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WHAT'S IN YOUR TEACHING GUIDE

This Teaching Guide has three purposes:

- to give the teacher tools for focusing on the content of the session in the Study Guide.
- to give the teacher additional Bible background information.
- to give the teacher variety and choice in preparation.

The Teaching Guide includes two major components: Teacher Helps and Teacher Options.

Teacher Helps

Bible Background

The Study Guide is your main source of Bible study material.

This section helps you more fully understand and interpret the Scripture text.



Teaching Outline

provides you with an outline of the main themes in the Study Guide.

Teacher Options

The next three sections provide a beginning, middle, and end for the session, with focus paragraphs in between.

Focus Paragraphs

are printed in italics at the top of the page because they are the most important part of the Teaching Guide. These paragraphs will help you move your class from “what the text meant” to “what the text means.”

You Can Choose!

There is more material in each session than you can use, so choose the options from each section to tailor the session to the needs of your group.

Prepare Before the Session

Read the session for today in the Study Guide. Then read the options in this Teaching Guide, placing checkmarks beside the activities you plan to include. After you have decided which options to use, gather the appropriate materials.

WHEN YOUR BACK IS AGAINST THE WALL

Exodus 14:10-18

Bible Background



Free at Last!

The Hebrew slaves were finally free of their Egyptian oppressors. After spending nearly 430 years as slaves, they left Egypt with ample supplies, gold and silver taken from the Egyptians (12:35-36), a sense of God's leadership, faith in a charismatic leader, and anticipation that God was about to fulfill ancient promises of land and home for the descendants of Abraham. What a powerful sight this enormous horde of people must have been, moving out of Egypt with their possessions and livestock toward a new future filled with the promise that God would provide their every need. So magnetic was the moment that people other than Israelites were drawn into and became part of the exodus (12:38). Now the Israelites were making their way as free people toward a new home.

The exodus is to the Jews what the cross is to Christians. Jews throughout time have looked at the exodus from Egypt as the defining moment in the establishment of their nation. The book that bears the name "Exodus" in the Christian Old Testament is a recounting of the acts of God on behalf of the Hebrew people: First, God brought them to a land where they could grow in number as a people. Then God delivered them from the oppression of a pharaoh

whose name we do not know. People of faith consider this spectacular deliverance—accomplished through horrible plagues and a parting sea—one of the most dramatic acts of God recorded in Scripture.

Years of Bondage

Exodus, which is translated "going out," is the title of the book taken from the Greek translation of the Old Testament. This title is probably derived from wording found in 19:2, which records that the people "set out," or "went out." In the Hebrew Bible, the title is translated "And these are the names," taken from the first few words of the Hebrew manuscript—a common practice in Hebrew literature. These words tie the book directly to the closing chapters of the book of Genesis. These chapters record the life of Joseph and the events that took him to Egypt, where he ultimately rose to be the second most powerful man in the country. From that lofty position, he was able to bring his family to Egypt from the land of Canaan, which was experiencing a protracted famine, and he provided for them and protected them. In all, seventy members of Joseph's family, including Joseph, made Egypt their home (Gen 46:27; Ex 1:5). From those humble numbers God grew a multitude (Ex 1:7), but their fate was not to stay in Egypt.

Eventually, a king who no longer remembered Joseph and his influence

ascended to the throne of Egypt (1:8). This marked the beginning of the oppression of the Hebrew people. But the more Pharaoh and the Egyptians attempted to control the numbers of the Hebrew people, the more the Hebrews multiplied (1:12).

Throughout the many years of their oppression, the people cried out for help, and God heard them. God told Moses, “I have seen their misery, I have heard them crying, I am concerned about their suffering, and I have come down to rescue them” (3:7-8). God sent Moses to lead the Hebrew people out of Egyptian bondage, but it took miraculous intervention to bring Pharaoh to the point where he finally let the Hebrew slaves go free. Only after the people of Egypt endured ten plagues did Pharaoh release his many slaves.

A Final Challenge on the Way to Freedom

Years before, God had promised to make Abraham’s descendants into a great nation with their own land. Even under Egyptian oppression, the first of these promises was fulfilled. Now, the people were to realize the second promise—a land of their own. Pharaoh finally relented to the demands of God and Moses following the tenth plague: the death of the firstborn in each Egyptian home. So terrible was this final plague that all Egyptians welcomed the departure of the Israelites (12:33).

Though the shortest route to the promised land was along the coastline, God directed the Hebrews a different way. The emerging nation was in no position to defend itself against the Philistines, who were skilled and ferocious fighters (13:17). Instead, God led his people toward the Red Sea, where God once more demonstrated great power in rescuing the people from the Egyptians, no doubt intending to show that God is the Lord (14:4). God instructed Moses to make camp at the sea, which placed the

Outline

FOR TEACHING

Introduction: Free from their Egyptian oppressors, the Israelites were making their way to a new home: the land promised to the descendants of Abraham. But just as their release had not been acquired easily, neither would the trip to their new home be easy. They would soon face their first challenge as a free people.

- I. The People Want to Go Back (14:10-12)
 - A. Pharaoh’s army approaches and the people cry out to God (14:10).
 - B. The people blame Moses for their predicament (14:11-12).
- II. Moses Desires to Stand Still (14:13-14)
 - A. Moses urges the people not to be afraid, for God will act to deliver them by destroying the Egyptians (14:13).
 - B. Moses expects God to do all the fighting, so the people need only stand still and watch (14:14).
- III. God Wants the People to Move Forward (14:15-18)
 - A. God commands Moses to tell the people to move (14:15).
 - B. Moses is to raise his staff to divide the waters of the sea (14:16).
 - C. God will harden the heart of Pharaoh so that he will have his army pursue the people, which God will use to gain glory (14:17).
 - D. The Egyptians will know that God is the Lord (14:18).

