



**A Bible Reading Plan
for the Book of Exodus**

January 9 - March 5, 2017

Mountain Brook Baptist Church
www.mbbc.org



Exodus

ABOUT PROJECT 119

Project 119 is a Bible reading initiative of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Our hope is that every member of our church body would be encouraged in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ through the regular reading of God's Word.

This reading plan will guide you through the book of Exodus. The plan provides you a devotional thought and suggested Scripture reading for each day of the week. The weekends are used as time to reflect on the passages of the previous week.

To receive email updates when devotionals are added to the blog, go to www.mbbc.org/blog, click on "Subscribe to Mountain Brook Blog by Email" and follow the instructions. To learn more about Project 119 and to access previous plans, visit www.mbbc.org/project119.

INTRODUCTION

The word Exodus comes from a Greek noun which means "departure" or "going out." Namely, Exodus speaks of the "departure" of the Israelites held in captivity in Egypt under the harsh hand of Pharaoh. But the book of Exodus is about more than just their release; Exodus, traditionally attributed to Moses, recounts significant moments of Israelite history while serving as a reminder that God is faithful to keep His promises. Exodus shows the fulfillment of promises made long ago to Abraham, to make him into a great nation, to bless him, and to bless the entire world through his lineage. The nation of Israel is formed from this very lineage - a royal priesthood and holy nation. Exodus also reminds us that the Israelites receive their identity from God alone; He has proven Himself to be a faithful God who has determined that He will dwell among His people. He led them out of slavery in Egypt so that they might worship Him; He purposes to dwell among His people through the building of the tabernacle (Exodus 25-40). The events of Exodus propel the nation forward, yes, but we see throughout Scripture a call to also go back and remember - to remember their slavery and that the Lord God determined to deliver them from Egypt. Their relationship is based on rescue. God heard their cries, delivered them, and determined to make Himself known to His people despite their fallenness. In this way, the book of Exodus is our story as well, as we look back on what God has done for us in Christ; we have been rescued from the slavery of our sin and are called to walk in His marvelous light as His redeemed children.



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WEEK ONE: EXODUS 1:1-4:31 JANUARY 9-15

Monday, January 9 | Exodus 1:1-7 | Doug Dortch

“Together in Egypt”

The book of Exodus recounts the most pivotal story in the Old Testament – the story of God’s deliverance of His people from bondage to freedom and from promise to possession. Like most stories in the Bible, the Exodus story is best understood in retrospect. No one living the story at the time would have been able to see God’s design. It is only by looking back do the people come to see that God is with them and that no power, not even Egypt, the most dominant of world powers, can ever frustrate His sovereign purposes.

As you begin reading Exodus, you’ll notice how it’s a continuation of the last story in Genesis, the story of Joseph’s reunion with his father Jacob and brothers, and God’s provision for the house of Jacob when the only food to be found was in Egypt, where son Joseph oversaw the provisions. Now, the whole house is together in Egypt, seventy in all (an important number in the Bible that suggests completeness), but their fortunes are about to take a turn for the worse as the number of Israelites becomes so great (because of God’s blessing) that their very presence becomes a threat to the Egyptians, who fear that the Israelites will soon outnumber them and take over the land.

I doubt that the Israelites never considered such a thing, but perception is reality; and if people see you as a threat, then there’s not much you can do about it. However, actually there is. What the story of Exodus teaches us is that God’s purpose for His people holds sway over the fears and insecurities that would cause others to be suspicious of us. As people of faith we must learn how to trust our situations to God and believe that He will either deliver us from difficult situations or that He will give us the grace to endure them until His deliverance comes. What we often forget is that Israel was in Egypt for 430 years! Most of those years were onerous ones and the only way they could survive was to lean on one another and trust God to work on their behalf in due time.

We’re now seeing that our world today is becoming more suspicious and cynical of us Christians. While we don’t experience nearly the same persecution and abuse as did the children of Israel, we certainly find ourselves situated in a society that is becoming increasingly more unaccepting and hostile. Now more than ever, our world needs to see a community of believers who are devoted to one another and passionate about their relationship with God. Only then will they see us to be no threat at all, but the very means by which they too might experience the abundant life for which we all yearn,
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which in the fullness of time God made available to all through the deliverance He has brought about through faith in Jesus Christ. Such a step is the key toward everyone moving toward the “Promised Land” that God has in store for all who look to Him.

Tuesday, January 10 | Exodus 1:8-22 | Doug Dortch

“Fearing God and Showing Faith”

There’s not a soul among us who doesn’t show fear at one time or another. We may talk big at times, bragging that we’re not scared of anything or anyone, but the truth of the matter is there are times when find it hard to take a stand in situations that threaten our well-being. That’s why I love the story of the Hebrew midwives who refused to follow Pharaoh’s commands that every Hebrew male be put to death.

As you read the text, you notice that a new Pharaoh eventually came to the throne of Egypt, one who had no idea about Joseph or, more tellingly, the God whom Joseph served. His solution to the “Hebrew problem” was to wipe them off the earth, or at least the males among them who would pose the greatest threat to his rule.

Pharaoh’s plans, however, were frustrated by two Hebrew midwives, whose names have been recorded in the Exodus story as a lasting memorial to their deep faith in God – Shiphrah and Puah. No doubt they feared Pharaoh, but what the text teaches us is that they feared God even more. Hence, they could not do what Pharaoh ordered them to do and came up with a story about the vigor of the Hebrew mothers, a story that God blessed. Not only did the midwives have families because of their faithfulness, God used their boldness to make it possible for Israel’s ultimate deliverer, Moses, to be born and the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be saved.

We make a big deal about how no one should be afraid of God, but I wonder sometimes if we don’t do ourselves an injustice by minimizing how much God is deserving of our obedience and what’s at stake when we don’t. Reverencing God, which is what fear really is, doesn’t lower God’s standing in our minds; it simply allows us to own the implications of not obeying His will when that will conflicts with what others around us may be telling us to do.

Disobedience is serious business and ought to make us shake in our boots.

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Only then will we be moved to do the right thing and experience God's favor, which is certainly what God prefers to show human creation. Every expression of faith will most always disappoint those who have their own agendas. But it is the only way to experience God's choicest blessings. So be careful to fear God and do what He gives you to do, even when it is at odds with others around you. As Shiphrah and Puah would tell you, you'll never regret that you did.

Wednesday, January 11 | Exodus 2:1-25 | Doug Dortch

"Born to Run"

As with many births in the Bible, the birth of Moses was a miraculous event. We've already seen how the two Hebrew midwives chose God's way over Pharaoh's, which allowed for a Hebrew boy like Moses to be born in the first place. But if you ever wondered if God has a sense of humor, notice what happens next. After Moses is born, he must be hidden lest Pharaoh discover him, and when someone finally comes across him floating in the Nile in his little papyrus basket, who is it that discovers him but none other than Pharaoh's own daughter! And it gets better! Not only does Pharaoh's daughter discover the baby Moses, she adopts him, and then secures Moses' own mother to nurse him! If that's not God, I don't know how else to describe such a turn of events. Clearly, this child is born for some great purpose.

But as so often is the case, God's purposes can be deterred by human disobedience. In this case, when Moses grows up and discovers one day an Egyptian abusing one of his own people, Moses commits murder and then tries to hide his misdeeds in the Egyptian sand. This act, too, becomes public knowledge in due time, and Moses is forced to flee. His destination is Midian, which in the ancient world would have been equivalent to the back side of nowhere.

It would be easy for us to assume that this flight would have meant that Moses wasn't going to live up to his potential, but that would not be true. Moses' time in Midian served a purpose; it served God's purpose. In Midian Moses found a wife. In Midian Moses began a family. In Midian Moses had time to reflect upon what can go wrong when someone takes matters into his own hands instead of trusting all situations to God.

The Bible calls it "a long period" (Exodus 2:24). But what seems to us to be a long time only serves to allow God's ultimate purposes to come to pass. In this case, the Pharaoh dies, which sets the stage for Moses to return and live out his true calling.

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This may be a “back side of nowhere time for you.” You may feel as if you’ve missed God’s purpose because of choices you made, sins you committed, or paths you’ve taken to run away from something or someone. Yes, it could be that you missed God for a moment. But God hasn’t given up on you. So use this time to reflect upon both the error of your ways and the good that can come from receiving a second chance. You also have a purpose for which you were born, and it will never be too late for you to turn back to God, this time more ready to do what God has created you to do.

Thursday, January 12 | Exodus 3:1-22 | Doug Dortch

“Holy Ground”

The wilderness in Scripture is oftentimes a place of revelation. It’s a place where God shows up to disclose His purposes to His servants so that they might be the instruments of His will. As we’ve seen in Exodus, Moses retreated (and retired) to the wilderness to watch sheep, but God had other plans. First, however, God had to get Moses’ attention, and what better way to do that than to make His presence known through a burning bush.

