Lord. He led by example as a servant and a leader. Yet, in one swift act of disobedience, he was denied entrance to the promised land.

Numbers 20:12 (NCV) adds, ***"But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe me, and because you did not honor me as holy before the people, you will not lead them into the land I will give them.'"***

How has an act of disobedience cost you? What was the penalty for your breaking of the covenant between God and yourself? As we see in Moses' life, one act cost him dearly. Imagine now, you have lived a good and upright life, yet in the end, you fail and falter, what will be the outcome? You see, as much as we may try, we will never be able to fulfill the Law completely. Just like Moses before us, at some point, we will fail the Lord miserably. The Good News is, if you have received Jesus as your Lord and have repented, you will receive forgiveness. With Him, we have a picture of grace so freely given to us by the Father. He gave us the perfect sacrifice in His Son, and by doing so, the Law was fulfilled completely. We are found guiltless, without condemnation, we are brothers and sisters in Christ, and this should produce in us a desire to live a righteous life by grace alone.

Finally, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:9, ***"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me."***

REFLECTION

TABERNACLE: DEVOTION 4

Pastor Gareth Volz

In the first eight verses of Exodus chapter 38, we are told about the construction of the Altar of Burnt Offering and the Bronze Laver – two important items in the courtyard of the Tabernacle of God. Back in Exodus chapter 36, God gave Moses instructions on how to build His Tabernacle. Moses relayed these instructions to the people. While some gave materials required by God for His dwelling place, others were given skills to build what God mandated.

We are told in Exodus 36:2 that God put skill in the mind of Bezalel of the tribe of Judah, a craftsman whose heart was stirred to heed the call to build God's Tabernacle. In Exodus chapter 38, we are told how he built the Altar of Burnt Offering and the Bronze Laver to God's specifications. These two items were very important in the worship of God, and a study of them reminds us of what we need to do before we can truly worship our God.

I want to first look at the Altar of Burnt Offering. He made the altar out of acacia wood and covered in with bronze (verses 1-2); he made all the utensils for the altar out of bronze (verse 3); he built the grating for the altar out of bronze (verse 4); and he built rings and poles of acacia wood covered with bronze to be used in transporting the altar when the people moved from place to place (verses 5-7). Then he built a laver (basin) out of bronze, and its stand was also made out of bronze (verse 8).

A cursory reading of this passage may seem monotonous. Why did God go into such detail in describing these two pieces of bronze in the courtyard of His Tabernacle? I believe it is because they teach us

some important lessons of how we need to prepare to worship our Holy, Righteous God.

First of all, before a priest could enter the Holy of Holies, where God's presence dwelt in the Ark of the Covenant, he had to offer a sacrifice for the sins he and the people had committed, and this sacrifice was made on the Altar of Burnt Offering. The priest did not offer any animal, but a lamb or dove without blemish. Sacrifice cost something because God cannot be in the presence of sin – He is holy. It cost the lamb or the dove its life. It cost Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God, His life to pay the penalty for your sin and mine. Once the sacrifice had been offered, the priest could enter the presence of our Holy God. We can enter the presence of our Holy God because Jesus was our sacrifice.

Yet there was still one more thing the priest had to do before he could enter the Holy of Holies and worship and fellowship with God; he had to cleanse himself at the Bronze Laver. If you and I are to enter God's presence in worship and have fellowship with Him, we must have a clean lifestyle. The sacrifice of Christ meant that we were no longer slaves to sin, but we must choose each day to live in a way that pleases God. Only then can we truly have fellowship with Him and worship Him in a way that brings glory to His name.

Preparation for true worship requires sacrifice and cleansing. Jesus provided our sacrifice. The Laver in the tabernacle was made to reflect the image of the priest as he washed. We need to reflect on our character, our lifestyle, and see what changes we need to make so we can offer our God in proper worship and have fellowship with Him. This should be a daily occurrence in the life of the believer. We need to prepare ourselves to offer God the worship He deserves.

INCONVENIENCED

TABERNACLE: DEVOTION 5

Jen Combs

By now, you have read all of the other devotions on how the tabernacle was constructed. This devotion covers the last chapter dealing with the construction. There were all of those final little details to wrap up. I had recently read through Exodus and very distinctly remembered this chapter, so I had to chuckle when it was assigned it to me. I remember thinking how weird and strange all of those priestly outfits had sounded (and then pictured my husband wearing one! HA!). I actually went into Josh's library of study books so I could get a visual of the description in chapter 39. Yes, it was still just as strange as I was thinking in my head. An Ephod is a sleeveless garment worn by priests. During that time, in particular, it was worn by Aaron and his sons.

I want to go back to the tabernacle getting finished. Exodus 39:32 says, ***"Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished,*** (this is the statement that keeps sticking out to me) ***and all the people of Israel did according to all that the Lord had commanded Moses; so they did."*** This statement is made about nine times throughout the chapter. My very favorite time is at the end of the chapter, ***"According to all that the Lord had commanded Moses, so the people of Israel had done all the work. And Moses saw all of the work, and behold, they had done it; as the Lord had commanded, so had they done it. Then Moses blessed them"*** (verses 42-43).

Moses saw all of the work. How many times do we see work that needs to be done and avoid it? Whether that is "in church" or outside of it, when we hear the Lord clearly tell us to "get to work," do we just

brush it off or make excuses? Most of the time the Lord wants to use us, it is not convenient at all. Are you hearing me? It is not convenient at all.

The Lord needed me to help out today in a way I was desperately trying to avoid. Do you want to know why? I was able to be in a hotel room all by myself for a few hours, get some writing done, relax, have a cup of tea, maybe catch an episode of Fixer Upper and move at a slow pace, which I have not been able to do in a while. Oh, I saw the need, but I was hoping that I would be forgotten about and would not be challenged by God. So, what happened? I was called on, had an attitude, changed it (after some grumbling; you are going to want to try and skip that part) and was able to help feed about 30 guys that volunteered on one of our prison trips. I love to host and feed people; it is like one of my favorite things to do. However, in this instance, it was not in my plan (remember that convenient part?). We need to be more like Moses. We need to see the work and do it. Do not avoid it. You will be blessed.

TO A TEE

TABERNACLE: DEVOTION 6

James Mann

I want to try something a little different with this devotional. Please do me a favor. Before reading this devotion, read Exodus 40:1-33.

Welcome back. If you are wondering why I have asked you to read this chapter before reading the devotion, it is because what happens here is very interesting. In verses 1-15, we see the Lord talking to Moses and explaining to him how he is to build the tabernacle. Then reading verses 16-33, we see Moses following God's orders to a tee. You might be asking why I am bringing up this obvious point. The purpose is to point out that Moses understands the importance of following God's plans.

See, in our lives, God has a plan laid out for us. We often have a plan set in our heads that does not coincide with what God wants for us. Moses could have listened to all of these demands that the Lord gave him and said that He was too picky or that Moses had his own idea for the tabernacle. Here is the deal; we do not see the big picture. Our point of view is so minuscule in the grand scheme of things. Should we not listen to the One who can see all and know all?