Hebrews in a vulnerable defensive position. Realizing that he had lost his cheap labor force (14:5), Pharaoh gathered his army and chariots and pursued the Israelites, overtaking them at the Red Sea. Though the Israelites had marched with boldness away from Pharaoh’s oppression (14:8), the sight of the approaching army terrified them, and they were soon willing to abandon their freedom.

In ancient warfare, few things were more feared than an army of chariots, the equivalent of modern-day tanks. One can

visualize the scene as all the chariots of Pharaoh's army, including his 600 best chariots (14:7), suddenly emerged over the horizon just when the Israelites were beginning to feel the joy of their newfound freedom. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of chariots probably created a dust cloud that could be seen for miles, signaling the approach of devastation and death. It is no wonder the Israelites reacted with fear and anguish. With the sea to their backs, the desert surrounding them, and an army pursuing them, their

first instinct was to panic and place the blame for their predicament on the one who only hours earlier had been their savior. "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?" they asked Moses. This question expresses a sense of desperation. The people would rather serve as slaves in Egypt—where they knew their place and understood their roles—than be exposed to the hazards of freedom. Going back to Egypt seemed to be their only option.

A Way to Begin

One of the important themes in this session is our tendency to want to "go back" to more familiar surroundings—regardless of the circumstance—when we face challenges. People of faith are not immune from this tendency. Fear of the unknown often paralyzes us, but faith requires us to trust God when no resolution is apparent. How do we respond when we find ourselves with our backs against the wall?

○ From Miraculous to Mundane

Read the Scripture passage for today and then explain its context. Only a brief time had passed since the Israelites left Egyptian slavery. What would it be like to lead such a group?

The situation was desperate. The people were trapped between the pharaoh's advancing army and the Red Sea. How desperate, though, had their situation been while they were still under Pharaoh's control? Did not God provide an unexpected escape for them through the miracles of the ten plagues?

Questions

- How are we guilty of failing to perceive God's providence in our lives?
- Why do people so quickly forget what God has done for them?
- How might we have reacted if we had been among the Israelites on the banks of the Red Sea?

○ Let's Go Back

Discuss what it means to "go back." Ask those who are willing to share instances when they wanted to "go back" because of difficulties they encountered. What did they learn about God's provisions in those times?

Recall the circumstances that led the Israelites to slavery in Egypt and then to freedom under Moses' leadership. Read the passage for today.

Questions

- Does it seem surprising that the people wanted to go back to Egypt?
- What does this suggest about their understanding of and appreciation for the previous acts of God on their behalf?

B A Way to Explore Scripture

The behavior of the Hebrew people is not so surprising because, even though our circumstances differ, we have acted in similar ways. This story, like so many in the Old Testament, is relevant for two reasons. First, people are basically the same today as they were in Moses' time. We may drive cars rather than chariots, but we're the same. Second, God is the same. Thus, we can find value in God's actions for and words to generations far removed from us.

○ Recognizing God at Work

Write "People are the same" and "God is the same" on a white board or large piece of newsprint. As you discuss the text, invite class members to give examples from the text and from their own experiences that support these two statements. Have learners identify ways in which the power of God was at work in the lives of the Israelites. Have them also identify ways in which the people demonstrated lack of faith.

Questions

- Given their recent history with God, why were the Israelites so fearful at the sight of the approaching Egyptian army?
- What does it say about a person's faith in God when fear prevails over trust?
- Why is it important to recognize and remember God's work on our behalf?
- How can we better connect God's past faithfulness with present-day challenges?

○ No Way Out

From time to time we find ourselves pinned against the wall with no apparent means of escape. This can be true in relationships, finances, health, or other circumstances. Ask the learners to consider a time when they felt that their situation was hopeless.

Questions

- When have you been in a difficult situation that offered no apparent escape?
- How was the dilemma resolved? Did anything unexpected change your situation?
- What lessons in faith did you learn from that experience?
- At what point did you recognize God's presence and influence?
- How has the experience prepared you for future challenges in life?

Such circumstances are often used to reveal the glory and power of God. This was certainly the case in today's text (see Ex 14:18). Remind the learners that God's ultimate goal in redeeming us is to bring glory to God.

C A Way to End

We often act in the same manner as the Israelites when confronted with a dilemma.

Through this story we have witnessed typical human response to fear. When we factor out God in our times of crisis, we are likely to fall into the “let’s go back to Egypt” syndrome. After the spectacular miracles God already performed on behalf of the Hebrews, what made them doubt God could work in another amazing way? How are we like the Hebrews?

○ Remembering God’s Acts

When we take God’s acts on our behalf for granted, we are likely to forget them when faced with new challenges.

Distribute copies of page 23, titled “Remembering God’s Acts.” Encourage your learners to use it this week to become more aware of God’s providence. Discuss these questions together.

Questions

- In what ways do you see yourself in today’s text?
- In what ways do you see God at work in your life that are similar to the ways God worked in today’s text?
- How is God’s glory being revealed through your life?
- How have past experiences prepared you for future challenges in life?

○ Recognizing the Glory of God

The acts of God are ultimately intended to reveal the glory of God. When God told Moses that the Israelites would be rescued and the Egyptian army destroyed so that the “Egyptians will know that I am the LORD,” the lesson was meant for the Hebrew people as well. The Egyptians needed to learn the lesson because they were worshiping other gods, but the Israelites needed to learn it because they had forgotten that God had already been at work to redeem them. Ultimately, it was all for God’s glory.