It’s a riveting story of how Moses discovers what he considered to be a barren place to be in reality “Holy Ground.” There at the bush, God disclosed the purpose for which He sent and spared Moses, which was to go to Pharaoh and plead for the release of His people.

Moses, of course, was skeptical and not a little afraid (though we shouldn’t miss this chance to compare Moses’ fear with that of the Hebrew midwives in Exodus 2). Like many of us are wont to do, Moses came up with countless excuses as to why he was not the right person for the job. After all, who would listen to an exiled murderer? But God’s response was that it wouldn’t be Moses’ words that he would be speaking; it would be God’s, and the people would most certainly pay attention to that.

The most important part of this section of the Moses’ story is the revelation of the divine name Yahweh or “I am.” I’ve always found it interesting that when it comes to learning a language, we always start with the various forms of the verb “to be.” God’s revelation of His name points to how He is the ground of our existence and everything we know comes together in Him. Moreover, it shows God to be a relational deity, who invites us not just to live for Him but also to live with Him.

God can find us wherever we roam to. And when He finds us, He commissions us to return to Him and to live for Him. Center your life upon God’s revelation of Himself in Jesus and then live out your calling with even greater joy and purpose.



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Friday, January 13 | Exodus 4:1-31 | Doug Dortch

“The Staff of God”

One thing you can say about Moses – he was a tough nut to crack, even for God. Moses’ insecurity simply wouldn’t allow him to trust God’s promise, even when God had taken the remarkable step of revealing His personal name to him. Moses wanted more; Moses wanted a sign. And boy, did God give him one.

The story of Moses’ staff is one of the most gripping in the Bible. When you think about it, the staff of Moses was the only thing Moses had to his name. For all intents and purposes, Moses had lost everything else of value. So, when God told him to throw it down, Moses’ obedience was a true show of faith. But that wasn’t where Moses’ faith was to end. The staff became a snake, whereupon God told him to pick it up again, this time by the tail! I’m not much on handling snakes, but I know enough that when you grab a snake by the tail, the most dangerous part is left free to strike. Talk about faith! But Moses again heeds God’s word, and when he does, the snake reverts to a staff. Only this time the staff will become the means by which Moses will do incredible things – send plagues, part seas, deliver water. Indeed, from this time on the staff won’t be called the “staff of Moses.” From now on it will be called “the staff of God” (Exodus 4:17). That’s a big difference.

If you’ve got access to the Internet, check out Ken Medema’s song on Moses (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRBjtnp4208>). It will be worth your time. Medema captures the ups and downs of Moses’ story better than most, and best of all he captures its challenge. We too are called to take the risk of putting our lives and our loves in God’s hands so that God might return them endowed with His power so that we might accomplish incredible things.

So, what do you hold in your hand today? Throw it down. Perhaps God will not tell you to pick it up. If so, you can surely live without it. But if He does, well, that’s when the fun really begins.

Saturday, January 14-Sunday, January 15 | Exodus 1:1-4:31

Reread Exodus 1:1-4:31 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



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WEEK TWO: EXODUS 5:1-9:35 JANUARY 16-22

Monday, January 16 | Exodus 5:1-23 | Wayne Splawn

Pharaoh's arrogance is striking in Exodus 5. In verse 2, Pharaoh responds to Moses' and Aaron's words that the Lord has commanded him to let God's people go by saying, "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." (ESV).

Surely Pharaoh was aware of his country's past encounters with the God of the Israelites. After all, Joseph had risen to a place of high authority in the land of Egypt and even though Exodus 1:8 informs the reader that a new king who did not know Joseph had risen to power in the land, it is hard to believe that Pharaoh was unaware of the existence of Israel's God. If Pharaoh had indeed heard of the Lord in the past, how are we to understand his supposed ignorance in Exodus 5:2?

I think the writer of Exodus wants the reader to understand that there are two ways of 'knowing' someone. Pharaoh probably knew of the Lord in that he had heard of his name, but he obviously did not have a personal knowledge of the Lord so he defied the Lord's commands.

You and I may be more like Pharaoh than we might initially believe. We live in a land that is well-acquainted with the name of the Lord. But, do we know him in a personal way? Does our knowledge of God lead us to lovingly submit ourselves to His will or are there moments when we defiantly refuse to obey God's commands, choosing instead to usurp his lordship in our lives?

As you reflect on Pharaoh's hardness of heart throughout the book of Exodus, you would do well to reflect on the condition of your heart. Ask God to graciously reveal Himself to you so that you might experience the joy that can only be known by those who know and submit to the Lord.



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Tuesday, January 17 | Exodus 6:1-30 | Wayne Splawn

In Exodus 5, Pharaoh exhibited unbelief through his prideful defiance of the Lord's command. Here in Exodus 6, the Israelites display a different type of unbelief. When Moses tells them that the Lord will deliver them from slavery in Egypt, they will not listen to his message. After years of harsh slavery, their spirits are broken (Exodus 5:9) and they are resigned to the fact that they will live out their days in bondage. The good news of God's coming salvation seems too good to be true and they will not even entertain the notion that God will deliver them.

Perhaps you or someone you know can relate to how the Israelites felt in Exodus 6. When we walk through extremely difficult seasons of life, we are tempted to believe that things will never change. Rather than hope in God's ability to deliver us, we surrender to despair and defeat. The good news that God works all things for the good of those who love him seems too good to be true. What do we do in such situations?

First, we should be honest with God regarding how we feel. If you read through the book of Psalms, you will see that faithful saints of old struggled with doubt and uncertainty regarding God's good purposes in their lives. They did not cover up such feelings or pretend that everything was alright. God can handle our honest questions and fears.

Second, we should pray that God would give us faith to believe that He is at work in our lives and can deliver us from our distress. In Romans 4, Paul describes God in a way that I have always found captivating. In verse 17, he writes that Abraham believed in the God "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist" (ESV). The most powerful picture of this aspect of God's character is seen in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When Christ was laid in the tomb all hope seemed to have been lost. However, God raised Jesus from the dead and overcome sin and death. Pray that God would help you believe that He is one who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence even things that do not yet exist.



Exodus

Wednesday, January 18 | Exodus 7:1-25 | Wayne Splawn

Here in Exodus 7, the account of God sending plagues on the land of Egypt begins. The pattern that will be repeated in chapter 7 and a portion of chapter 8 is this: God will do a miraculous work through Moses and Aaron but the wise men, sorcerers and magicians of Egypt will replicate the miracle through their use of 'secret arts.'

I have always been perplexed by the ability of Pharaoh's men to perform some of the wonders God does through Aaron and Moses. How is it that they could turn staffs into snakes, water into blood and send frogs throughout the land of Egypt? The author of Exodus does not provide any explanation that would satisfy my curiosity. The author simply records what happened.

However, there is a significant difference between the miracles accomplished by Moses and Aaron and the sorcerers of Egypt. The men of Egypt relied on their own effort to perform the signs and wonders, but Moses and Aaron were clearly not the source of the plagues God accomplished through them. They simply obeyed God's commands and watched in amazement as God's power was on display in their lives.

I think this passage is a great reminder to each of us that all the Lord asks us to do is to make ourselves available to his plans and purposes by obeying His commands. Pursuing the will of God will often mean that we must seek to accomplish tasks that we know are impossible to accomplish in our own strength. However, if we will obey in faith and trust in God's ability rather than our own, it may just be that God will "do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20, ESV).



Exodus

Thursday, January 19 | Exodus 8:1-32 | Wayne Splawn

The sorcerers of Egypt are able to keep up with the miracles God performs through Aaron and Moses for a time, but eventually God accomplishes signs and wonders that Pharaoh's men are unable to replicate. Here in Exodus 8, God sends gnats upon the land of Egypt and Pharaoh's magicians cannot produce the gnats using their secret arts. The magicians see their inability to replicate the miracle as a sure sign that this plague is an act of the Lord. They inform Pharaoh of their belief in the Lord's work, but Pharaoh persists in disbelief. Why can't Pharaoh see what is plain to everyone else around him? The author of Exodus informs the reader that Pharaoh's unbelief is due to the fact that he has a heart that has been hardened.

The danger of having a hardened heart is not something that was unique to Pharaoh. In Hebrews 3:7-13, the author of Hebrews reminds his audience that of the importance of God's people continually listening to and obeying God's word so that our hearts do not become hardened by sin. If our hearts are hardened, then like Pharaoh, we will persist in disbelief even when what we ought to know about God is so clear to everyone else.