The purpose of the tabernacle is revealed to us in verses 36-37,***"Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up."***

This tabernacle became the guide of the Israelites throughout their journey. Within this tabernacle contained the glory of the Lord. In

our lives, we should also be carrying the glory of the Lord wherever we go. While we are definitely lucky not to have to carry around a tabernacle, we should be treating our bodies as the vessel in which we show others the glory of God. I challenge you to take time and listen to God, as Moses did, and then follow Him in your life.



LESSON 18

TWELVE SPIES

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

“The Earth is flat and is the center of the universe.” There was a time when this was accepted as fact by the majority of people. The majority is not always right. Just because a lot of people believe something to be true, does not make it so.

I like the shirts that say, “Detroit vs Everybody.” Detroit will always be special to me. There were several situations in Scripture when a few were right, and everyone else was wrong. Genesis chapter 6 speaks of Noah vs everybody. Only eight were on the Ark, and we are not sure seven of them really believed it would rain. Noah stood in faith. He knew he was right because he listened and chose to follow God.

Another lonely scenario is recorded in 1 Kings chapter 18. Elijah takes a stand. In one corner is Elijah (with God) and in the other corner is King Ahab (with 850 false prophets). Fire falls from Heaven, and one plus God wins. The majority had faith, but it was directed away from the Living God. They were wrong and led many down a road of destruction.

Matthew chapter 27 gives an account where people get to chose between two men. The majority chose Barabbas. Few chose and choose Jesus. The majority was loud, animate, and determined they were right. Yet, they were wrong.

Do you remember a time when you chose to go against the flow of the majority and were right?

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Do you remember a time when you just followed the crowd and it did not turn out well?

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In Numbers chapter 13, Moses sends out twelve spies. When the vote came back, there were ten negative and two affirmative responses. It is time to determine whether the majority was right.

Numbers 13:1-3 set the stage, ***"The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel. From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a chief among them.' So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran, according to the command of the Lord, all of them men who were heads of the people of Israel."***

How were the twelve spies described?

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Verses 4-16 list the men by name and give their family line. All twelve men were the cream of the crop and top of their class. They all were leaders who had received the same promise and had the same opportunity.

What was the promise given to the men in those verses?

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Numbers 13:17-20 detail Moses' orders to the twelve men, ***"Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan and said to them, 'Go up into the Negeb and go up into the hill country, and see what the land is, and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, and whether the land that they dwell in is good or bad, and whether the cities that they dwell in are camps or strongholds, and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be of good courage and bring some of the fruit of the land.' Now the time was the season of the first ripe grapes."***

What was the mission for the men?

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Verses 21-24 give a road map of their tour, while in verses 25-29 they give their report, ***"At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, 'We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan.'"***

What did the spies find? Did they all agree on their findings?

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The mission was to see the land God was giving them and maybe identify some tactical points that could help. It should have been a tour of awe and praise of what God was giving them.

However, verses 30-33 records the response of the spies, ***"But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, 'Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.' Then the men who had gone up with him said, 'We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.' So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, 'The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.'"***

Why did the majority of men vote, "No?"

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What did Caleb (Joshua stands with him) suggest? Why?

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Only two of the spies understood their mission. They saw their obstacles in light of their God as a great opportunity. The other ten saw God in light of their circumstances. Actually, the ten never even mention God in their report. They discouraged the people with a pessimistic, negative report. They soured the people saying the task would be impossible because of the unfavorable odds.

Caleb and Joshua did not ignore the obstacles, but they focused on God making it a great opportunity. They already saw God do amazing things. They knew He was able. The decision became one of faith or fear.

In what areas today does faith vs fear affect our lives?

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John Maxwell has written, “Through a negative majority report, this ancient commission deprived nearly two million people of their inheritance in Canaan. Through their poisonous influence, the Israelites were driven back into the wilderness to die, and God delayed in fulfilling His purpose for His people for 40 frustrating years.”

The majority is not always right. Fortunately, we can search the Scriptures and seek out God for ourselves to see what is right. We can choose to take the right path even if it is not the popular choice.

“Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.” Mark Twain

BE OBEDIENT

TWELVE SPIES: DEVOTION 1

Noble Baird

For as long as I can remember, I have always loved spies. The concept of hiding in plain sight or behind enemy lines in order to gain information has always fascinated me. As a kid, I loved watching G.I. Joe; seeing the secret missions that went on and watching the spies carry out whatever task was put before them, I was hooked! That being said, in Numbers chapter 13, we have one of my favorite stories in the Bible. You probably guessed by now; it involves spies; twelve of them to be exact. At this point in Moses' life, he has successfully led the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt, and they are in the wilderness, approaching the Promised Land that God said was theirs. So, as any good leader would do before entering the unknown and possibly hostile territory, Moses selected twelve men to scout the new land out, however, this was all done at the advisement of the Lord.

In Numbers 13:1-2, it reads, ***"The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel.'"*** Here, we see two things: obedience and a guarantee. First, we see Moses' obedience to God as he followed out what the Lord ordered him to do; send out twelve. In Numbers 13:3 we see Moses' reaction to God, ***"So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran, according to the command of the Lord, all of them men who were heads of the people of Israel."*** Obedience is one of the absolute crucial attributes in which a true leader carries with them. Yet, in the second half of verse two, we see a guarantee from the Lord. God told Moses to send the men to spy on the land of Canaan, ***"which I am giving to the people of Israel."*** Here, we have the Lord's guarantee to Moses - the land is yours; you will have it!

Being a leader is not always easy. It is a position and a role, which Moses was truly called to do and be. Yet, he was not left alone. We see throughout all his life that the Lord continually guided and encouraged him in the ways he needed to go. In this passage, Moses again shows his strong leadership character as he obediently listens to the Lord's guidance in his life. As you continue on in your week, I want to challenge you to listen. However, as you listen, be obedient. Be obedient and remember the promise of victory we have in Christ, just as the Israelites were guaranteed the Promised Land.

NO BLIND FAITH HERE

TWELVE SPIES: DEVOTION 2

LaRae Wing

I grew up in the country. We had a very, very long driveway and there was little traffic on our country road. During the summer before I turned 16, I was scheduled to take driver's training. I had no fear of passing the written portion of that training, but getting behind the wheel and driving an automobile was a huge fear. It was not that I had not ridden in a car, or knew that other people my age were already driving. It was not the fact that my dad had been talking to me about proper methods of driving for several months; pointing out the ways to safely maneuver and control the car. It was the fact that I had never been behind the wheel before and would be the one in charge of that huge machine. I would be responsible for where it went, how fast it was going, and where it would start and stop. What would happen if I drove too fast, cut a corner too short, got too close to another car, pressed the brakes too hard (or not hard enough)? Most kids my age were anxious to drive, but it was terrifying to me.