Encourage the group to make a commitment to pray the following kinds of prayers that will make them more aware of the glory of God.

- Praise—for God’s creating, delivering, and sustaining power
- Confession—of all the ways we forget God’s care
- Thanksgiving—for God’s many daily blessings
- Commitment—so that we may be instruments for revealing God’s glory to the world.

SHARING THE LOAD

Exodus 18:13-26

Bible Background



God's Mighty Deeds

The miraculous deliverance of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt marked the beginning of a new nation. Yet despite their wondrous release from slavery, the people's actions and conversation quickly became more reminiscent of spoiled children than of appreciative recipients of divine intervention. Within days after leaving Egypt, the people began to complain about their living conditions, even though they were now a free people. Although hardships soon arose in their newfound freedom, was it proper for the people to compare these hardships to the life of slavery they had known in Egypt (14:11-12; 16:3; 17:3)? Before we get too critical of the Hebrews, we must remember that humans are prone to be more comfortable with the misery of the familiar than the challenges of the unknown, even when the unknown offers the possibility of a better life.

Consider the ways in which God's power had been demonstrated to the Hebrews already. Through a series of disastrous plagues and a miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, God rescued them from Egypt. At Marah (ch. 15) and Massa (ch. 17), God provided them with water to drink; God also gave them quail and manna to eat (ch. 16). Finally, God made them victorious over the Amalekites at Rephidim (ch. 17).

A Grumbling, Stiff-necked People

It seemed, however, that the Israelites were unimpressed with God's stunning acts of deliverance. They complained about everything from the lack of food and water to the way Moses was leading them. In each case, God responded to their complaints by providing the necessities of life, but God did so in a way that demonstrated divine power and control. Just as God had acted at the Red Sea to prove lordship over the Egyptians (14:18), God acted on numerous occasions to prove lordship over the Israelites (15:26; 16:8; 16:12). In each instance, God's provision was more than adequate to meet the people's needs, but each was also a test of obedience. Unfortunately, the Israelites' performance was far from impressive. Furthermore, the Israelites constantly criticized Moses' leadership. One can only imagine the challenges associated with leading so many people and the inevitable disputes that would erupt among them.

A Family Reunion

Perhaps overwhelmed by the demands of leadership and fearing for the safety of his family, Moses had sent his wife, Zipporah, and his two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, to be with his father-in-law, Jethro. "Jethro" is apparently a title ("his excellency") and not a proper name. Moses' father-in-law is called Hobab elsewhere in Scripture (Num 10:29-32; Jgs

Outline

FOR TEACHING

4:11) and is once called Reuel (Ex 2:18), unless, as some Talmudic rabbis took it, this is a reference to Jethro's father. Following the defeat of the Amalekites (Ex 17), Jethro sent word that he would soon arrive with Moses' family. Upon their arrival, Moses received Jethro into his tent and shared the many ways God had acted on behalf of the Israelites. Jethro responded with praise and testified that God was greater than all gods (18:11). He offered a sacrifice to God and shared in a sacred fellowship meal with Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel.

Jethro's presence in the camp was no doubt a blessing to Moses, and his advice to Moses would prove invaluable. Moses' responsibilities included acting as a judge in settling disputes that arose among the people (18:13). Considering the thousands of people in the camp (12:37) and the circumstances in which they lived, it is no surprise that disputes were common, creating an enormous demand for arbitration. The morning after Jethro's arrival, Moses sat down (the posture of leadership) to serve as judge for the people. Although the text does not say so specifically, this was probably a role Moses practiced regularly but only periodically. So many people waited to be heard that day that "they stood around him from morning until night" (18:13). Jethro observed this arrangement and pointed out that it was not healthy either for Moses or for those who came to him for judgment. The task was simply too great for one person to handle alone. Seeing the crowd that continuously surrounded Moses, Jethro raised an important question: "Why are you attempting to do this alone when there are so many people standing around waiting to see you the entire day?" The tone of Jethro's question suggests that Moses was doing a disservice both to himself and to the ones he served as judge.

Welcome Advice

Jethro proposed a system by which trusted leaders would be chosen to

Introduction: Few things are more devastating than being overworked and under appreciated. Yet this is exactly what was happening in the Hebrew camp when Moses attempted to be the sole judge for all the disputes that arose. Both Moses and the people were affected by his failure to delegate. Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, helped him see a better way to serve the people while helping himself in the process.

- I. Moses serves as judge of the camp (18:13–18:16).
 - A. Moses takes his seat as judge, surrounded by people from morning till evening (v. 13).
 - B. Jethro raises the question of Moses' effectiveness (v. 14).
 - C. Moses explains his rationale (vv. 15-16).
- II. Jethro offers sound advice to Moses (18:17-23).
 - A. Jethro points out the flaws in Moses' method (vv. 17-18).
 - B. Jethro helps Moses focus on his most critical role (vv. 19-20).
 - C. Jethro's plan is laid out before Moses (vv. 21-22).
 - D. Jethro's rationale for the plan is explained (v. 23).
- III. Moses responds to Jethro's advice (18:24-26).
 - A. Moses implements Jethro's plan (v. 24).
 - B. Moses chooses leaders for the various sizes of groups (v. 25).
 - C. The plan works as intended (v. 26).

oversee groups of ten, fifty, one hundred, and one thousand. These leaders would be charged with judging the less important but potentially time-consuming matters. Only the more important issues would be brought to Moses' attention. The benefits of such a plan are obvious. First, Moses would be relieved of the burden of acting as the sole judge for the

entire camp. Second, capable people would be integrated into the various leadership roles. By creating a mechanism for identifying, equipping, and putting into service those who showed leadership potential, Jethro's advice helped build a stronger community with greater long-term stability. Finally, this arrangement ensured that justice would be more readily available to the people.