How might we avoid having a heart that is hard? One strategy the writer of Hebrews suggests is to "exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13, ESV). Sin has a way of hardening our hearts over time and we need other faithful believers in our lives to exhort us to be attentive to God's Word. Talk with one or two other close Christian friends about ways that God might use you to encourage one another to listen to and obey God's Word on a daily basis.

Friday, January 20 | Exodus 9:1-35 | Mary Splawn

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Saturday, January 21-Sunday, January 22 | Exodus 5:1-9:35

Reread Exodus 5:1-9:35 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



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WEEK THREE: EXODUS 10:1-15:27 JANUARY 23-29

Monday, January 23 | Exodus 10:1-29 | Mary Splawn

Last summer, my family and I went to Rickwood Caverns to explore. The guide took us to the depths of the cavern and said, "Have you ever been in total darkness?" Then she proceeded to turn off the lights one by one so that we couldn't even see our hands in front of our faces. Our eyes never adjusted to the darkness.

Exodus 10 reminds me of the darkness I experienced. This passage tells us about 2 plagues of darkness which display a physical picture of the spiritual reality in Pharaoh's heart. God sent the plague of locusts "which covered the whole land so that it was darkened" and the plague of "darkness to be felt." Scripture tells us that during the plague of darkness "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."

Now my darkness was in the cavern was for no more than 3 minutes and honestly, I got a little nervous. I can't imagine how the Egyptians felt being in darkness for 3 days with no promise of the return of light.

Reading this passage makes me so thankful for physical and spiritual light and it causes me to think about one of Jesus' titles for himself, "the light of the world." Take a minute to thank God for light and ask Him to illuminate your life today.

A prayer for illumination: Lord, open our eyes that we may see the wonders of your Word; and give us grace that we may know what to do with the wisdom you have given. May we be lights in a dark world by the power of your Holy Spirit. May you display your power in us so that we can be witnesses to the dark world around us and to the next generation (v.1-2), through Christ our Light and Lord, Amen.

Tuesday, January 24 | Exodus 11:1-12:51 | Wayne Splawn

In Exodus 7 - 10, we have read of the various plagues God sent on the land of Egypt to display his power and set his people free. Those plagues reach their climax here in Exodus 11-12. The Lord tells Moses and Aaron to inform Pharaoh that if he does not let his people go, He will pass through the land of Egypt and kill the firstborn male of both livestock and man. Pharaoh again refuses to grant Moses' and Aaron's request and God prepares his people to experience his salvation in the Passover. (continued on next page)



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How will the Israelites be set apart from the people of Egypt? God tells them to sacrifice an unblemished lamb and put some of the blood of the lamb on their doorposts. Then, when he passed through the land of Egypt their firstborn males will be protected. The people of God obey the Lord's instructions and as the Lord passes over the land they are spared. The people of Egypt awake to the devastating effects of God passing through the land and they implore the Israelites to immediately leave their land once and for all. Pharaoh, who had arrogantly resisted the Lord, finally yields to the Lord's command.

The Passover was such a significant event in the life of Israel that it would forever be central to who they were as a people. The Passover would dictate how they marked time (Exodus 12:1-2) and Passover celebrations would be occasions upon which the Israelites would evermore teach their children about this saving act of God.

It is not difficult to see the sacrifice of Jesus Christ foreshadowed in this most important event. In 1 Corinthians 5:7, Paul identifies Jesus as our Passover Lamb. Just as the Israelites were delivered from their bondage in Egypt through the blood of a lamb, so we are delivered from oppression of sin and death through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Exodus 11-12 remind us of the importance of keeping God's work of salvation at the center of our lives. Ask God to show you how you might live in such a way that Jesus' life, death and resurrection would be on display in you. As the Israelites were to tell future generations of the saving work they experienced in the Passover, be open to the ways God can use you to tell future generations of the salvation you have experienced through Jesus Christ.



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Wednesday, January 25 | Exodus 13:1-22 | Wayne Splawn

There are moments in life when we are aware that we are dependent upon God for our very existence. For example, in times of sickness or financial hardship, we often cry out to the Lord for deliverance. However, on the days we feel strong and in control, we mistakenly conclude that we can handle things on our own.

The Lord brought His people out of Egypt by His strong mighty hand and guided them through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. At every point in the process, God wanted them to know that He had accomplished salvation on their behalf. They did not save themselves and they had no hope of survival apart from Him.

Allow Exodus 13 to be a reminder that you are ever dependent upon the Lord. Praise God for the salvation He has accomplished on your behalf through Jesus Christ. Ask God to show you areas of your life in which you are trying to walk in your own strength. Repent of that sin and daily walk in the strength God provides.

Thursday, January 26 | Exodus 14:1-31 | Mary Splawn

Exodus 14 is a vivid retelling of the epic salvation story for the Israelites when they were saved from the Egyptians through the parting of the Red Sea. What does the scene look like when you imagine it? I picture the waters of the sea becoming two big waves on either side of a dry walkway that is parted as Moses raises his staff in dramatic fashion.

I have also wondered about the pillar of cloud that represented God's presence was like. Recently there was an article about the Israeli army and a cloud that separated them from their enemies in battle. In the age of cellphone cameras and YouTube, I think I have a better picture of the pillar of cloud from Bible times might look like (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Wqf610inOY&app=desktop>).

As I watched the video, I marveled at the God of all who has power not just over men but over the forces of nature. He is a God who will bring to pass what He determines.

My favorite verses in Exodus 14 state, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent" (Exodus 14:14-15).

I want to claim this verse as my own, but first I have to see it in context for the Israelites. God was giving them a promise that He would fight for them on that day! (continued on next page)



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We are not a direct recipient of this promise in Exodus nor of the direct command to be silent and stand by. But, the verses do still have relevance for us, helping us to see who God is and how we should relate to Him. We have a God who fights for us and a Lord who asks us not to fear but to lean on Him (Proverbs 3:5-6).

What are the battles you fight today? Take time to stop and acknowledge that the Lord is fighting for you and actively relinquish control to Him. Perhaps get physical with your prayer. Pretend to ball your fists around the worries of today then slowly open your hand as a symbol of relinquishing control. Then sit in silence for a few minutes, asking God to calm you and control your thoughts and actions. As you rise from your prayer time, imagine the Lord parting the Red Sea and thank Him for the ways He intervenes in your life circumstances for your good and His glory.

Friday, January 27 | Exodus 15:1-27 | Mary Splawn

I don't like a test. Honestly I don't think that anyone does, but as this Scripture reminds us today, our walk of faith includes tests, but it also includes triumphs.

Exodus 15 starts out with a beautiful song reminding the Israelites of what the Lord has just done for them by defeating the Egyptians and helping them to cross the Red Sea on dry land. What seems like moments after they end their song, they go into a time of testing. For three days they walk without any water and then when they find water, ironically, the water they find is bitter.

They start to grumble but Moses redirects their grumbling into a cry for help to the Lord. They call out to the Lord and He purifies the water and makes it drinkable. And then He leads them to a place where water is in abundance, a resort type place!

This passage teaches us that in life, we will have two t's: Triumph and Testing. In the times of testing, we must look back at the many ways that the Lord has triumphed over evil and cry out to Him for help. And in times of triumph, we do well to remember the Source of our blessings.

We even see this in the life of our Lord Jesus. Think with me about the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus is baptized by John and the Spirit of God descends like a dove and calls out "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well-pleased." What triumph! And then...Jesus is led out by the Spirit to the desert for testing. And, in that time of testing, He remembers God's Word in Scripture and trusts in His Father's goodness in order to defeat the temptation of the devil. (continued on next page)



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I'm pretty sure Jesus didn't like the test, but He persevered by His dependence on God and His Word. Often times I don't approach my tests in the same way. I try to muster strength on my own and study the wrong things. Yet God calls us to open up the Book and study. He also asks me to approach the teacher and depend on Him for instruction!

A prayer I pray for students is this: "Lord, Help my friend to recall what she has studied and to take the necessary time to check her work. Help her to sense Your presence with her."

This prayer might also be a good one for us as it relates to spiritual tests! *Lord, Help us to recall what we have learned about You and help us to take the necessary time to check our life work. Thank You for the promise that You never leave us or forsake us. Amen.*

Saturday, January 28-Sunday, January 29 | Exodus 10:1-15:27

Reread Exodus 10:1-15:27 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Exodus

WEEK FOUR: EXODUS 16:1-20:26 JANUARY 30-FEBRUARY 5

Monday, January 30 | Exodus 16:1-36 | Mary Splawn

We have a sign in our living room that says, "No Whining." The reason we have this sign is that everyone in my house likes to whine from time to time! But, I've got to be honest, if I were one of the Israelites in the wilderness, I probably would have been whining too. No food, no water, and lots of walking are a recipe disaster. The term used in the NIV for all this whining is "grumbling."

