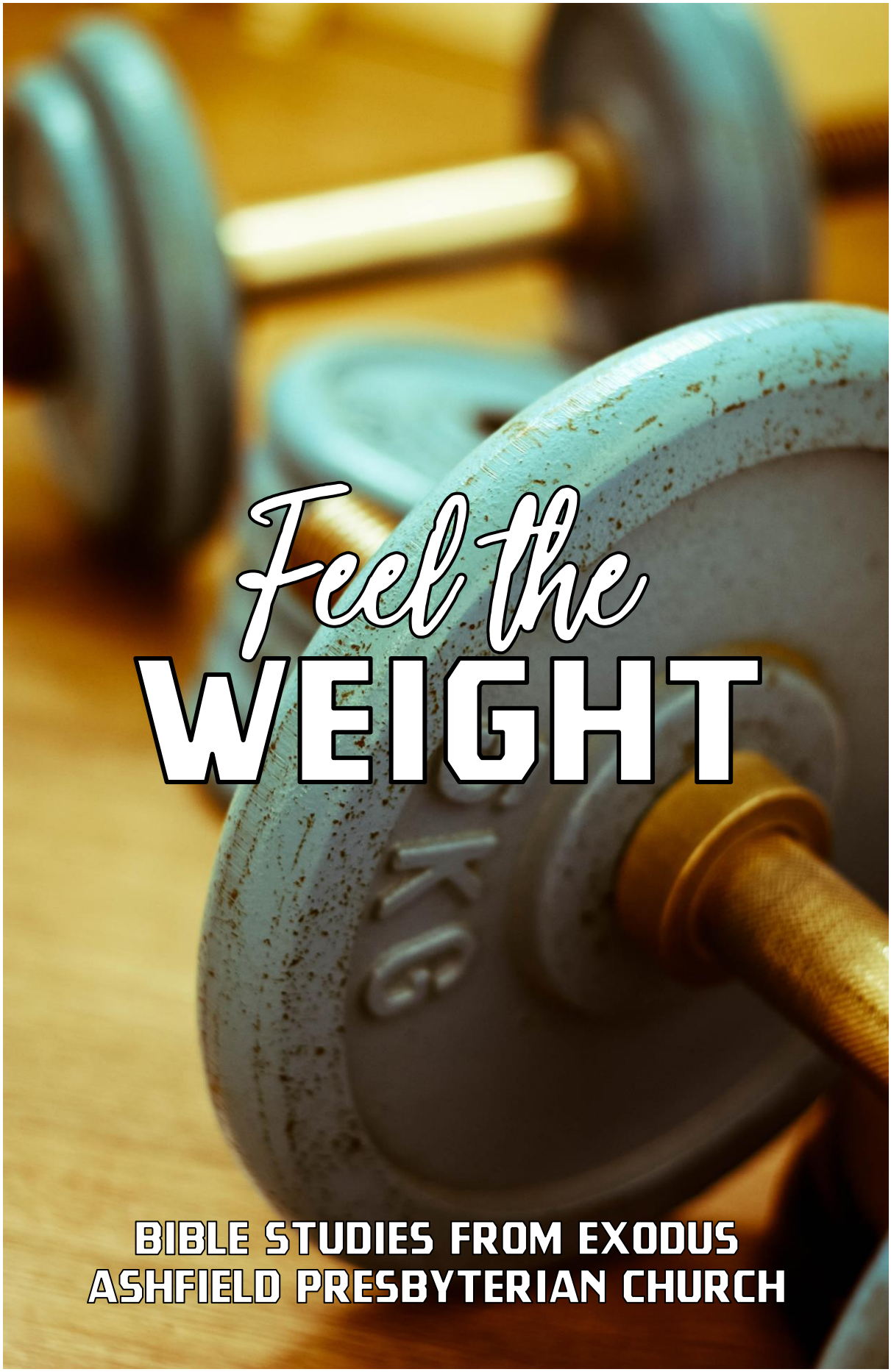


Feel the WEIGHT

BIBLE STUDIES FROM EXODUS
ASHFIELD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

FEEL THE WEIGHT

THE GOD OF EXODUS IS NOT TO BE TAKEN LIGHTLY

Exodus - it's one of the most exciting books of the Bible. The stories are some of the most vivid, dramatic and action-packed in the whole Bible. Think of Israel's slavery in Egypt and Moses' amazing rescue from the river. Think of God appearing to Moses in a burning bush and sending him back to confront Pharaoh. The spectacular plagues on Egypt and the Passover for Israel. Crossing the Red Sea and seeing Pharaoh's army destroyed. Manna in the wilderness. The Ten Commandments. The Golden Calf. God's glory in the Tabernacle. This book has it all!