This system serves as a model for effective leadership in any generation. In fact, advocates for small-group ministries in the church often point to this "Jethro

principle" as a model for ensuring that every member of a church receives adequate pastoral care. If a group or organization is to survive past the first generation, new leadership must be identified, trained, and employed in the work of the group. Just as important, though, is the necessity to keep the group vibrant by meeting the group's needs in an orderly and efficient manner. Jethro's advice is as relevant for the church today as it was for Moses and the Hebrew people, for it ensures the well-being of the group and of the group's leadership.

A Way to Begin

We often encounter leaders at work, at church, and even in the home who try to do too much on their own. The stress associated with work overload leads to inefficiency, disgruntled followers, and poor health for the leader. How can we lead effectively and take care of our own well-being?

○ Standing in a Mile-long Line

Remind learners of the major events that had taken place since the Israelites left Egypt as described in the Bible Background section. Discuss the difficulties of managing such a large group of people and the inevitability of conflict.

Questions

- When was the last time you had to stand in a long line at the store, the bank, etc.?
- Did you lose your patience with those who were in charge? With the people ahead of you?
- What might it have felt like for the person who had to take care of each individual in line?

This situation is unappealing from either side of the counter. Everyone's nerves become frayed, tempers flare, stress is raised, and the entire process bogs down.

○ Manageable Bites

Remind the class of the old joke that goes, "How do you eat an elephant?" Answer: "One bite at a time!" Most of us are wired to handle life in manageable bites. Few of us can handle sustained waves of pressure for long.

Questions

- When you were last given a heavy assignment at work or school, one that seemed overwhelming at first, how did it make you feel?
- How did you handle it?

Read the Scripture passage. Discuss ways both Moses and the people might have been overwhelmed by their situations. How might your church be experiencing some of the same frustrations?

B A Way to Explore Scripture

Moses was a dynamic leader who had successfully led the Israelites out of Egypt. He had Aaron as his spokesman and God as his guide and strength. Even so, when it came to the seemingly less complicated issue of settling disputes within the camp, Moses' method was insufficient. The people needed timely justice and arbitration, but they also needed to learn that their newfound freedom would require some of them to become leaders.

○ Sharing the Load

Lead a discussion guided by the session outline.

Questions

- What was wrong with Moses' method of handling disputes in the camp?
- Why didn't Moses realize that his method was inappropriate?
- How might Moses have been blinded to the faults in his leadership?
- Why is delegating responsibility important to a group?
- Who benefits most from proper delegation, the leader or the group? Why?

One of the key attributes of successful leaders is the ability to delegate. In Moses' defense, he did exactly that when Jethro suggested it. Proper delegation brings new energy into leadership roles and allows group members to have a sense of ownership. It also ensures that leadership will not be overburdened, which in turn guarantees the health of both leaders and organization.

○ The Value of Sage Advice

Ask a class member to read the text for today. Lead the group in a discussion of the text guided by the session outline. As you discuss the text, ask learners to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of Moses' leadership style.

Questions

- What was Moses doing wrong? What was he doing right?
- Why was Moses eager to listen to his father-in-law? What does this suggest about Moses' character?

Suggest two reasons why Moses heard and followed Jethro's advice. First, Moses trusted Jethro because of their past relationship. Moses knew Jethro was a wise man and therefore he was confident that whatever advice he offered would be helpful. This underscores once again the value of healthy relationships.

Second, Moses was willing to learn from his mistakes. Some leaders are too proud to recognize their shortcomings, much less listen when others point them out! The community benefits when leaders and followers are willing to set aside pride and to receive the advice of wise and trusted people.

Questions

- How do unhealthy relationships prevent us from hearing wise advice? How does pride keep us from accepting the counsel of others?
- What other factors keep us from receiving correction and insight from others?
- What are other biblical examples of the importance of taking advice from godly counselors?

C A Way to End

We feel more like part of a group, regardless its overall size, when we see ourselves as more than single grains of sand on a vast beach. We are healthier when life seems more personal and intimate and we feel that our voice will be heard. Groups are healthier when led by trustworthy and ethical people.

○ Are You Called to Lead?

Provide a list of service opportunities available through your church. Ask learners to consider assuming a place of responsibility in a ministry or function. Remind them that each of us is called to serve. Encourage learners to look for service opportunities that will help ease the workload of the present leaders.

Questions

- Who should be entrusted with leadership roles?
- Are leaders more important than followers?
- Why is sharing the load important to the health of the community of faith?
- Do you regard service in the community of faith as a blessing or a burden?

○ Knowing When to Give Advice

Part of the challenge of being in a community of faith is knowing when and when not to offer advice. Jethro felt comfortable giving advice to Moses because he knew Moses and his situation. Jethro was wise to offer advice that would strengthen Moses *and* the entire community.

Questions

- From whom are you willing to receive advice? What character traits make that person a welcome counselor?
- What hinders people from offering advice? To what extent are these hindrances justified?
- How do we discern when to offer advice and when to keep silent?

SHOW ME YOUR GLORY

Exodus 33:12-23

Bible Background



Giving the Law

Few passages of Scripture record a more intimate encounter between God and a human being than the one we consider today. Previous lessons have demonstrated the close connection between Moses and God, but here it reaches levels of intimacy unknown before.