Unlike many of my friends, I had never driven a riding lawn mower, a go-cart, or anything motorized, much less a car. I was not allowed to even start the car, until that summer. Then a few weeks before I began my driver's class, my dad gave me the keys and said I could drive the car up and down the driveway. "Don't go past the end of the driveway," he said. My dad had complete confidence in me and knew I could do it, but I balked. What if my little brother was playing in the driveway (as he often did), or what if I did not stop and went into the road? My dad was not worried. He had given me lots of verbal instruction. He wanted me to trust him; to do this thing because even though I had my reservations, he had confidence in me, had prepared me, and knew I could do it.

In chapter thirteen of Numbers, twelve men are being called to check out the land that God had promised would be the new home for the Israelite nation. Moses was commissioning these very specific individuals (named in Scripture) and giving them detailed instructions to:

1. Check out the geography. Was it fertile or poor, forest or desert?
2. Check out the inhabitants. Were they strong or weak, battle-ready or not?

He did this because the Israelite people wanted to know these things. Despite the fact that God had been supplying everything they needed, they still wanted first-hand information. They would not blindly follow God's leading.

One of the questions I have while reading this is, why do you people need spies to check out this place? Did God not promise this land to you? Have you not learned by now that, "Where God guides, He provides?" I love how Matthew Henry in his *Commentary on the Whole Bible* writes, "(The people) came to Moses, and said, 'We will send men before us; and it was the fruit of their unbelief.' They would not take God's word that it was a good land, and that He would, without fail, put them in possession of it. They could not trust the pillar of cloud and fire to show them the way to it, but had a better opinion of their own politics than of God's wisdom. How absurd was it for them to send to spy out a land which God himself had 'spied' out for them, to enquire the way into it when God himself had undertaken to show them the way!" Is that just like us humans? We need to see it to believe it.

Guess what? I made it up and down that driveway (not without my fears at first) and I have been driving for over 50 years now. My dad just wanted me to believe that I could do it because he had told me

to do it. He did not want me to second guess him; his desire was for me to have confidence in his judgment.

So it is with our Heavenly Father. He wants us to have “blind faith,” so to speak. He is all-knowing and all-powerful. He says, “follow me,” a minimum of 20 times in the first four books of the New Testament.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV) tells us, ***“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him and he will make your path straight.”***

WHAT IS YOUR EXCUSE?

TWELVE SPIES: DEVOTION 3

Max Sinclair

I am not an extremely confident person. I am insecure about how I talk to people; I feel very strongly about my beliefs, and sometimes I can come off too strong. I care about what others think, and I am very short. All of these things plague my mind when I act. I always look to others for acceptance and validation, and I can see my self as a disappointment to others. All of these are excuses that I use when I do not think that I can do something. It is something that plagues my mind as I try something new or something difficult. I become overwhelmed by my flaws and shortcomings that I do not go forth and try. This negative thinking is something that we all struggle with, but it is not about our flaws, but God's supremacy.

In Numbers chapter 13, the Children of Israel are about to enter the Promised Land, and God instructs Moses to choose from the twelve tribes one chief from each tribe. Doing as God had commanded, these twelve men were tasked to spy out the land. They could provide precious intelligence about their home and tactical information for the invasion. Forty days later, they returned from their mission and gave their report. They said that the land was filled with milk and honey, that it was all that was promised, but there was a problem, the people were strong, they were giants, and they lived in well-fortified cities. They see that the land was good, that it is what had been promised to them, but yet they advise that it is not a good land because of the trouble that lies ahead. There are giants, there are obstacles, and it is hard.

I love how the transition happens in the Bible, ***"They reported to Moses: 'We went into the land where you sent us. Indeed it***

is flowing with milk and honey, and here is some of its fruit. However, the people living in the land are strong, and the cities are large and fortified. We also saw the descendants of Anak there'" (Numbers 13:27-28 CSB). In a manner of a sentence, the promises of God were real and obtainable, for 400 years they had been enslaved but no longer would they be sojourners in a foreign land, they would have a home, but it was not going to be easy. I think it is comical when people ask the question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Whoever said that life was going to be easy? Our life was never supposed to be easy. Our life is in service to God and His Son, Jesus Christ, and the world has rejected both of them. How do you expect your life to be any different? Hardships will fall on us, but the great thing is victory has already been secured. When God told the Children of Israel that they shall have this land, He was telling them that He has already given it to them. Hard work is to expected, but the blessing was given. These things are important for us to remember and for us to see. God expects us to work for the blessing that He has already given us, not for us to be lazy and wait for it to be handed to us. Nor does God want us to come up with excuses to His promises. He told us exactly that which He would do for us, and yet we still shy to Christ's command of the Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations. Our limitations are not limitations on God, but amazing opportunities to see God work.

"HOWEVER"

TWELVE SPIES: DEVOTION 4

Pastor Ben Kirkman

Every time I study the Israelites and their wilderness wanderings, my temptation is to jump to judgment and say, "What is wrong with you people?" God literally led them, fed them, and provided for their every need. The only responsibilities they had were to love, trust, follow, and obey God. As they followed God, He was miraculously proving His power and faithfulness. Reading through their adventures in the wilderness, you can predict how they will respond to the "difficult situations." A perceived problem arises, and what do they do? They start to whine, complain, and forget the promises of God. What a miserable way to live! God has never failed them, yet they refuse to trust that He will take care of them again.

In our study today, we find the children of Israel close to the land God has promised to them (Do not miss the part that it is the land God has promised to them). They are on the outside looking into their future. Twelve spies are chosen to sneak into the Promised Land and take a survey of the land and the people that occupy it. The spies return and give their report to Moses and the people. The land is awesome! It flows with milk and honey! The fruits and vegetables are incredible. On the other hand, Numbers 13:28 says, ***"However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large."*** They emotionally retreat thinking, "There are too many obstacles for us to take the land God has promised to us. The enemy is too strong, the walls are too tall, and the cities are too big for us to defeat. We cannot do it!"

What? God has said the land is yours. God has never let you down before. Trust God and go take the land! Earlier, Numbers 13:2 said,

"Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel." It was a land that God described as ***"which I am giving."***

Of the twelve, there were two spies who believed God and tried to encourage the people to trust God and take the land He had promised them. The Israelites responded to the two by trying to kill them. The consequence for the doubting people is they end up dying in the wilderness and never entering the Promised Land.

The Israelites let their perceived problem become bigger than their God. They had an amazing God who had never been anything but faithful and trustworthy, yet they chose to let their fear dictate their actions. Their fear became bigger than their faith, and it destroyed their lives.

Instead of saying, "What is wrong with them?", we need to reflect on our own lives and consider, "Do I trust God, His promises, and the way He is working in my life?"

Do you believe God is in control and that He is bigger than any problem you may face?