In this passage, the people were grumbling against Moses but ultimately they were grumbling against God. An interesting thing to note is that God not only hears the grumbling, but He responds to it as well. He responds to the cries of the people with provision of something called manna for the people to eat.

The interesting thing about the manna is that through God's provision, He continues to test the people. God told the Israelites in Exodus 15 that if they obey Him, He will protect and bless them. But, they don't obey in even the smallest of commands not to hoard the manna. The Israelites break this rule and there are consequences – worms! We too suffer consequences when we don't obey God's commands.

Isn't it true that our whining and our wandering from God's commands expose a deeper heart issue? The Israelites struggled to trust God, even though He had seen them through so many difficult circumstances before. I'm afraid I fall in the camp with the Israelites on this as well. Even though God has provided for me in the past, I fear and I hoard and sin against God to get my own way.

There is a biblical response to grumbling and disobedience found in Philippians 2:14-15: "Do everything without complaining and arguing so that you may become blameless and pure children of God."

The next time you're in a situation where you want to whine, think about the deeper heart issues. Why is it that you feel dissatisfaction? Do you feel that God owes you something or are you jealous because you're comparing your life to others? And, the next time you disobey God's commands, contemplate your motivations. Are you sinning against God because you believe you know better than He does?

Be honest with the Lord and ask Him to reveal your heart issues. If you'll take your grumbling to the Giver of all good things, He stands ready to sustain you in the midst of your distress, providing daily provisions of His guiding presence.



Exodus

Tuesday, January 31 | Exodus 17:1-16 | Mary Splawn

If you have a staff to sell, I'm in the market.

I want to hang it on the wall as a physical reminder of the spiritual reality that is so clearly displayed for us in Exodus 17. The Israelites are in the wilderness, traveling from Egypt to the Promised Land. Again, they have no water. So God instructs Moses to take the staff which represents God's power and strike a rock and it will gush water. This staff shows up in the second half of the chapter when the Amalekites attack the Israelites. Moses is to raise the staff and when he does, the Israelites go on to victory.

This isn't our first introduction to the staff of God. This same staff was used to strike the Nile during the plagues (Exodus 7) and Moses held it up above the waters of the Red Sea when they parted. The staff of God is a physical symbol of God's all-powerful nature.

When the Israelites fix their eyes on God's staff, their attention is moved away from the problem and redirected to their all-powerful God who promises His presence with them. God has supremacy over nature and authority over an army and power over whatever circumstance the Israelites face.

The author of Hebrews picks up on this idea that we, like the Israelites, should fix our eyes on something other than our problems, ourselves, and our power in the face of suffering and life struggles. Our eyes should be fixed on Jesus, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame so that we might be saved.

Next time you're tempted to despair over what seems to be going wrong, think about the staff of God and pray to the One whose power the staff represents! *Lord, give us a sense of Your power and Your purposes in what we face. Please give us the faith to believe in Your goodness. Help us to stop worrying and stewing over whatever is causing us grief, and help us to look instead to the One who entered into our grief, who bears our burdens with us and ultimately the One who gives us the power to overcome. It is in His name we pray, Amen.*

Wednesday, February 1 | Exodus 18:1-27 | Mary Splawn

Exodus 18 recounts for us the time when Moses' father-in-law comes to visit and brings home Moses' wife Zipporah and his sons. During his visit, Jethro does something that is stereotypical in the movies of what in-laws do - he offers Moses some advice. His advice is for Moses to delegate or share the burden of ministry by teaching the people the law of God and then entrusting to them the responsibility to help with judging the people.

Delegation is something that is hard for most of us to do, because it comes with a risk.
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Exodus

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But, as we see in this passage, allowing others to share the burden is key to helping Moses.

This idea of burden bearing is meaningful to anyone who has had a weight on them that they couldn't carry alone. In the church, God gives us a community who can help carry our burdens. We are called to ask others to pray and to come alongside us as we seek to honor God in our lives and situations. We are also called to be aware and share the burdens of others.

Often, we can get myopic in our own situations and experiences that we hardly have time and energy to devote to praying for others and being the hands and feet of Christ for those in need.

I challenge us to meditate on this passage asking God to give us practical wisdom for today from it. Let's ask the Lord to help us know:

- 1) The areas of our lives where we may need to ask others for prayer support and a helping hand. And...
- 2) the other areas of our lives where we might become a burden bearer for someone else.

Thursday, February 2 | Exodus 19:1-25 | Hayden Walker

So many of our stories and fairytales include a protagonist who doesn't know his or her true identity. Think of Rapunzel; she was trapped in obscurity because she didn't know that she was royalty. When she learned that she was a princess, everything changed. Life will indeed be disappointing if we don't know who we are.

Exodus 19:5-6 are important verses because they explain who the Israelites truly were. Though they had been working as slaves, that was not their actual identity. They were the treasured kingdom of priests, a holy nation. They had been set apart by God to serve others. Because they were priests, they were to teach others about this God who had delivered them. As a holy nation, they were not supposed to live like the rest of the world. God wanted them to live, act, and speak differently from others. Their distinctiveness would point the world to the God who empowered them to be holy.

This royal identity belongs not only to the Israelites, but to all of us who put our faith in Christ Jesus. The apostle Peter writes that the purpose of our identity is to "proclaim the excellences of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). There is no room for arrogance in our hearts since we didn't become God's treasured possession by our own goodness, but because of the mercy He has lavished upon us. Let us live into our identity as God's royal sons and daughters, testifying to the world about the hope that we have in Jesus!



Exodus

Friday, February 3 | Exodus 20:1-26 | Hayden Walker

One year at church camp when I was growing up, our theme was “The Ten Commandments.” We memorized them, performed skits about them, sang songs about them, and even received a shirt decorated with them at the end of the week. I could recite them backwards and forwards, as I’m sure you can if you had a similar church experience in your childhood. However, I believe that all of the lessons, songs and skits missed the most important part of the Ten Commandments. They missed verse 2.

Without verse 2, the commandments become rote rules or abstract moral theory. Even more dangerously, they can become an attempt to earn God’s favor. Verse 2 puts it all into perspective: God has made the first move, we therefore respond to His deliverance in obedience. It all must be understood within the context of a covenant.

God reminds His people that He has delivered them from Egypt. This is the God who loves them so fiercely that He brought about their miraculous salvation! It is in light of this *relationship* that the people are to follow God’s law. When they remember that truth first, they will realize that the commandments must be a positive prescription for a life of fullness instead of prohibition.

The Israelites had to remember that it was the God who had delivered them from slavery in Egypt by His mercy and grace who gave these rules. The law is not from a vengeful and angry God, but from a God who wants the best for His people. Likewise, when we explore the laws of God, we must remember that the rules follow the grace that God has given us in Christ Jesus. We don’t earn His favor by following the rules, we desire to keep the law *because He has already given us His favor.*

Relying on our own efforts, we can never keep the law to God’s standard. Jesus reminds us in Matthew 5 that keeping these commands is not just about avoiding the action, but not even having any smidge of these sins in our hearts. It is utterly impossible. We would be hopeless and helpless without the mercy we’ve been shown in Christ. The imperatives of a Christian life always follow the truth of what God has already done in and for us.

Saturday, February 4-Sunday, February 5 | Exodus 16:1-20:26

Reread Exodus 16:1-20:26 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Exodus

WEEK FIVE: EXODUS 21:1-25:40 FEBRUARY 6-12

Monday, February 6 | Exodus 21:1-36 | Hayden Walker

The commandments listed in this chapter may seem overwhelming and antiquated to you. In all likelihood, you don't have oxen in your yard that you fear may gore someone. It would be easy to breeze over passages like these and believe that God has nothing to say to the 21st century believer from these words. However, that's just not the case.

From this chapter, we learn more about the standards that God requires - and come to realize that we just can't meet them. We learn that God desires that all people be treated with dignity and honor, including the unborn (Exodus 21:22-25). Even animals bear punishment for harming God's people!

Ultimately this communicates to us that sin deserves punishment. All sin is atrocious in the eyes of God and must be judged. This was not only true for the Israelites but it is true for us. Your sin deserves death. We see the character of God most fully displayed on the cross of Christ, as the judgment for sin and the mercy of God met one another. Christ has borne the punishment of all of our sins, and we who trust in Him bear the burden no longer. Thanks be to God!

Tuesday, February 7 | Exodus 22:1-31 | Hayden Walker

Our passage today concludes in verses 29-30 with the command to give to God without delay and without hesitation. Though we aren't giving the literal fruits of our harvest and oil from our presses to Him, He does desire that we give freely and without hesitation.