Moses had led the Israelites to the base of Mount Sinai. There God called Moses up the mountain to give him the laws and decrees that would define the Israelites' way of life in the land they were to inhabit—the land God promised them as descendants of Abraham. The most recognizable of these laws, the Ten Commandments, are recorded in Exodus 20, but the eleven subsequent chapters contain laws and decrees addressing criminal, social, and religious matters that were also handed down to Moses while he was on the mountain.

Breaking the Covenant

The people waited for Moses' return throughout his extended absence. Their patience wore thin, however, and they began to grow restless, even rebellious. Finally, fearing that Moses may have died on the mountain and desiring a god they could worship, the people convinced Aaron to make them an idol from their own gold jewelry. Aaron relented and

fashioned a calf from the melted gold. Later, when called to account for his actions, Aaron gave a ridiculous excuse: "The people gave me gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" (32:24). On the contrary, he actually built an altar to the golden calf and led the people in worship before it, offering burnt offerings and sacrifices to the lifeless image.

God had informed Moses of everything taking place below. Burning with anger at the people's sin, God dismissed Moses and decided to destroy the Israelites. But Moses interceded for them. He argued that if God completely destroyed Israel, the Egyptians could say God had simply brought the Israelites into the desert with an evil intent: to kill them, not to allow them to worship God (32:12).

Moses returned from the mountain carrying the stone tablets God gave him that bore the laws of God. Seeing Israel's debauchery, he threw the tablets to the ground, breaking them. He then ground the golden calf into powder, mixed the powder with water, and forced the people to drink it. Because of their idolatry, some 3,000 of the Israelites were slain (33:28). Even more ominous, though, was God's decree that the entire nation would be destroyed (33:9-10). God deemed these people a "stiff-necked" bunch, not worthy of the time and energy invested in them. God fully intended to destroy them and

establish a new nation under Moses' leadership, but Moses' intervention seems to have prompted God's lesser action: sending a plague on the people. God then commanded Moses to lead them to the promised land, but with a notable difference: God would no longer accompany them. The promise to Abraham would be fulfilled, but without God's constant presence.

Moses' Intercession

This announcement caused great anguish to Moses and the people. Leading this rebellious group was a tough assignment, but the thought of God not being in their presence was too much for Moses. Moses had been meeting with God "face to face" in the tent of meeting (33:11), indicating an intimate relationship, but now Moses faced the prospect of having to lead the people without the benefit of God's presence (33:3). His appeal to God for the revelation of God's glory is one of the more moving requests in all of Scripture, for Moses understood that apart from God's presence, there was no hope for them. The exchange between Moses and God is reminiscent of the incident in which Abraham appealed to God to spare Sodom if he could find fifty righteous people there (Gen 18:22ff). But beyond that, Moses appealed to God to remember that these people, despite their rebellion, still were the people of God (33:13).

In effect, Moses stated, "Your presence is so important to me that I don't want to think about going any-where without it!" God's presence is, after all, the defining feature of the faith relationship, that which distinguishes the people of God from others (33:16b).

Entering God's Presence

God then promised that Moses and the people would not travel without God's presence, but this promise was specifically tied to God's prior intimate relationship with Moses (v. 17). Moses responded with a remarkable request: "Show me your

Outline

FOR TEACHING

Introduction: Rebellion against God carries many consequences, but none more ominous than the removal of God's presence. Left to our own devices, we struggle with life's challenges alone. Because of their idolatry, the Hebrew people faced the terrible prospect of going forth without God.

- I. Moses' First Appeal (33:12-13)
 - A. Moses wishes to know who will go with him (v. 12).
 - B. Moses asks God to teach him the ways of God (v. 13a).
 - C. Moses reminds God that the Israelites are God's people (v. 13b).
- II. God's Response (33:14)
 - A. The promise of God's presence (v. 14a)
 - B. The promise of rest (v. 14b)
- III. Moses' Second Appeal (33:15-16)
 - A. If you don't go with us, then don't send us (v. 15).
 - B. God's presence is a sign of God's favor (v. 16).
- IV. God's Response (33:17)
 - A. God agrees to Moses' request (v. 17a).
 - B. God is pleased with Moses (v. 17b).
 - C. God knows Moses by name (v. 17c).
- V. Moses' Third Appeal—"Show me your glory" (33:18)
- VI. God's Response (33:19-23)
 - A. God agrees to reveal God's goodness (v. 19).
 - B. The revelation of God is limited (v. 20).
 - C. God arranges to reveal the divine glory to Moses (vv. 21-23).

glory." Moses had already demonstrated a desire to know God completely so that he might remain in God's favor (33:13). Now he asked to see God for all that God truly is. This was the pinnacle of Moses' desire to know God. The long journey that began with Moses begging God to choose someone else as the Israelites' leader

(4:13) ended with “show me your glory!” (33:18).

Again, God responded affirmatively—but with a proviso. Moses would be allowed to see the glory of God, but only in a measure that would not destroy him. God’s glory seen in its fullness would bring death to Moses. God could have refused to answer Moses’ request, but as in the case of the golden calf, God works around human weakness. This story holds in tension both the awesome otherness of God—whose face no one can see

and live—and God’s great grace and condescension to humankind. God placed Moses in a protected area, covered him, and passed by him. Moses saw the afterglow of God’s presence and glory. It may appear contradictory that God spoke to Moses “face to face” (33:11) but then would not allow Moses to see the face of God (33:20). In the first reference, however, Moses was not experiencing the full revelation of God; in the second reference he was.