CALEB

TWELVE SPIES: DEVOTION 5

Sierra Combs

Have you ever felt like God was leading you somewhere you know would be amazing, but the obstacles in the way made you shy away in fear? I am raising my hand. Even when I know that God has called me to do something, sometimes my fear will hold me back. What if I am not good enough, smart enough, or strong enough? What if I am completely unqualified? Those insecurities scream at me to keep me from where God is asking me to go. This is not just an issue for me; this was an issue for the Israelites who had just fled Egypt under Moses' lead. By the time we reach today's passage in Numbers chapter 13, God has already promised Moses a land for His people that was rich and fertile and would be theirs for the taking. Moses sent twelve spies to the land to check it out and report back on what they had found. Upon their return, they gave plenty of good reasons for entering this promised land, but their fear was stronger than their faith. According to ten of the twelve spies, the reward was not worth the risk. Numbers 13:31-33 tells us that the ten spies came back from the Promised Land and reported, ***"'We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.' So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, 'The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.'"***

These men had seen the beautiful and bountiful land that God had promised with their own eyes, and yet they came back determined to

sway the Israelites away from entering it. Instead of God's promise, all they could see were the giants (literally!) that stood in their way. I am going to pause and give a teeny amount of slack to these men because if I was in a land that God told me was going to be mine, but all I saw were actual giants living there, I would probably be afraid too. It is said that these giants, ***"the sons of Anak,"*** would have been between seven and nine feet tall! The cities were fortified with huge walls, with guards stationed on the top. These are majorly threatening and difficult obstacles, probably impossible for mere men, yet they forgot the most important part - God was on their side, and not only that, He had promised them this land! If I can say one thing with absolute surety, it is that if God makes a promise, He is going to keep it. Unfortunately, only two of the twelve spies kept this in mind. In verse 30 we see one of them trying to reassure the people of Israel, ***"But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, 'Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.'"***

I have always enjoyed reading about Caleb in the Bible because he reminds me of my own Caleb. My husband would totally be the one to come back from seeing a bunch of giants and confidently tell people that he could take them (and I have actually seen him do it on the basketball court). The Caleb of the Bible knew that God would have their back, and with Him on their side, they could overcome any obstacle. He called for his people to stand and do as God commanded. It would have been wise for the people to trust God and listen to Caleb. Instead, they listened to their fear, and it cost them dearly. Friend, I know the obstacles can be scary. I even know that often times, our insecurities might be totally accurate. Maybe we are not smart or strong enough. I, for sure, know that most of the time, I am totally unqualified. That is when God can step in and do a mighty work. I encourage you to let Him do His job, despite your fear and inadequacies. Trust in His promises and remember that with Him, you are well able to overcome!

DOUBTER OR OVERCOMER

TWELVE SPIES: DEVOTION 6

Isaiah Combs

"But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, 'Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.' Then the men who had gone up with him said, 'We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.' So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, 'The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.'" Numbers 13:30-33

God had freed the Israelite people from slavery, and they were now wandering in the wilderness. They had seen God do some awesome things. They got to see the ten plagues, the pillar of fire that would direct them by night, and the cloud that would direct them by day. God also fed them bread from Heaven every morning, so they had something to eat. You would think that the Israelites would be fully trusting in God and the promises He had for them.

Moses sent twelve men to spy on some land that God had promised them. Ten of the men came back, saying that they would not be able to defeat the people of the land. The men they saw were giants, and the ten men agreed that they could not win the fight against them.

Two men came back and said that they could defeat the giants living in the land that God had promised to the Israelites. The two men were Joshua and Caleb. In verse 30, Caleb says, ***"Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it."***

In this story, Moses had ten men who were doubters and did not believe with God they could do anything. Moses only had two men who believed they could overcome.

There will be many more doubters in your life than people who believe you can overcome. We have a choice in life to be doubters or overcomers. We also have a choice to whom we are going to listen. Do not let the doubters in life convince you that you cannot overcome something.



LESSON 19

HITS ROCK

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

My daughter and I were in a store where every item cost $1.00. She laughed as she pointed out that they had security cameras. We joked about it for quite a while. Not too long later, I saw one of my police officer friends and shared the humor with him. He chuckled and said, “It gets even funnier than that.” He shared that someone broke into this dollar store and got caught. The funny part was that they broke the front window which was expensive, so it turned into a felony case. People do the dumbest things.

What is one of the dumbest things you have ever heard or saw?

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Everyone has done something in the past that they wish they could change. Moses was no exception to the rule. He messed up, and it cost him the opportunity to go into the Promised Land.

Numbers 20:2-9 records the Moses’ situation, ***“Now there was no water for the congregation. And they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people quarreled with Moses and said, ‘Would that we had perished when our brothers perished before the Lord! Why have you brought the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink.’ Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. And the glory of the Lord appeared to them, and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out***

of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle.' And Moses took the staff from before the Lord, as he commanded him."

It feels like a sense of déjà vu. Exodus chapter 17 records a similar situation that happened 40 years earlier. Numbers chapter 14 also contains this theme of the people as they "quarrel" and "complain."

What instructions does the Lord give Moses? How is this different than before?

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How much water was He going to provide?

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Numbers 20:10-13 records Moses' poor response, ***"Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?' And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock. And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.' These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarreled with the Lord, and through them he showed himself holy."***

Did Moses follow the Lord's instructions? How or how not?

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There are at least three things that Moses does wrong in this brief section.

1. Pride

Moses had a sense of unhealthy pride. Notice that Moses said, ***"Shall we bring water for you out of this rock."*** He used the pronoun ***"we."*** He started taking partial credit for God's work. Scripture is clear that pride can get us in trouble.

"Love the Lord, all you his saints! The Lord preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride." Psalm 31:23

"The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate." Proverbs 8:13

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Proverbs 16:18

"One's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor." Proverbs 29:23

What are some of the dangers of pride?

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What does ***"lowly in spirit"*** look like?

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2. Anger

Moses acted in anger. There is a time for righteous anger. He was correct in his response to the Golden Calf and the idolatry associated with it. However, anger can cause problems. Too many walls have felt the pain of anger.

"Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger." Ephesians 4:26

"Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly." Proverbs 14:29

"Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." Proverbs 16:32

"Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense." Proverbs 19:11

"Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man." Proverbs 22:24

What are some things that these verses say about anger?

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3. Unholy

The Lord points out a major problem with Moses' action, ***"Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy."*** Moses messed with the holiness of God.

In 1 Corinthians 10:4, we read that the rock was actually the presence of the pre-incarnate Christ Himself, ***"And all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ."*** Moses struck the Rock once earlier and out poured living water. To strike the Rock again was to sacrifice the Lord again. That is not needed and challenges the holiness of God. Christ's sacrifice was sufficient; it does not need to be repeated.

In what ways can we show the holiness of God?