But how often do we withhold the first fruits of our lives from God? Sure we give to Him, but often we give what is leftover of our time, our energy, and our money. We make great sacrifices to never miss work or sports practice, but worship and Bible study only fit if we have the time. We stay up late watching our favorite television series or checking all the social media sites, but we rarely take time to pray or read Scripture. We save for a new home, car, or clothes, and give what we have leftover as an offering to the church.

What might it look like for you to give God the priority and dominion over your entire life? Spend some time in prayer today, asking God to forgive you for giving Him your half-hearted leftovers in life.



Exodus

Wednesday, February 8 | Exodus 23:1-33 | Hayden Walker

When I was in college, I spent a semester in Salzburg, Austria. Most days I rode a bike from my host home to the university, but occasionally it was so cold and snowy that I needed to take the bus. One such morning, an undercover bus inspector boarded to check everyone's tickets. As I presented my ticket, the man began yelling at me. In my own broken German, I attempted to understand what he believed I had done wrong. I was alone and afraid. In that moment, a kind older lady came to my aid and defended me. In a foreign land, she extended kindness towards me. It would have been easy for her to stay seated and silent, but I was so grateful that she stood up for me and helped me when I could not help myself.

Exodus 23:9-11 encourages the Israelites to assist sojourners and the poor. Although I was not a sojourner of the destitute variety on the bus that day, I was in need of someone to speak up on my behalf. God wants His people to be a voice for the voiceless, and to provide for those without possessions. The holy nation of God should leave no room for oppression of foreigners. In fact, they should even allow the needy to take from their own resources.

So we must consider: How are we coming to help those who are outcast? Those who don't belong? Those who are refugees, fleeing from their homeland? Are we providing for those who are downcast? Or are we simply staying in our seats and looking the other way? God desires that His people show mercy and advocate for justice, especially for those on the margins of society.

Thursday, February 9 | Exodus 24:1-18 | Amy Jackson

In Exodus 24, we come to the confirmation of the covenant that God has made with His people. The covenant is confirmed and the people promise to live by the standard that God has revealed to them (Exodus 24:7). They are sprinkled with the blood of Moses' sacrifices, "the blood of the covenant" (Exodus 24:8). Then, something unusual happens. Moses, Aaron, Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders go up on the mountain where the text tells us "they saw the God of Israel" (Exodus 24:10).

Now, it might not seem weird to us, but people didn't just "see" God in a physical manifestation too often in the Old Testament. In fact, later in Exodus the Lord will tell Moses that He cannot show Moses His face "for man shall not see me and live" (Exodus 33:20). While the people here only see God in part, it's a miracle that they can see Him at all! He is a God who is holy and other. Adam and Eve once walked in the garden with the Father, but their sin brought about a rupture between the Creator and created.

Yet here we have a beautiful, impartial picture of people encountering God and communing with Him. They "beheld God, and ate and drank" (Exodus 24:11), enjoying a meal together after the ratification of the covenant. (continued on next page)



Exodus

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This text also points us forward to two other stories of God communing, fellowshiping, and breaking bread with His people. On the night of Christ's betrayal, His disciples gathered for a meal together where He proclaimed that the very cup they drank was the "blood of the covenant, poured out for them." Man could not behold God in full and live; and yet John tells us that the incarnation changes everything. If we have seen Jesus, we have seen God (John 14:1-11). The blood of Exodus 24 points forward to a perfect, spotless Lamb, whose blood will be sprinkled on the nations as a final sacrifice through His death on the cross. The rupture of Genesis 3 will be repaired through this atoning act. And one day, when Christ returns, believers of every tribe and tongue will dine together at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-10). We will feast in the house of Zion with the Lord, and we will behold Him face to face, in His glory.

Friday, February 10 | Exodus 25:1-40 | Amy Jackson

Beginning in Exodus 25, the Lord gives Moses instructions for building a tabernacle. This tabernacle, or sanctuary, wasn't built to just be a place where the Israelites would gather for fellowship; the primary purpose of the tabernacle was to provide a place for God's presence to dwell among His people. These verses remind us of the faithfulness of God - that He would choose to dwell among the Israelites. The Lord gives very detailed specifications for the tabernacle; these instructions help guide the Israelites as they consider what it means to live as God's people in His holy presence.

We read about three objects in Exodus 25: the ark of the covenant, the table for the bread of presence, and the golden lampstand. You could easily get lost in the details here - and I think the details are beautiful! The specifications remind us that we worship a God who is holy and other, who prizes beauty and order - the same God who created cells and designed DNA codes.

Rather than getting overwhelmed by all of this information, take heart that God is a God of details. Consider that each of these items reminds us of His faithful character. The ark of the covenant, located in the Holy of Holies, contains a copy of the covenant, a container with manna, and Aaron's budded staff - each of these holy objects remind us of God's care and concern for His people. He fed them with manna and quail as they journeyed to the promised land. He spoke through His servant Aaron, to deliver the Israelites from Egypt and sustain them in the wilderness. He gave the law, so that the Israelites might know how to live as God's holy people.

Likewise, the table for bread and the lampstand also remind us of His faithfulness - that God would choose to dwell with His people. God gives His people their daily bread, and this bread is a reminder of His sustaining presence with His people. The golden lampstand reminds the Israelites that God is the true light, pointing us back to creation, where God spoke light into being. The lampstand, which resembles a beautiful flowering tree, makes us think of Eden and the tree of life. Despite the Fall of Genesis 3, God continues to give the light of His faithful presence and guidance to His people.

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Exodus

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In the words of John Mackay, "The Lord is the source of light. There is to be no darkness in the presence of the Creator who has redeemed His people." He is a God faithful to His people, who chooses to dwell among the undeserving. Praise God for this provision!

Saturday, February 11-Sunday, February 12 | 21:1-25:40

Reread Exodus 21:1-25:40 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Exodus

WEEK SIX: EXODUS 26:1-30:38 FEBRUARY 13-19

Monday, February 13 | Exodus 26:1-37 | Amy Jackson

Have you ever been listening to someone tell a story - a long-winded, involved story - and wished they would just get to the point already? We might wish that in Exodus, particularly in these parts. Why couldn't we just sum up these chapters by saying that God gave Moses instructions to build a tabernacle, and then he built it? Why do we need the specifications and the details?

Well first off, we believe that all of Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable. Perhaps these verses may not be your "life verses" or the passages that you memorize and come back to over and over, but they are important regardless. I think after reading Exodus 26, we walk away with the reminder that God is holy. He shows His goodness by coming to dwell with His people in the tabernacle, a tent that could be transported as the people journeyed to the Promised Land. Still, He is still a God who is holy and other and set apart.

We see the truth of His holiness in how the tabernacle is set up, as we move from the courtyard to the Holy Place, where officials and other representatives of the Israelites might gather, to the Holy of Holies, a room separated from the Holy Place by a thick curtain. Most Israelites could not enter the Holy Place, and only one Israelite, the High Priest, could enter the Holy of Holies, on the Day of Atonement, to offer sacrifice for the nation of Israel. As John Mackay explains, "Though Israel had this tremendous privilege of the divine presence in their midst, there was to be no doubt that He is the Holy One and that access to Him is no easy matter."

To really appreciate that we, as believers, can come into God's presence and that He dwells within us - the holy, perfectly righteous God - we have to appreciate the system that came before us and how it points to a greater reality in Jesus. Through His death on the cross, the "final" Day of Atonement, our perfect High Priest opened a new way for us. The author of Hebrews tells us that "we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain" (Hebrews 10:19-20). We can draw near to God because of Jesus' work on the cross. God no longer dwells in a transportable tent, a tabernacle made of frames and curtains; instead, the Holy Spirit lives in believers - we are living temples of God!



Exodus

Tuesday, February 14 | Exodus 27:1-21 | Amy Jackson

I love when biblical themes come together. Here in Exodus 27, we see how the theme of light is used in worship. This chapter outlines instructions for building the bronze altar and the courtyard for the tabernacle. The bronze altar, used for sacrifices, had the shape of a cube with horns on the corners of the altar and sat outside of the tabernacle in the courtyard. As we'll see later in the Old Testament, sacrifice was a central part of worship for the Israelites. Animals would be slaughtered, cut into pieces, and put on top of the altar, where the fire of the altar would consume them.

The light of the fire, which the Israelites would see outside the courtyard as sacrifices were made, reminded them that God is consuming fire, the perfectly holy and righteous God who also appeared before Moses in the form of a burning bush. Later, God's consuming fire is described as burning away impurities within us, making us more like Christ (1 Peter 1:7), and as a call us to offer Him our "acceptable worship, with reverence and awe" (Hebrews 12:28-29).