A Way to Begin

Do you recall Moses’ initial reaction when God called him to lead the Israelites out of slavery? He offered God several excuses for not being able to do the job. Being close to God changes a person. We can see this clearly in Moses’ journey from reluctant prophet (4:13) to devoted servant who asked God to “show me your glory” (33:18). Is there similar evidence in our lives that we have grown closer to God?

○ A Study in Contrasts

Remind class members of the context of chapter 33, in which God commands Moses to lead the people to the promised land, although God refuses to accompany them because of their sin. By worshiping the golden calf, the Israelites committed two atrocities. First, they turned away from God. Second, they succumbed to idol worship. They did this while Moses enjoyed spiritual intimacy on the mountain. Consider the dramatic contrast between the people and their leader.

Questions

- What made it easy for the people to turn their backs on God?
- Why was Aaron so easily persuaded to build the golden calf?
- Would you have reacted differently had you been there? Why or why not?

○ Standing in the Gap

Remind class members that the Israelites had already seen God perform mighty deeds on their behalf, yet they rebelled against God by worshiping the golden calf. Because of this breach of relationship, God told Moses that he and the people must journey to the promised land without God’s presence. Hearing this, the people began to mourn (33:4), but Moses acted as their advocate, begging God to reconsider.

Questions

- What is the role of an advocate?
- How have you served as an advocate for others? Who has advocated for you?
- What qualifies a person to be an advocate?
- What was Moses’ motivation for interceding for the Israelites?
- What made Moses’ advocacy effective?

B *A Way to Explore Scripture*

Given their rebellion against God, the people probably deserved to be left to their own devices. Yet Moses' appeal to God on Israel's behalf apparently turned God's heart from abandoning them on this difficult journey across the wilderness. What can we learn from the way Moses approached God?

○ **One Person's Influence**

Discuss how one individual could have great influence on a group. Moses had a number of attributes that gave him unprecedented access to God. Have learners explore the passage to identify some of those attributes.

Questions

- How do Moses' statements indicate the health of his relationship with God?
- What indications do you find that Moses was intent on growing in his relationship with God?

Those who genuinely seek God are not satisfied with past experiences. Moses asked God to go with him and the people as an indication to the other nations of their unique relationship with the Lord.

Questions

- How deeply do you desire the presence of God in your life?
- Does your relationship with God distinguish you from the rest of the world?
- What episode from the life of Moses best describes your current spiritual life?
- What can we learn about Moses from his act of intercession? What can we learn about God?
- How did Moses' relationship with God influence the people around him?

○ **Seeking God's Glory**

Discuss what it means to seek to know the glory of God in its fullness. Observe that Moses sought knowledge of God above all else. He wanted to experience God's presence and God's glory.

Questions

- How are God's presence and God's glory related?
- How did Moses demonstrate humility in the requests he made to God?
- Under what circumstances would you be able to ask God for God's presence and an experience of his glory? How might God respond to such requests?

Moses' request did not arise out of thin air: it grew out of his previous experience. When we have experienced God's glory in part, we desire to experience it more fully. God's glory fully revealed would overpower humanity to the point of death. Even so, God stands ready to reveal divine glory to the extent that our devotion allows.

C A Way to End

In any relationship, what we learn from each other comes in increments that grow with mutual trust and respect. The higher the trust level, the more we feel comfortable revealing who we are to others. The same is true with God. Moses had already proven his devotion to God by following God's directives. That obedience led to relationship, relationship to devotion, and devotion to desire for deeper intimacy. Each of us should undertake that same kind of journey to know God more intimately.

○ Acknowledging God's Glory

Distribute copies of page 24, titled "Acknowledging God's Glory." Remind class members that by acknowledging God's glory with our mouths, we honor God's reign in our lives.

Invite volunteers to read aloud each of the Scripture verses quoted on page 24. Discuss how each verse guides us in acknowledging God's glory.

Questions

- Other than in private or corporate worship, how can we acknowledge God's glory?
- How is acknowledging God's glory tied to our ethics? Our family relationships? Our personal witness?
- How is God's glory revealed through God's people?

○ Devoted to God

When Moses returned from the mountain with the commandments of God, he found the Israelites living in rebellion and idolatry. But Moses remained devoted to God and even interceded for the people before God. God honored Moses' devotion by showing him divine glory in ways Moses had never experienced.

Questions

- How can we follow Moses' example by praying for those who have turned away from God rather than condemning them?
- How can our intercession lead to a manifestation of God's glory?
- What degree of spiritual intimacy with God is necessary for us to respond in this way?

4

WITH HEART, SOUL, AND STRENGTH *Deuteronomy 6:1-12*

Bible Background



Moses' Final Days

The book of Deuteronomy is a series of sermons Moses delivered to the Israelites on the plains of Moab (1:5), just before they entered the promised land. The sermons are both retellings of the laws and decrees God had earlier given to Israel at Mount Horeb and exhortations to follow them. Following the Jewish tradition of naming a book by its opening phrase, the title of the book in the Hebrew Bible is “These Are the Words” (see Deut 1:1). In these sermons, Moses delivered his farewell address to the people. Because of Moses’ past disobedience, God was not going to allow him to enter the promised land (3:21-29).