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"In holiness God is more clearly seen than in anything else, save in the Person of Christ Jesus the Lord, of whose life such holiness is but a repetition." Charles Spurgeon

EXPECTATION GAP

HITS ROCK: DEVOTION 1

Pastor Ryan Story

Every year since my oldest son was born, my wife has always planned an annual trip to Frankenmuth for the Fourth of July fireworks. The first year we went, she was able to get us an amazing room at a hotel that we could perfectly watch fireworks from the comfort of our room. We all picked out awesome matching tie-dye shirts with superhero “Minions” on them. We got ice cream, went on a ferry ride, ordered pizza, ran into church friends, and enjoyed our few days stay up there. We loved this mini-vacation so much we wanted to make it an annual thing. The next time we went, we added my second son to the mix, again we had a blast doing the same activities and said we would return. Then there was year three. My wife was pregnant with our daughter, and my sons both were hitting toddler mischievousness at record-setting levels. The weather was in the triple digits. Everything that we loved about this trip became a lot more difficult. Our expectations of having an amazing mid-summer getaway left us more tired than we were before we left our home.

In life, no one plans a vacation expecting it to be a strenuous, stress-filled time. Our expectations of what we want it to be versus what it becomes can create something I heard called an expectation gap. What we would like to happen versus what life gives us can create a huge conflict inside our heart, especially when it comes to the things of God. Think about the time in your life when you thought something should have gone one way or another, and yet it left you frustrated, angry at a person, sad, crying, or worse having to mend a relationship. Those expectation gaps can create havoc in our lives.

A common theme throughout the nation of Israel's wandering is their excessive need to complain, rebel, and want to return to slavery. Numbers chapter 20 is one of the saddest chapters in the Bible. We see a nation that has seen God do miracles, bring them a binding law, provide food and water, and was with them for years, begin to complain again. Numbers 20:5 records a conversation from the Israelite nation complaining, ***"And why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink."***

The nation of Israel just entered the wilderness of Zin, Moses wife just died, and they instantly start complaining about their new surroundings. They lacked water, but they did not go looking around, there is no evidence of them looking for how God would or could show up, no prayer, no calling out for God to provide, and no sense of "what is God trying to teach us here." The congregation just all jump right into critiquing the leadership of Moses and Aaron. The expectation gap that the land would get better and more fruitful the closer they got to the Promised Land led to Moses acting out in anger and ruining his opportunity to see God's faithfulness with his own eyes.

Expectations are scary if not tempered by the Spirit, God's Word, and some healthy discernment. We can ruin seeing God work in our hearts if we are so stuck on what something should be. We can live a life of disappointment because God may not work out the same situation in other areas. We could miss out on getting closer to God because we reject His sovereignty. I still love vacations with my family, but I have had to take each trip as God decides to give it to me.

DEALING WITH DISBELIEF

HITS ROCK: DEVOTION 2

Pastor Manning Brown

One of my favorite Gospel songs is sung by the Gaither Vocal Band. It is called, *"I believe, help thou my unbelief."* The title comes from Mark chapter 9, which tells the story of a man coming to Christ, asking for healing of his demon-possessed son. Christ calls us to come to Him with child-like faith. It is so much easier said than done.

Moses, when leading the Israelites, had to deal with their unbelief, and in Numbers chapter 20, we see where Moses had to deal with the consequences of his own unbelief. This was not the first time that the Israelites complained to Moses about lacking food and water, even suggesting that things were better back in Egypt when they were slaves. The idea seems unfathomable, but yet how often do we find ourselves looking back after God has taken us out of our comfort zone and asks us to follow in faith, to believe Him, and in Him.

In verses 8-11, God gave a specific set of instructions to draw water from the rock to quench the thirst of them and their cattle. God told Moses to speak to the rock to bring forth its water. Moses did speak, but he also struck the rock with his staff - twice. God still brought the water, but not without consequence to Moses. Verse 12 says, ***"And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.'"***

On more than one occasion, I have felt like I needed to add to God's instructions for my life. Sometimes it is to help move them along

quicker, or ease the discomfort that comes with truly believing God at His word. Like the man in the book of Mark, I cry out that I believe, but yet I need help with my unbelief. Now I do believe there are times when God will lead us to the point of comfort, but not so we become complacent. Rather it is to prepare us for the next time that He will call us from our comfort zone. It is during those times we must remember that God's instructions do not need our help. The flesh, in its disbelief, looks back. The spirit in belief looks forward, to God.

NUMBER ONE

HITS ROCK: DEVOTION 3

Shawna Johnson

Who is your number one? Who is your go-to? Or *what* is your go-to? When you are in trouble, when you are excited, or when you are down, think about what your first response is.

For me, it is usually my husband or one of my girlfriends; then after a while, I will be reminded that I need to go to God. Whether it be thanks, praise, or crying out in prayer, God is not always my first thought. I pray that through this devotion, with the help of each other, and being in God's Word, we can be reminded that God should always be our Number One.

I am thankful for the life and stories of Moses. He was unsure of himself, and he needed reassurance, but He did not let himself or his fear get in the way of what God had for him. He led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, through the Red Sea, and further on their journey, often unsure of how to lead them or what to do.

Numbers 20:2-5 (NIV) says, ***"Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. They quarreled with Moses and said, 'If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the Lord! Why did you bring the Lord's community into this wilderness, that we and our livestock should die here? Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!'"***

As we read about Moses and the Israelites journey, I am encouraged by Moses.

Numbers 20:6-8 (NIV) continues, ***"Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the tent of meeting and fell facedown, and the glory of the Lord appeared to them. The Lord said to Moses, 'Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.'"***

Notice this passage of Scripture does not say Moses talked to Aaron about it, complained, or pouted about it, but that ***"Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the tent of meeting and fell facedown."***

Immediately he went to God.

Moses called upon the Lord, and the Lord not only heard him but responded to him. Moses would not have gotten anywhere had he tried to solve the problem on his own.

One of my favorite quotes came from DeeAnn Moshier, "His purpose will stand, and He will accomplish His plans with or without you." Do you want to be part of what God is doing? Let us go to Him first, in both praise and concern, that He may use us as a blessing and encouragement to others. Holy Spirit, please help us to consider You first, that we would make You our Number One always.

WAS IT WORTH IT?

HITS ROCK: DEVOTION 4

Pastor Ryan Story

Have you ever done something that you have regretted? Yes, I know, that was an easy question. A resounding "yes" from every person to read this just went through their mind. We have all done something that we wish we would not have. The harder part of this question becomes, what did this mistake cost you? I missed out on meeting a pastor I admired and respected. I regret that I went to the RV early that day because that mistake cost me, but it was not the worst thing that could have happened. Sadly, there are mistakes I have made that have cost me friendships and opportunities, but even those still are not an end of the world mistake. Then there are the mistakes I have made that have cost me in my relationship with God. Those mistakes are the ones that I truly regret.

Moses had one of the most tragic endings in any Bible narrative. After being used by God, seeing God, communicating with God, and being able to speak for God, Moses falls. Moses never got to go to where God was leading him and the Nation of Israel. The worst thing about all of that is it was Moses who was squarely to blame for missing out on the opportunity. As the narrative in Numbers continues the life of Moses, we see the continual grumbling from the people of God. Numbers 20:10 says, ***"Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?'"*** Moses seemingly let the grumbling get the best of him. Moses struck a rock expecting water to come out as God has done before. Like God does, He did make the best of this bad situation and provided water for all who were in need. Sadly, for Moses, God was not very accepting with how this situation was handled.