The theme of light continues as we see provisions given for the lamp in the Holy Place. The Israelites were to bring olive oil as an offering, for the lamp to be lit in the evenings. I think the light here reminds us of a few things. First, we are reminded of light a symbol of God's presence. Later in Numbers, God would go before His people and lead them through the wilderness in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Second, we are reminded of the usefulness of light! The lamp wasn't lit during the day, since sunlight probably entered the Holy Place. However, the priests needed light at night to perform their duties; in the same way, God's light sheds led on our own brokenness and our sinfulness. The light of His word shows us our fallenness and our need for Him. Finally, the light flickering from the lamp in the Holy Place points us forward to Christ, who would declare that He is the true light of the world and that "whoever follows [Him] will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).



Exodus

Wednesday, February 15 | Exodus 28:1-43 | Amy Jackson

What can you learn about someone based on his or her outfit? While I don't think judging people on the basis of their clothing is a wise decision, if I'm confused and frazzled in Home Depot, seeing someone in an orange apron is a welcome sign for help! Chances are, if you are in an orange apron at Home Depot, you work at the store and can help those of us who aren't so technically inclined.

While all of the verses regarding priestly garments might seem monotonous, we can learn a lot about the priest's role and about worship in Israel through studying these verses. God gives explicit instructions on the appropriate priestly uniform; much like orange aprons designate Home Depot employees, these priestly garments set the priest apart, reminding the Israelites that the priest serves a holy God in a holy place.

What do we learn about the priest from his clothing? First, we hear that his garments are made of the same materials used to construct the tabernacle itself - "gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twisted linens" (Exodus 28:5). Home Depot employees are connected to the store through their uniforms, which include the store logo; in the same way, the priest is connected to the tabernacle through his garments, which are woven out of the same materials that make up the curtain system.

We also see that the priest is the representative of the people; notice the two stones adorning his outfits. The stones are carved with the names of the tribes of Israel, reminding us that the high priest represents all of Israel. God provides a means to dwell among His people, but they can only approach God through the mediation of the High Priest - through Aaron and his descendants.

We no longer have high priests like Aaron; instead, Jesus is our high priest. We can only approach God through Him - He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), and there is other name by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12). Jesus is our representative, and that should be good news for us! When we read the Old Testament, we hear of high priests who were holy and good, and priests who led the people astray - but our high priest is perfect in every way. He identifies with us in our humanity but is without sin. He is the One who represents us to the Father! What better news could there be?

Thursday, February 16 | Exodus 29:1-46 | Amy Jackson

In these verses, the Lord gives instructions for sacrifices to consecrate priests serving in the tabernacle. Now, if we aren't careful, we can have pretty negative (and wrong) attitudes about Israel's worship. We don't live in a culture where animal sacrifice is the norm. It seems odd and burdensome and maybe even gross to us that the Israelites would be called to go to these lengths and make so many sacrifices.

I think the last four verses help put these attitudes in perspective for us. Right when we might be weary of reading about yet another sacrifice, we are reminded of the purpose of the sacrifices:
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Exodus

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God institutes sacrifices as a means of atonement and worship for His people, that He might dwell among them. And, we're reminded that this has been God's intention from the beginning: to set aside a people for His own possession. God didn't just set the Israelites free in Egypt because He hates oppression; He set them free so that they might worship and serve Him. When Moses repeatedly approaches Pharaoh to request that he let God's people go, he asks for their freedom so that they might go to worship and serve the Lord (see Exodus 5:1, 7:16, 8:1, 9:1, 9:13).

So, these sacrifices aren't burdensome; rather, they were a part of system of worship for Israel, making it possible for God to dwell in their midst (Exodus 29:45). Notice all of the "I" statements in the last four verses! God has done all of these things so that people might know that He is the Lord, the God who delivered them from Egypt. Sacrifice provided atonement for their sin, pointing forward to the perfect sacrifice of Christ. They were also a sign that the Israelites were God's people, set apart as His treasured possession. And, sacrifices were an expression of worship, showing their gratitude and praise for God's goodness and faithfulness. This same God who delivered them out of Egypt delights to dwell in their midst and to be their God.

Although our worship today reflects on the central sacrifice of Christ rather than burnt offerings, in many ways, our worship ought to demonstrate the same kind of praise and gratitude: just as the Israelites remembered God's work in delivering them and worshipped, we also remember what Christ has done to break the bondage of sin and shame in our lives, and that remembrance leads us to worship - worship that isn't burdensome but rather is a reflection of our heart's gratitude for all that God has done in Christ.

Friday, February 17 | Exodus 30:1-38 | Amy Jackson

In 2000, I was thirteen; I had a lot of discoveries that year, but one thing I remember learning about is the U.S. Census. Every ten years, the United States takes a census to develop statistics about the country's population and diversity. Now, the census here in Exodus 30:11-16 is different than our census. You see, the instructions here were not to take a census after every ten years; instead, the instructions are provisions for what to do if Israel decided to take a census. If they were to take a census, they would also need to take a "ransom" for each person numbered in the census (those age twenty and up). This ransom amounted to half a shekel and would be taken from each person counted in the census, regardless of income. Why take up a ransom? Verse 16 tells us the ransom is "atonement money" which is to be given "for the service of the tent of meeting, that it may bring the people of Israel to remembrance before the LORD" (Exodus 30:16).

Some scholars wonder if the rules and ransom offerings were meant to discourage the Israelites from even taking a census. While there's nothing inherently wrong with nations taking censuses, the Israelites weren't just any nation - they were a people holy to God.

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Exodus

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And yet we see that the Israelites struggle with this in the Old Testament; they want to be like all of the other nations and have their own king and own allegiances, and trust in their own strength. But the Lord is their king, and their strength, and their only hope. Taking a census might have shown that they were trusting in their own numbers and their own military strength rather than in the power and glory of the Lord (see 2 Samuel 24:1-17).

Sadly, we struggle with this too, don't we? We want to take a census of our own skills. Am I equipped to handle this task? Do I have enough resources to get this job done? How often do we assess ourselves rather than handing our lives and resources over to a holy and competent God, remembering that our Father has authority over everything and watches over His children with His tender care? The cattle on a thousand hills are His; He flung the stars into the heavens and numbers the sands of the shore. He needs no census - all things are His, and we are His, and we rest in that truth - even when our hearts are tempted to turn to the self-trusting ways of the world.

Saturday, February 18-Sunday, February 19 | Exodus 26:1-30:38

Reread Exodus 26:1–30:38 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Exodus

WEEK SEVEN: EXODUS 31:1-35:35 FEBRUARY 20-26

Monday, February 20 | Exodus 31:1-18 | Amy Jackson

I love to-do lists. They help me to think through all that needs to be done and to make decisions about scheduling and writing and running errands. I don't think to-do lists are inherently bad - I've seen how helpful they can be for me; however, sometimes we get so caught up in doing tasks and finishing things that we forget what's really important.

I think this might be why we have this section about the Sabbath here in verses 12-18. God has just given Moses and the Israelites lengthy instructions about building the tabernacle, ordaining priests, and offering proper sacrifices in worship. And here, God reminds the people again of the fourth commandment, the call to keep the Sabbath. Just because they are building a tabernacle doesn't mean they should skip out on observing the Sabbath.

Recently I read Mark Buchanan's *The Rest of God*. His work has helped mold my perspective on Sabbath. Buchanan talks about this very passage in one chapters, where he explains that the Sabbath rest of Exodus 31:12-18 is rooted in creation. The Israelites are called to keep the Sabbath because "it is a sign...that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed" (Exodus 31:17). Why keep the Sabbath? Because God modeled this for us - and because it is a reminder that we not God. In Buchanan's words, "Sabbath-keeping involves a recognition of our own weakness and smallness, that we are made from dust, that we hold our treasures in clay jars, and that without proper care, we break."

God reminded the Israelites to take a Sabbath rest so that they would remember their need for Him. He is the One who would enable them to build the tabernacle and to follow His commands. He calls them to remember and to trust in His provision - they aren't doing any of this in their own strength but in His. Taking Sabbath rest is a reminder of that good truth for the Israelites - and for us. As Buchanan says, "God commands that we imitate Him [in keeping Sabbath rest] in order to discover again that we're not Him, and that we need Him." No matter how many items I can check off of my to-do list, I am reminded yet again that I am not sufficient on my own. I don't know where you are today, but let your heart rest in God's rest and in this specific knowledge today - that we are not God, and that we need Him. Moments of Sabbath rest recharge and refocus our hearts on the truth of our humanity and our need for our Redeemer.



Exodus

Tuesday, February 21 | Exodus 32:1-35 | Amy Jackson

While I love living in Birmingham, one of the things I can appreciate about being from a small town is the way the sky looks at night. While city light here clouds our view of stars, those dark navy expanses rolling over the fields back home twinkle with light from thousands of stars. I can appreciate the sheer darkness of the sky, along with the brilliance of the stars, unobstructed by the city lights, pollution, and towering buildings of a large city.