The Israelites poised to enter the promised land were of the second generation. They had been born in the wilderness, the children of those who had had left Egypt forty years earlier. They had not seen the plagues fall on the Egyptians, the wondrous departure from Egypt bearing the Egyptians’ gold and silver, or God’s miraculous guidance and protection through the deliverance from Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea. The older generation had been forbidden to enter the promised land because of their disobedience and lack of faith in God and in Moses’ leadership (Num 14:20ff). The older generation had died in the wilderness. Only Caleb and Joshua remained

from that generation who had witnessed the exodus from Egypt and the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. Only those two had seen the miracles of God on behalf of the people (Num 14:24). Moses’ sermons, therefore, were vital to the well-being of the people set to claim the inheritance of God. He spent his final days telling the people the story of God’s saving deeds that led to their establishment as a free nation. He also reminded them of the laws God had passed down for them to follow. They were about to enter the promised land. It was time for them to learn.

A Call to Obedience

Conditions in their new homeland were going to be very different from life in the desert. Instead of tents, the Israelites would live in houses. Instead of exclusively tending to livestock as nomadic pastoralists, they would now grow crops in settled communities. Where they had been wanderers in the wilderness, now they would live in villages and cities engaging in agriculture, commerce, and trade. Given this new lifestyle, though, they were still expected to maintain their singular devotion to the one true God—and they were not to take the blessings of God for granted. Moses sought to educate them about God’s expectations of them. These expectations were not to be considered as shackles but rather as a divine

prescription for leading lives of contentment and peace (6:18).

Moses reminded the people that the instructions he was giving them originated in God and not in him. He was simply the message bearer. The fact that these laws and commands were from God underscores their importance. They were given for a specific people in a specific place, but they are laws that have universal implications and applications, for they reflect the nature of God.

Keeping these laws would lead to two consequences. First, the people would live in “fear” of God. The laws were meant to establish the boundaries within which the people could live and be acceptable to God. Understanding these boundaries leads to a healthy respect for the One who established them. It might be tempting to believe no negative element of fear, as in dread, is intended here, but this is unlikely. There are benefits to knowing that unpleasant consequences result when one crosses the line of acceptable behavior. In that regard, the negative aspect of fear can make a positive contribution to a healthy life.

But God did not desire the people to live under a crushing, debilitating kind of fear, as is evidenced by the second consequence of following God’s laws and commands: the people would enjoy long life (6:2b). It is clear that there is a correlation between obeying God’s commands and leading a long, happy life. Verse 3 continues the benefits of obeying God. Doing so will insure that things will “go well” for the people and that they will grow as they live in the land of promise. The promises of long life and growth in the land based on obedience to God carry a negative connotation. Disobedience leads to stagnancy and the inability to “enjoy long life.”

Worship One God Only

Of all the important concepts Moses wished the people to grasp, the most important were obeying God and avoiding idolatry. Moses understood that

Outline

FOR TEACHING

Introduction: As the Hebrews were poised to enter the promised land, Moses once again instructed them in the law God had given them. By keeping the law, the people would demonstrate their love for God. A total commitment of heart, soul, and strength was required to do this.

- I. Moses Lists the Benefits of Keeping the Law (6:1-3)
 - A. Keeping the law demonstrates “fear” of God (or respect for God) and allows one the ability to enjoy life (vv. 1-2)
 - B. Israel is urged to “hear” and to “obey,” which, if they do, will insure that things will go well for them and that they will increase in the land according to God’s promise.
- II. The Shema (6:4-9)
 - A. Israel is commanded “to hear” that God is one, and that God is unique and all-inclusive (v. 4).
 - B. Israel is commanded to love God with all their being—heart, soul, and strength (v. 5).
 - C. Israel is commanded to incorporate God’s law into every aspect of life (vv. 6-9).
- III. Do Not Take the Blessings of God for Granted (6:10-12)
 - A. God’s promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are about to be fulfilled (v. 10).
 - B. God will give provisions for all of life to the new inhabitants of the land (v. 11).
 - C. The people are warned against allowing their provisions to undermine their dependency on God (v. 12).

turning away from God results in worshipping other gods. This was demonstrated a generation earlier when, at the peoples’ instigation, Aaron fashioned a golden calf to worship while Moses was

on the mountain receiving the laws of God.

Verse 4 begins a section of Scripture known as the *Shema*. Its name is derived from a transliteration of the Hebrew verb translated “hear.” “Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.” This foundational cry forms the basis for monotheistic thought in both the Hebrew and Christian faiths. Scholars debate whether Moses intended to make a case for the singularity of God in this statement, but at the very least it is a declaration about the uniqueness and priority of God. The call to give God priority in life is underscored in the statement “Love the LORD with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” These elements—heart, soul, strength—encompass the totality of being

in Hebrew thought. If one loves God completely in this way, love and devotion can be given to no other. All other gods are in effect rendered null and void.

Moses urged the people to be singular in their devotion to Yahweh because no other nation enjoyed the unique relationship they had with their God (4:7ff). He also reminded them of the terrible price many of the earlier generations had paid for idol worship (4:3-4; see Num 25 for the full account). Moses then recounted the ten commandments God had given at Mount Sinai. These commandments were the means by which the people could live obediently before God. For Moses, nothing was more terrible than abandoning the living God for a worthless, lifeless idol.

A Way to Begin

God’s intention in giving the law was not to bind the Israelites to another form of slavery. Rather, the law was intended to set them free to experience an unencumbered relationship with God, resulting in a life filled with God’s blessings. In the same way, we are “bound into freedom” when we willingly give our lives to God and serve God faithfully in every aspect of life.

○ When Hearing Makes a Difference

Verse 4 begins with the command “Hear, O Israel!” Discuss the difference between “hearing” and “hearing with understanding.” Brainstorm examples that illustrate the difference between the two.

Questions

- How does one move from mere hearing to hearing with understanding?
- How did the Israelites fail to make this transition? How do we?