After this moment, God wanted to speak to the leaders He put in charge. Numbers 20:12 sadly tells us what that one moment would cost Moses and Aaron, ***"And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.'"*** God rebuked Moses and Aaron for not having faith that God was working something out to provide them all with water and not setting a holy example for the nation of Israel. Moses should have acted in a way that would show the rest of God's people how to act and trust. Moses resorted to calling his people rebels and acted out in anger based on the congregation complaining. That is not exactly the holy lifestyle God wanted out of the person He put in charge.

I believe that every person is a leader in one way or another. If you interact with any person in which you are hoping to influence them in any capacity, you are a leader. I believe that all Christians should be leaders in their respective lives. I am not claiming all Christians are meant to be pastors, but all Christians should be trying to influence the world around us for the cause of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The scariest realization I had while reading this chapter was, "What have I missed out on because I am not representing God in the way I should be? How many times have I name called, got angry, and did something with a bad attitude? How often have I missed out on seeing what God has planned for me because of my sinful self?"

Let us all take this chapter as an amazing warning that God rejects sin, and will punish those who are not representing Him in Heaven. I am never a fan of fear-based living when it comes to our walks with Jesus, but I am calling every Christian to make sure that they are living for God in the utmost of their being. No mistake will ever make God not love us, but sin can make us lose out on seeing God's blessings today.

LEADER OR REBEL?

HITS ROCK: DEVOTION 5

John Rigg

"And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?' Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank." Numbers 20:10-11 (NKJV)

The Bible records Israel being labeled as ***"rebels"*** because of their murmuring and complaining all throughout their wilderness travels. It was their constant refusal to obey God's commandments through the leadership of Moses and Aaron that earned them this title. After almost 40 years of dealing with Israel's rebellious attitude, Moses has had enough. After inquiring of the Lord what to do over Israel's recent complaint of having no water, Moses receives his instructions. Numbers 20:8 starts off by saying, ***"Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water."***

However, acting out of frustration and anger over their complaining, Numbers 20:11 tells us what Moses did, ***"And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock."***

Numbers 20:12 gives some harsh consequences, ***"And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.'"***

According to verse 12, Moses' response to the rebellion was one of unbelief and irreverence towards God, costing him his opportunity to lead the people into the Promised Land, a judgment that seems a little harsh at first glance. However, it is not until we remember that God's original desire was to bless the children of Israel with "water for them out of the rock." They certainly did not deserve it, but what a wonderful example of grace and mercy!

In a moment of weakness and frustration, Moses disobeyed God by "striking the rock" instead of "speaking to the rock." God desired the Israelites to see His power and His might so that they might believe in Him and trust Him; something they had been struggling to do since they first set out from Egypt. However, what they witnessed was Moses taking matters into his own hands. Verses 10 and 11 (NKJV) reveal His attitude and action, ***"'Must we bring water for you out of this rock?' Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod."*** What the Israelites needed most was not to see the poor example of their leader, but to see the power and love of God through His graceful provision of water. God was not hallowed in the eyes of the children of Israel because of their leader's poor decision. So, by disobeying God, the leader Moses became a rebel himself and shared in the punishment with the rest of the rebels.

If you have ever had the opportunity to lead people, eventually, you will find yourself in the same frustrating situation as Moses and Aaron. Listening to the complaints from those you are trying to lead is an inevitable part of leadership and joining in with the rebels is tempting. However, it will be your response to contention and strife that will either define you as a leader or number you among them.

Numbers 20:13 adds, ***"These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarreled with the Lord, and through them he showed himself holy."***

“Meribah” translated into English, means provocation or strife.

From which waters are you drinking?

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

HITS ROCK: DEVOTION 6

Dani Reynolds

In Numbers chapter 20, Moses and Aaron went to God for some answers on what to do for the complaining people who do not have any water. God told them what to do, what to say, and how to handle the situation. However, Moses goes back to the people and starts off by doing what God told him to do but then did not handle it the way God told him to do. Instead of being God-like and calmly telling the people this is how you talk to God and pray to God for Him to help you, Moses popped off at the mouth and erupted with the whole situation. I think he had had enough of the people and their grumbling ways and I think he had enough of God not immediately fixing the problem.

God told him to take his staff. God had used the staff for several other miracles. The staff was a reminder that God was present. However, Moses was to talk to the rock. A rock is often used to represent or describe God. He is our strength; He is the one we lean on in times of trouble. Yet, Moses did not do that. Out of anger, frustration, and anxiousness, he behaved just like the people of Israel. Moses misrepresented God. He let his bitterness over shine his godly heart.

Moses and Aaron were chosen by God to lead the Israelites to the Promise Land. He put them in charge, and their job was to do what God asked them to do. They were to act and speak like God. Ephesians 4:20 says, ***"But that is not the way you learned Christ!"*** God is telling Moses, "I did not teach you that!" I did not teach or instruct you to throw a temper tantrum, to speak harshly, or to behave like a buffoon.

Psalm 116:5 describes God, ***"Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful."*** God is gracious, pleasantly kind, benevolent, and courteous. He is righteous, always acting in an upright, moral way, and virtuous. He is merciful and compassionate.

God is not rude or angry, even though Moses behaved exactly like that. God told Moses and Aaron that since you did not represent me the way that I told you to, now you will not get to lead the people of Israel to the Promise Land.

God wanted Moses and Aaron to lead by example and do and say as He told them. I think God may have said something along these lines, "I get that you are irritated with the situation. I get that you probably feel like you have had enough of the grumbling with the people, but if you were a true follower of Me, you would have known to be angry without sinning." God could have added, "Cast all your worries on Me, and I will give you strength." However, Moses decided to take matters in his own hands and sin. Therefore, Moses did not get to be the person who got to lead the people to the Promised Land.

There are consequences for actions. A sin is a sin, and it does not matter who you are, who you work for, or how high you are up in the business ladder, we will all be treated the same. There is no special treatment. A leader is someone who leads by example. Clearly, Moses and Aaron did not lead by example.



LESSON 20

BRAZEN SERPENT

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

My mother, wife, and daughter hate snakes. My Mom used to say she was theologically correct in her abhorrence of serpents. One day my wife was looking out the window and spotted a snake on one of our Globe Evergreens. She yelled the news to me and ran into the other room.

I got a machete while my daughter became a "spotter" from the porch. I nonchalantly walked into position and struck it. At first, I could not find it and then realized it was wrapped around the blade. I threw it to the ground and proceeded to finish my project, when my daughter yelled, "You missed it, it is right there." There were two snakes. As I continued to fillet this menace to our family, little snakes proceeded from it. There must have been three dozen of them. I became an instant household hero for at least 42 seconds.

Do you like snakes? Have you ever owned one?