In Exodus 32 we have this same picture, but, instead of having a picture of the night sky with stars in full view, we are able to fully see the weight of man's sinfulness and the graciousness of God's mercy. The Israelites break the first three commandments in one fell swoop, fashioning an image of "gods who shall go before us" (Exodus 32:1). We are reminded again that all sin is first and foremost a betrayal of God, a refusal to trust in Him. And we see that sin leads to more sin - first, the Israelites make an idol, but soon, they find themselves worshipping and sacrificing to it. The ugliness of sin continues when they are confronted: Aaron blames the Israelites for his part in the treason (Exodus 32:22), and the Israelites blame Moses for their idolatry (Exodus 32:1, 23).

Yet in the darkness of sin, the light of God's mercy and justice shines forth. God had every right to destroy the Israelites, and yet He relents from total destruction. The beauty and the grace of Exodus 32 comes in Moses' intercession before the Lord; Moses doesn't ask God to refrain from total destruction because of the people's worth or goodness. All of those ideals have been obliterated in the events of this chapter. Rather, Moses appeals to God's character. Despite their sin, he reminds God that these are still His people, the children of Abraham He delivered from Egypt and determined to bless, for His glory (Exodus 32:11-14).

It's easy to judge the Israelites, who had witnessed so many miracles and were delivered from the shackles of slavery in Egypt. How quickly their hearts turned to another! And too, how prone are our hearts to wander? Yet the good news of the gospel is that we do not receive forgiveness on the basis of our merits or goodness but on the basis of Christ's righteousness. Praise God that our salvation is not dependent on our goodness but rather on His! In the midst of the darkness of our sin, the light of God's grace shines through.



Exodus

Wednesday, February 22 | Exodus 33:1-23 | Amy Jackson

As we approach Exodus 33, we can feel the tension after the golden calf incident. God tells Moses to depart with “the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt” (Exodus 33:1). The pronoun “you” has a bite to it - no longer does God refer to them as His people but instead as Moses’ people. He declares that He will send an angel to go with them, to drive the nations out of the Promised Land, but He will not go with them because they are a “stiff-necked people.” His anger and justice would consume them.

We come to a crossroads. The text tells us the people regarded this as a “disastrous word” (Exodus 33:4); when they heard it, they mourned. We might read this and think, “But they’ve gotten off the hook! They’re still getting the Promised Land! An angel is still going to go with them.” But the people recognize that, if God doesn’t go with them, it doesn’t matter. In fact, God’s mission in the book of Exodus has been to make a way to dwell among His people. This is why we’ve had such extensive instructions regarding the tabernacle. If God doesn’t go with them, if He just sends an angel...they might as well pack up and go back to Egypt. They need God’s abiding presence - and without Him, all the conquered kingdoms and Promised Lands in the word are meaningless.

Moses’ prayer (Exodus 32:12-23) reflects this realization. He begs God to go with His people; at first, God says He will certainly be with Moses (Exodus 32:14), but for Moses, this isn’t enough. Moses declares that, without God, the Israelites aren’t anything special or a people set apart (Exodus 32:16). And on the basis of Moses’ faithfulness, God consents to continue on with the Israelites. He even gives Moses an affirmation of this promise by reminding Moses of His name, the same name revealed to Moses in the burning bush in Exodus 3. He will remain true and faithful to His character. His abiding presence will go before the Israelites.

Even now, the prayer of my heart is that God would constantly go before me, that I would see my need for Him and would want nothing apart from Him! All of the treasures of the world and all of our hearts’ desires and dreams are meaningless apart from His presence in our lives. *Lord, help us to recognize the work of your Holy Spirit in our hearts. Help us to walk faithfully in step with Your Presence and to follow wherever You lead us.*

Thursday, February 23 | Exodus 34:1-35 | Amy Jackson

Anytime I read Exodus 34 (especially verses 6-7), I’m taken back to my Old Testament Theology class at Beeson. My professor wanted to make sure we knew critical passages of the Old Testament. His goal was to help us connect concepts across books of the Bible, and Exodus 34:6-7 was one of those frequently mentioned passages. I quickly learned the reference so I wouldn’t be put on the spot when Dr. House asked us to reference it in class - and in turn, I began seeing this passage pop up all over Scripture. This self-revelation of God is woven throughout the Bible. In Exodus 33, Moses asks to see (continued on next page)



Exodus

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God's glory, and as the Lord renews His covenant with the Israelites, He shows His glory by declaring His character.

There have been countless works written on this very self-revelation; there's no way to plumb the depths of God's character found in these verses in a short devotion. But there are a few things we could definitely note. First, we see God describe Himself as a God who is merciful, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. God's love is not dependent on our character or actions but on His. He is faithful in His love, and faithful to keep His covenant, because He is a God who is merciful and gracious.

This mercy and grace is emphasized in the claim to forgive "iniquity and transgression and sin." In the Hebrew, the word for "forgive" is the same word used for "bear." The Lord bears the weight of our wickedness - and three nouns are used here to encompass our treason against God: sin, iniquity, and transgression. We've seen in Exodus 32 - and we see in our own hearts - that without the hope of the Lord, we are fallen and broken people. But God forgives all of our sin. As Duane Garrett explains, "There are no degrees or types of sin that are beyond His power or willingness to forgive. He forgives sin of every kind and shape." Yet we also see in Exodus 34:7 that God does not clear the guilty; forgiveness of sin doesn't mean that we escape the consequences for our sin. The Israelites are well aware of the consequences they face as a result of their sin in Exodus 32; yet their hope (and our hope, too!) is that this imagery of "bearing" sin points us forward to Jesus, God in the flesh, who would literally bear the weight of our sin and shame on the cross. The life, death, and resurrection of Christ is the full picture of God's mercy and grace.



Exodus

Friday, February 24 | Exodus 35:1-35 | Amy Jackson

Exodus 35 picks back up with the task at hand: building the tabernacle. We've had quite the diversion in the last few chapters - in fact, we wondered if the tabernacle would even be built and if the Israelites would even make it through the golden calf incident! Through Moses' intercession, by the mercies of God, they continue on with their duty, answering the call to collect contributions for the temple.

I love the way their collection is described in these verses. After Moses gives orders for what is needed, just as prescribed in Exodus 25, the people respond in obedience. But their obedience isn't empty. The text says that "they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought the LORD's contribution" (Exodus 35:21). They are later described as people of "willing hearts" (Exodus 35:22). This is a beautiful picture of what it means to be moved to give and contribute, out of a grateful heart. The adage is true: God really does love a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The people don't give out of bitterness, and they don't come to serve out of this empty sense of duty and obligation. I wonder if their experience with the golden calf has changed their hearts - that they saw God's merciful forgiveness and His determination to continue with His plan to dwell with His people, despite their sin. I think their hearts must have been moved by God's compassion on them, and their response here in Exodus 35 is to worship through serving and giving!

This is a convicting picture. I think it's easy for us to struggle with giving and serving for the wrong reasons: for a sense of our own self-worth, or out of duty or obligation, or being under compulsion. If we aren't careful, we can grow bitter if we are giving and serving from our own strength. But the picture here is a picture of God moving His people to give and to serve. He empowers them to do His work. Just as the Israelites gave out of gratitude, pray that God would move your heart today in worship. Pray that He would give you a grateful heart, and that your worship, service, and giving would come as an outflow for gratefulness in response to what He has done first and foremost through the cross.

Saturday, February 25-Sunday, February 26 | Exodus 31:1-35:35

Reread Exodus 31:1-35:35 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Exodus

WEEK EIGHT: EXODUS 36:1-40:38
FEBRUARY 27-MARCH 5

Monday, February 27 | Exodus 36:1-38 | Amy Jackson

If these next three chapters of Exodus seem strangely familiar, it's because they are! We read about the instructions for the tabernacle in Exodus 25-31, and now we see the people, empowered by God, putting the plan to action. It's kind of like reading a recipe and then turning on the TV to watch someone actually make and eat the exact same dish. We might take these chapters for granted, if we forget the despair of Exodus 32-33. There was a time when we doubted that God would be able to dwell with His people in this way, so even if the reading seems a bit monotonous, we are reminded of God's faithfulness and kindness to His people, and how He specifically showed mercy in these verses by even allowing the tabernacle to be built.