○ When Hearing Becomes Doing

Read Deuteronomy 6:1-12. Today’s text underscores the importance of imprinting the desires of God onto our hearts and into our lives. To do this, we must be able to hear and understand what God expects from us.

Questions

- Have you ever had to give someone instructions on how to do something over the phone or via email?
- How is that different from giving instructions face to face?
- What are the factors that make it hard to follow directions given from a distance?
- What is required of the person following directions given from a distance?

As servants of God, we are called to hear the expectations God has for us with understanding. Guide the learners into a study of today’s text, encouraging them to hear with understanding.

B A Way to Explore Scripture

We often send mixed signals to the world about our relationship with God. On the one hand we claim to know and follow God, while on the other hand we allow many of life's attractions to undermine that relationship. Moses' message was that we should not allow anything to take precedence over God. Rather, we must guard the sacredness of that relationship by recognizing God's uniqueness and following his commands. When we do this, our relationship with God will be more consistent and others will no longer be confused by the mixed signals we send about our faith.

○ Literal or Figurative?

Many Jews consider this text so sacred that they take the commands in verses 8-9 literally. Orthodox Jewish men bind small leather boxes known as *tefillin* to their wrists and to their foreheads when they pray. Each box contains small slips of paper inscribed with Scriptures that remind them of their religious obligations. They also put small scrolls with Scriptures on one side and a name of God on the other into small cases called *mezuzahs* and attach them to the doorposts of their homes. As Christians, we interpret this passage figuratively, but we still believe it teaches the importance of securing a permanent place for God's commands in our hearts and minds.

Questions

- How can we ensure that we will make God the priority of our lives?
- What things do we allow to have priority over God?
- Why did Moses encourage the Israelites to love God with all their heart, soul, and strength?
- How are devotion to God and contentment in life related?

○ Taking God for Granted

Guide learners through the teaching outline. Relate that the Israelites were standing on the doorstep of the promised land. When they stepped into their new homeland, the two promises God made to Abraham—to make of his descendants a mighty nation and to give this nation its own land—were finally fulfilled. In Egypt the people had grown to monumental numbers. Now they were about to take possession of the land. But before they did, they needed to be reminded of what their covenant with God demanded of them. They also needed to be reminded not to take God's blessings for granted.

Questions

- How do you connect the command to love God with heart, soul, and strength with the idea that one should be careful not to forget God (v. 12)?
- Why do people tend to take God's blessings for granted?
- How can we ensure that we will not take God's blessings and provisions for granted?
- What are the consequences of taking God's blessings for granted?
- What promises does this passage offer for those who obediently and faithfully follow the commands of God?
- Are those promises relevant for our day and our relationship with God? Why or why not?

C A Way to End

When we accept Christ as Savior, we commit to a relationship with God that is secured by Christ's sacrifice on our behalf. Does that mean we are then free from the responsibility to follow God's commands? Not at all! We are still to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength. No matter how we express this love, the real issue is whether we take seriously the command to be devoted to God above everything else.

○ A Time of Commitment and Renewal

Look at each aspect of our lives mentioned in verse 5—heart, soul, and strength. Consider how each aspect might be more genuinely devoted to God. Discuss using the following exercises to foster deeper devotion and commitment to God.

- In Hebrew thought, the *heart* is the seat of emotion. Practice making your heart tender by engaging in mission efforts, service projects, and prayer groups. See and hear the needs in other people's lives and work to meet them.
- Feed your *soul* by exploring the Bible and all its treasures. Work to establish a regular study routine. Memorize Scripture passages that will guide your daily walk. Get involved in Bible study groups during the week. If you do not already do so, begin the practice of meditating on the things of God for a deeper appreciation of God at work in your life.

- Develop your *strength* by exercising your spiritual muscles through daily awareness of and involvement in the needs of people around you, by taking spiritual nourishment through Bible study and prayer, and by being active in a strong community of faith. Realize that spiritual weakness and lethargy are symptoms of a need for recommitment of your life to God.

○ A Prayer of Devotion

Distribute copies of page 25, titled "A Prayer of Devotion." Read the prayer responsively, using the time as an opportunity for personal and corporate dedication of heart, soul, and strength to God. Encourage learners to use this responsive reading as a model prayer during the coming week, repeating it each time they commune with God in personal study and prayer.



REMEMBERING GOD'S ACTS

1. When and where did you first commit your life to Christ? What were the circumstances? Who was there?

Record this information on the inside cover of your Bible or in the margin next to a meaningful verse of Scripture.

2. List specific instances in which God delivered you from a fearful situation. How did you see God's involvement in your deliverance?

3. Use a concordance to find relevant Scripture verses for the instances you recorded under number 2 above. Make a note in the margin of your Bible next to these verses to remind you of your experience.

4. Commit to memorizing these verses.





ACKNOWLEDGING GOD'S GLORY

Psalm 19:1—"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of God's hands."

Psalm 72:18-19—"Praise be to the LORD God, the God of Israel who does marvelous deeds. Praise be to God's glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with God's glory."

Psalm 96:2-3—"Sing to the LORD, praise God's name; proclaim God's salvation day after day. Declare God's glory among the nations, God's marvelous deeds among all peoples."

Isaiah 6:3—"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of God's glory."

1 Corinthians 10:31—"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."



A PRAYER OF DEVOTION

Leader: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

People: We will love the Lord our God with all our heart.

Leader: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

People: We will love the Lord our God with all our soul.

Leader: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

People: We will love the Lord our God with all our strength.

Leader: Do what is right and good in the Lord's sight so that it may go well with you.

People: We will love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and strength.

All: We will not forget the Lord our God who brought us out of bondage.