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I believe the most famous verse in the Bible is John 3:16, ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*** Most Christians do not know the two verses that set the stage for verse 16. John 3:14-15 say, ***"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."***

John takes his readers back to Numbers chapter 21. Surprise, the people are complaining again. God does not take complaining lightly. When we complain, we say, "God does not care, love us, or is not strong enough." We criticize God. It is not good.

Numbers 21:4-5 record the scenario, ***"From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.'"***

What did the people complain about?

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Who did the people speak against?

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The people complain of no food, yet they say, ***"We loathe this worthless food."*** Sounds like every American teen I know, "There is nothing in the house to eat." Okay, sounds like we adults, too.

Verses 6-9 show God's response, "Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.' So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live."

What did God do to the people for complaining?

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What was the means of salvation?

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Why do you think He used a snake?

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There could be several good answers to this question. First, God may have wanted to use the symbol sarcastically to make a point of their sin. Second, He may have wanted them to think of the serpent in the garden and how their complaining brought that serpent glory. Third, He may have used the serpent to take them back to their roots in Egypt when He did many signs (including turning the staff into a serpent), so He could rescue them.

Either way, those who were bitten had a choice to make.

What could someone do if they were bitten by a snake?

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C.S. Lewis has said, “You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you.” It is important to put yourself in the scenario to fully appreciate the impact.

There were probably about 2,000,000 people wandering. They took up a lot of space. When someone was bitten by a snake, they would have had to be told about the means of salvation (looking upon the golden serpent), take the time and energy to find it, and then behold it. Believing implies action. They had a choice. They could say their good-byes, or they could trust the message, travel a distance, and be healed.

How does Numbers chapter 21 and John 3:14-15 relate to John 3:16?

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John F. Walvoord has said, “Believing is accepting as a fact and making a commitment of your own future to the promises of God to save you -- simply by believing in Christ.”

What does it mean to believe in Christ?

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“We have a right to believe whatever we want, but not everything we believe is right.” Ravi Zacharias

THE WAY

BRAZEN SERPRENT: DEVOTION 1

Pastor Ryan & Cathy Story

It can be shocking to watch people make choices for which they know there will be a consequence. We are people who love to test our limits! By Numbers chapter 21, it can start to feel like we are rereading the same story. The Israelites are really good at being impatient and complaining. In Numbers 21:4-5, we read about the Israelites complaining against God again. In verses 6-7, we read, ***"Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us.'"***

When faced with the consequences of their disobedience and complaining against God, the Israelites immediately acknowledge what they have done and ask for Moses to approach God on their behalf. You may notice that the Israelites do not question where these snakes originated. They do not try to blame the environment or make up some other reason for why these snakes appeared. Instead, it appears as if they knew exactly where these snakes came from and the reason that they were there.

The Israelites say in verse 7, ***"We have sinned."*** This is such a bold statement because it accepts responsibility. Having to admit that we have done wrong is often a hard thing to do. It can feel easier to shift blame to something or someone else rather than admitting that we have done something wrong. Even more challenging than admitting our own wrong may be accepting the fact that God may discipline us for our actions. While this certainly does not mean that every

time something unfortunate happens in our lives it is God punishing us; how often do we try to correlate our lack of obedience to God with His discipline in our lives? God is too good to let us continue in our sin. Proverbs 3:12 writes, ***"For the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights."*** Similarly, Hebrews 12:7 writes, ***"It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?"*** It is out of His love for us that God directs us in the way we should go.

When we continue in Numbers 21:7-9, we read, ***"So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.' So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and life."*** When Moses goes to God on behalf of the people, God answered their plea, but probably not in the way they expected. God does not remove the snakes from the people, but instead provides a way that they can live. This is what God has done in our lives by sending Jesus to die on the cross for us. While we still have the consequences and discipline for our actions, we are provided with a way to God through Jesus. In John 14:6, we read, ***"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"***

MEDICAL SYMBOL

BRAZEN SERPRENT: DEVOTION 2

Wes McCullough

Sometimes children fuss for no reason. Life is not exactly the way they want it. This attitude will make some parents think, “Stop crying, or I will give you something to cry about!”

It is easy for us to read the Old Testament in hindsight and understand God’s plan, but for the Israelites living it day by day, it was far from easy. God provided for and directed their journey through the desert, but it was a long and exhausting trip. Like they had done many times before, they complained about Moses and God because life was not everything they thought it should be. Like before, God saw fit to straighten them out, this time by sending snakes to bite and kill them.

Initially, I thought it odd that God would direct the Israelites to look to an object for saving. With some research, the concept became clear. Serpents were often used to represent sin. Bronze was associated with judgment because it is made by passing through fire for purification. John Wesley explains it clearly,

> “This method of cure was prescribed, that it might appear to be God’s own work, and not the effect of nature or art: and that it might be an eminent type of our salvation by Christ. The serpent signified Christ, who was in the likeness of sinful flesh, though without sin, as this brazen serpent had the outward shape, but not the inward poison, of the other serpents: the pole resembled the cross upon which Christ was lifted up for our salvation: and looking up to it designed our believing in Christ.”

God was teaching the world a long time ago that salvation would not come from man's efforts. We would have to look up and have faith in the efficacy of God's grace.

John 3:16 is a very well known Bible verse. The verses preceding it say, ***"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life"*** (John 3:14-15).

One final note of interest: can you picture the modern medical symbol of a serpent wrapped around a post? Surely you have seen it many times and not thought of the origins of its design. Now you know. It is so cool to see all the influences biblical stories have had on our world and culture.

HE WHO INTERCEDES

BRAZEN SERPRENT: DEVOTION 3

Max Sinclair

As we are wrapping up the story and life of Moses, we come to a strange story and interesting narrative. Here in Numbers chapter 21, we see the story of the bronze serpent and the children of Israel's salvation from being killed by poisonous snakes due to their grumbling and complaining. In the ESV, it uses the word ***"pray"*** in verse number 7 when the Israelites ask Moses for help, but in the Christian Standard Bible, it uses the word ***"intercede."*** This word struck me, as I read in preparation for this devotion, how important for us to have someone who intercedes for us. According to the Pulpit Commentary, this is the first and only time that is recorded that the Israelites asked Moses to intercede to God for them.

Now many of you, much like myself, probably did not know what that word "intercede" actually means. According to the dictionary, interceding is being the mediator between two parties, or to intervene on behalf of another. We can see why the Israelites cried out for help from Moses. Look at the rest of the book of Exodus and Numbers, and we can see time after time the Israelites complain. Time after time, God does provide, and time after time, they go back to complaining. They began to cry out to Moses and to God that their miserable lives would be so much better in bondage to the Egyptians than it would be wandering through the desert, and so God shows them His majesty and power by sending serpents into the camp. Soon enough the Israelites realize their folly and ask for someone to repent for them, they realize that at that moment they do not deserve to be forgiven, they have committed treason unto the Lord, and with that, the punishment should be death. Yet, Moses goes before the Lord and asks for His forgiveness.