I love that we are able to see God's plan put to action in these chapters. In Exodus 36, we see the curtains and frames for the tabernacle take shape according to the Lord's instructions in Exodus 26. The picture we get in these chapters is one of God using His people to do something incredible. Led by Bezalel and Oholiab, the skilled craftsmen go to work. In his commentary on Exodus, Duane Garrett points out how we see our natural gifts fitting together with God's anointing. Notice that the men in Exodus 36 are craftsmen, yes, but the text ultimately attributes their gifts to the Lord (Exodus 36:1). As Garrett notes, "On the one hand, God did not choose unskilled workers and supernaturally enable them to do the job...on the other hand, [they] could not have been truly successful had they not been empowered and directed by the spirit of God."

While we aren't building physical tabernacles today - after all, God dwells in believers through the work of the Holy Spirit - I do believe that God has gifted us all in unique ways for His kingdom work. This text is a good challenge for us as we consider how God has gifted us and how we are using those gifts for the upbuilding of the kingdom. It's remarkable to see the picture of natural talent and God's ordained calling coming together in this passage; in the same way, how might God be calling you to use your gifts, the gifts He has given you, for His glory?



Exodus

Tuesday, February 28 | Exodus 37:1-29 | Amy Jackson

I've always thought that the ark of the covenant was especially mysterious. First, the ark is holy - it is the picture of God's presence dwelling with His people. We learn that the ark is to be kept in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle - only the high priest will enter into the presence of the ark, and he won't do so casually. In fact, because the ark is holy, people are not permitted to touch it; Bezalel, following the Lord's instructions, creates an elaborate system of rings and poles which the Israelites will use to carry the ark as they journey to the Promised Land.

The cover for the ark is called the "atonement cover." The cover is made of gold, with cherubim on each corner. It is said that this is where God encounters the Israelites - "from above this cover between the cherubim, God will meet with His people and speak to them" (Peter Enns). Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would sprinkle blood from a sacrifice on this cover, an act of atonement for all of Israel. The picture is so beautiful because it points us forward to Jesus, the atonement for our sins. Every Day of Atonement points forward to Good Friday, when Jesus our perfect High Priest would offer up Himself, the perfect sacrifice - a sacrifice to end all sacrifices! We are sprinkled with His blood and forever redeemed.

Second, it's interesting to think about the contents of the ark; a jar of manna, Aaron's staff, and the tablets containing the law were all inside the ark. The ark is holy, but it is also a sign of God's continued presence and provision in the Israelites' lives. Even as they traveled through the wilderness and looked at the ark, covered in veils of animal clothing, carried with poles, I think the people had to think about those objects stored within the ark and how they were visible signs of God's work in their lives and their story of redemption as the people of Israel. That thought challenges me as I consider the signs of God's work in my own life. Whether it is a person, an event, or a place, we all have special parts of our stories which serve as signs of God's continued presence, guidance, and redemption. Spend some time praying and thanking God for the specific ways that He is at work in your life. Praise God that, though He is holy, He draws near to us in the person of Jesus and is at work in our lives, for His glory and our good!



Exodus

Wednesday, March 1 | Exodus 38:1-31 | Amy Jackson

In Exodus 27, God gives the people instructions for building the bronze altar and the courtyard around the tabernacle; in Exodus 38, we see the creation of the altar and the courtyard. You'll notice that much of these sections are repeated from the instructions; the commands in Exodus 27 become reality as we see the tabernacle take shape.

But there's one verse that strikes me as odd. What is the function of the ministering women in Exodus 38:8? This verse caught my attention because, as I visited several commentaries, it became clear that no one really knows what these women were doing, or why they were collecting additional bronze. After all, the people had already collected over three tons of bronze for the tabernacle; surely they could use some of this collection to make a small basin for washing, right? And there were many opinions about what the women were doing in their "ministerial roles" at tabernacle entrance, ranging from dancing to cleaning! Theologian James Bruckner declared, "One cannot be confident about any understanding of this enigmatic passage!"

At first, I was discouraged at the lack of clarity in commentaries. The more reading you do, the more questions you really have - since these women aren't really seen anywhere else in Scripture, with the possible exception of 1 Samuel 2:22. But I was also encouraged as I thought about the questions. We may not have a lot of certainty about their role, but their contribution is recorded in history. We don't have all of our questions answered, but this is another text showing us the value of women and that women served the Lord, even if we aren't exactly sure how they served! We also see that they gave up small luxuries - their mirrors - for the work of the Lord. And their ministerial work - whatever it may have been - happened at the entrance to the tabernacle, where priests would come each day to wash before entering to tend the lampstands and where sacrificial preparations would happen. These women weren't kept in hiding, doing their work behind the scenes - they were actively engaged in their ministry, in the presence of many.

This text reminds me that we all have a place in God's kingdom and are called to give sacrificially as a part of our worship - and that no act of service is too small. We may not have a lot of clarity about the these women in Exodus 38:8, but their ministry - whatever it was - is memorialized in Scripture! We all have a significant role to play in the body of Christ as we make the gospel known.



Exodus

Thursday, March 2 | Exodus 39:1-43 | Amy Jackson

Repetition is always a helpful tool. As a child, you learn by repetition. (Just a side note: I remember trying to convince my granny that I had “learned to read” while in preschool by “reading” *The Cat in the Hat* to her. Unfortunately, my granny kept me while my mom worked, so she knew that we read that book every day, and that I hadn’t really learned to read - I had only memorized it because I had heard the story over and over.) As we age, we see repetition as a key tool for authors as well as readers - not that authors tell the same story over and over (like my granny reading Dr. Seuss books to me!), but they do repeat what’s important, so that you catch on to themes and significant facts and can use those tools to interpret the story.

The phrase repeated here in Exodus 39 is especially significant: they did everything “as the LORD commanded Moses.” The Lord gave specific instructions to Moses regarding the tabernacle, and the people have followed Moses’ leadership to do all that God has commanded them. Their work for the tabernacle is complete. The repetition of these verses is a beautiful refrain in the ears of those who have been following the story closely; just a few chapters before, the Israelites had created a golden calf to worship. We began to doubt that the tabernacle would ever be built.

But God is gracious and called His people back to Himself, to repentance. And they returned in grief over their sin and with a greater commitment to the Lord. It didn’t take long to form the idol of Exodus 32 or to fall into false worship, but building the tabernacle was a slow, laborious process. I’m sure the Israelites thought a lot about their past choices as they sewed the tapestries and collected the precious materials for the tabernacle. I could almost imagine that the slow building process was cathartic and a good learning experience for them, as they walked step by step, following God’s instructions closely and slowly.

The Lord desires our obedience, yes - but He desires obedient hearts, not just outward conforming. The blessing of Exodus 39:43 confirms that God looked on the people and saw a transformation. They desired to do what was right and to walk in the way of the Lord, as best as they could. In many ways, I would hope that this same refrain could be repeated about my life: that in each area of my life, I have done all that the Lord has commanded me to do, with a willing spirit and obedient heart in grateful recognition of my salvation through Jesus.



Exodus

Friday, March 3 | Exodus 40:1-38 | Amy Jackson

If I had two words to categorize the latter half of Exodus, I would use the words “glory” and “grace,” and, quite appropriately, we see both themes emerge at the end. After the tabernacle is completed, God’s glory fills the tabernacle. The cloud of His presence is so intense that Moses, the man who has become the mediator for all of Israel, isn’t able to enter (Exodus 40:35). We are reminded again that God is holy and that His presence is glorious - and that we enter it on His terms, not ours. Moses was a man after God’s own heart, yet He is unable to see God fully or enter into His presence at this moment. He is an imperfect mediator because he too is a sinful human. But God’s glory points us forward to another mediator to come: “Christ is the final mediator of the covenant and the glory of God fills him. There is never a question whether he is able to enter fully into His Father’s presence” (Peter Enns).

But we also see God’s grace. The cloud of the Lord has been leading the people and will continue to guide them. The story of Exodus is also a story of grace - that God delivered His people from slavery, so that they might serve and worship Him. They are God’s chosen people - a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19). Later, Moses will remind us in Deuteronomy that they didn’t receive this title because of their own merits; rather, they are God’s people because of His love for them and because He is continuing to keep the promise He made to Abraham (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). It is all grace upon grace, and the cloud by day and fire by night are constant symbols of God’s abiding presence with His people (Exodus 40:38).

This is our story too as followers of Christ, is it not? In our shame and sin, we cannot be in the presence of God’s great glory. Yet, because of Christ’s death on the cross, we are given His righteous record in exchange for our own. Instead of wrath, we receive grace. God’s presence dwelled in the tabernacle, but the Holy Spirit lives in us and guides us, just as the cloud and the fire guided the Israelites. It’s all a picture of unmerited grace and undeserved favor. Rest in the knowledge of that grace today, knowing that God is with you and goes before you each step of the way, as we make our way to glory and to our final home with Him.

Saturday, March 4-Sunday, March 5 | Exodus 36:1-40:38

Reread Exodus 36:1-40:38 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.