This event will rattle through time to when Christ did the same for us. We sinned and have committed High Treason against the King of kings and the Lord of lords. We deserve punishment because of that, yet Christ pays the debt and intercedes for us to His Father. This can be seen in Hebrews 7:22-25, ***"This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."*** Consistently, Christ is going and interceding on our behalf to His Father, showing Him that once we have come to know Him as our Savior, we are covered in His righteousness.

COME TO JESUS MOMENT

BRAZEN SERPRENT: DEVOTION 4

Pastor Ryan & Cathy Story

Have you ever had what you would consider a "come to Jesus moment" with someone? This may have been with one of your children, a family member, or even someone at work. This statement can be used to describe situations where people have a serious or truth revealing conversation. The English language has many statements where we describe situations or things in one way but do not mean those words literally. There are times where these figurative language statements could not be true. When someone says that it is raining cats and dogs, you would not expect actually to see cats or dogs falling from the sky. While the statement that someone had a come to Jesus moment could be figurative, John 3:14-16 shows us the importance of using this statement in a literal context.

While many people are able to quote John 3:16 from memory, not as many people are able to quote verses 14 and 15. John 3:14-16 writes, ***"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."***

In Numbers chapter 21, Moses was commanded to place the bronze serpent on the pole. To be saved from death caused by the fiery serpents, one had to look to the bronze serpent. John 3:14 tells us that in this same way, ***"The Son of Man [is to] be lifted up."*** Just as looking at the serpent on the pole saved lives, looking to Jesus on the cross saves us when we believe. For this to happen, we need to have literal come to Jesus moments.

The Bible frequently writes about us coming to Jesus. In Matthew 11:28, it is written, ***"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*** John 6:37 adds, ***"Whoever comes to me I will never cast out."*** Matthew 19:14 says, ***"But Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me.'"***

Although we have an open invitation to come to Jesus, there are people who decline this invitation. Some feel that they need to get their lives "right" before they can come. Others feel too busy to take time to come to Jesus. Others are simply unsure of how to come to Jesus. We are able to come to Jesus in many different ways. Through prayer, fasting, reading God's word, worship, and fellowship, we can come to Jesus. While there may still be times we have these figurative "come to Jesus moments" with others, as believers we must make sure we have literal moments of us coming to Jesus to grow deeper with Him. God has called us, He is calling us, and even for those who may be resisting the call, He will continue to call you. His desire is for us to come to know Him in a personal way, through the death of His Son on a cross.

LOOK FOR JESUS

BRAZEN SERPRENT: DEVOTION 5

Isaiah Combs

Reading the Old Testament can be hard. I struggle through chapters and verses like everyone else. However, I have found the key to reading and studying the Old Testament - look for Jesus! The whole Old Testament is filled with pictures of Jesus and mankind's desperate need for a savior. That savior is Jesus. I love how the New Testament writers inspired by God used Old Testament verses and stories to prove that Jesus is the answer.

Could you imagine growing up your whole life being forced to study and learn the Old Testament? You know all the stories and laws by heart and your life is built around what the laws, thoughts, and stories say. Then a guy, John, who was a follower of Jesus writes in John 3:14-16, ***"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."***

The story John is describing in these verses is found in Numbers 21:4-9. God sent fiery snakes to bite and kill the people of Israel as punishment for their sins and dumb things they did. Verse 6 says that many people died. However, God gave the people a way to save themselves from death after being bit by one of these fiery snakes. God had Moses build a bronze statue of one of the fiery snakes, and if you got bit all you had to do was look at the statue, and you would survive.

Remember, when I told you to look for Jesus? I hope this story sounds familiar. Our Savior Jesus, the Son of Man, was lifted up

on the cross and died for our sins. When we look to the cross and believe Jesus died, was buried, and rose again, we will be saved from death and eternal damnation.

Jesus is the key to the whole Bible. He is the fulfiller, author, and finisher. The whole Bible is about Him and for Him. Look for Jesus!

LIFT YOUR EYES

BRAZEN SERPRENT: DEVOTION 6

Roger Allen

We have all seen the video where a person on their phone walks into the signpost, right? Remember when you first learned to dribble a basketball? Concentrating on the ball, we kept our head down as we dribbled down the court, failing to see our wide-open teammate under the rim. So often in life, we proceed in a similar manner. We have distractions in our everyday life. We tend to keep our eye off the important things. We allow errands, travel sports, and "chasing the dream," to become the focus of our attention. Failing to look up, we lose out on so many things.

In the book of John, we find just such a scenario. Chapter 3 starts with the story of Nicodemus. Considered a "ruler of the Jews," Nicodemus was a Pharisee. He would have been religious, pious, and observed all the Jewish laws. To most, he would have appeared to have it together. He was considered as a man that surely had his eternity secured. We see him come under cover of darkness to question Jesus about who He claims to be. This is where things get interesting, and we see Nicodemus for who he truly is. When questioned about spiritual matters, he fails to understand what Jesus is saying. Sarcastically, Jesus asks him as a teacher why he can not understand what He has said. Because his religiosity had blinded him, he almost failed to see who Jesus truly was.

Right at the end of this interview, John 3:14-15 says, ***"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."***

So often, like Nicodemus, the lost world tends to look at the physical instead of the spiritual. Blinded by the religious experience and worldly desires, they miss the most important aspect of their lives. Making a list and marking it off gives them a sense of security. When we read John 3:14-15, we may be confused by what we find. We might even read right past what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus. Why does Jesus compare Himself with a serpent? It seems odd; does it not? The serpent, the representation of evil in the world, lifted up for all to see, for whoever looks on it will live (Numbers 21:4-9). Is this actually the foreshadow of who Jesus is? Are we to look upon the embodiment of evil for our salvation? It is not until we read this next verse that it becomes apparent to us what Jesus meant, ***"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"*** (2 Corinthians 5:21).

High and lifted up, unblemished, sinless, perfect in every way, Jesus becomes sin for us so that we may have an eternal relationship with God. When we look on the cross, we see our past, present, and future sin, rendered dead and buried. As the representation of the serpent, our transgressions have been cast out, and we are found righteous by the act of our Savior. God furnished the "perfect lamb" for our atonement; we are now free from the penalty of our sin. Yet, there will be those that believe they have lived a righteous and holy life, only to find they will be cast out. Others have heard the call and completely turned their back on God. The religious men and women, that through the theology of works, keep their eyes to the ground, only to miss out on the salvation of their souls. All they had to do was "look up" and see what Jesus did for them. The gift of grace is free, and all we have to do is trust and believe in Him. ***"For God so loved the world"*** He sent His only Son to pay our price in full. Look to Him that beat death, Hell, and the grave.

John 3:16 promises, ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."***

OUR MISSION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."***

REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, "we don't go to church, we are the Church." We believe that as God's people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

GATHER

Weekend Gatherings at The River Church are all about Jesus, through singing, giving, serving, baptizing, taking the Lord's Supper, and participating in messages that are all about Jesus and bringing glory to Him. We know that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it's not only a refresher it's bringing life-change.

GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***"all things in common."*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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