But while we're enjoying these huge stories, there's a question we need to ask: Beyond providing great stories, what was the point of it all? What was this spectacular stuff all for? When you read Exodus carefully, God himself tells us his real purpose. And it's not what you might expect. God tells us he did all of this so that Israel, Egypt and the whole world (that's us too!) would come to know one thing about him: **This God is a heavyweight God. Don't take him lightly. The God of Exodus is worth taking more seriously than you ever have before**. Hear how God himself puts it:

> *To Israel: I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.* ***Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians****. Exodus 6:6-7*
>
> *To Pharaoh: Let my people go, so that they may worship me, or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people,* ***so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth****. For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. But I have raised you up for this very purpose,* ***that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth****. Exodus 9:13-16*
>
> *I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen.* ***The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory*** *through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen. Exodus 14:17-18*

The Hebrew word translated "glory" here more literally means "heaviness" or "weight." Like gold, where you know it's true worth only when you feel its weight. Like furniture when you can only tell it's solid and dependable when you try to move it. Like a barbell where you only realise your own limitations when you can't lift it. Exodus is a book where we get to feel the weight of God. See his true worth. See his solid dependability. Learn how foolish it is to take him lightly and treat him with disrespect.

Whether you already know God because you're following Jesus, or whether you're just starting to get to know him, our prayer should be that we'd all get know God more deeply through the book of Exodus: that we'd really feel the weight of who God is. These weeks in Exodus will be a great opportunity to do that together.

EXODUS 1-2: THE ONE WHO IS FAITHFUL

Before we jump into Exodus, it's helpful to understand where we are in the Biblical timeline. Essentially the whole Bible is the history of God's dealing with his world and his people. In the opening pages, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve's sin fractured their relationships with God and with the land. But God made promises that would bring these parties all back together, and he would bring that about through the family of a man named Abraham: the ancient nation of Israel.

KNOWING GOD FROM EXODUS

1. Summarise the original promises from God to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 & 15:1-16.

Read Exodus 1:1-2:10

2. What promises is God beginning to fulfil by Exodus 1?

   Which promises haven't yet been fulfilled?

3. Pharaoh is intimidated by how fast the Israelites are increasing. How does he try to slow them down?

   How successful is the policy? Why?

Read Exodus 2:11-25

Israel is in a desperate situation, but it looks like Moses is going to be the 'saviour' everyone has been hoping for.

4. How effective is Moses as a saviour figure for Israel from this chapter?

5. What's the real hope the Israelites have by the end of the chapter?

6. What do we learn about God's character from these chapters?

   What can we anticipate about how God will respond to Israel's slavery?

Even though it looked as if God had forgotten his people, God is faithful to his promises - in the midst of hardship, God had faithfully increased Israel's numbers (1:7, 9, 20), blessed those who had protected his people (1:19-20), and provided for his people. And he isn't going to forget them now!

KNOWING GOD IN JESUS

God's character never changes. His faithfulness is ultimately seen in what he has done for us in Jesus.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:20-22

7. What does it mean that all God's promises are 'yes' in Christ?

8. God promised to restore humanity's relationship to himself and the world by keeping a series of promises to Abraham. If ALL God's promises find their 'yes' in Jesus, how have even those promises been fulfilled in Jesus? (This might take some thought).

FEEL THE WEIGHT

9. Just like the Israelites, there are often times when we can feel God has forgotten us. Have you ever felt like God has forgotten you? When?

10. How does feeling the weight of what God has already done for us in Jesus help us when we're feeling abandoned or in desperate situations?

PRAYER POINTS

EXODUS 3-6: THE ONE WHO SETS FREE

As we saw last time, the descendants of Abraham are quickly growing into a large nation, just as God promised they would. But there's a problem. They're slaves in Egypt - and it's no fun! God and his promises of blessing feel like a distant memory… maybe their forefathers just imagined that God had a great future planned for them?

As a Christian, what kind of things make you question whether God has a good future in mind for you?

KNOWING GOD FROM EXODUS

Read Exodus 3:1-18

1. Moses, by now living as a foreigner (see what he named his son in 2:22!) has a strange encounter on the mountain. Who speaks to him, what's he going to do, and why? (Exodus 3:6-10)

2. When Moses asks God for his 'name', the answer is strange and unexpected. What sense can you make of Exodus 3:14? (Try to be as wise, philosophical and theological as you can! Your efforts will be just as good as the most famous scholars!)

3. From verse 15 to 17, what is this endlessly existing God going to do, and why?

4. What's your reaction to the way Moses responds to his commissioning? (4:1)

God has already given hints of how things are going to play out in 3:19-20. The process of leading the Israelite slaves to freedom is not going to be easy at fi rst! Moses sets off from Midian to go back to Egypt but is met by an unexpected blockage in 4:24 - the Lord who has sent him is (apparently) now about to kill him! Zipporah his wife seems to know the problem. She immediately takes a fl int knife and circumcises their son, who Moses had earlier named "Foreigner". Moses and his family need to be marked out as fully committed Israelites for what lies ahead! There's no turning back… and no more pretending to be Egyptians!

5. How do the Israelites respond to the message of their coming salvation in 4:29-31? (Does it remind you of anything you might have observed in the opening chapters of John's gospel?)

6. How do things get worse in chapter 5? How do the Israelite overseers respond to Moses?

   What's God's reply to their complaints? (Read 6:1-8 with emphasis on the words "I" and "my".)

Whether they're ready to hear it or not, the eternal, ever existing "I AM" God has made a covenant with Israel, and he's going to keep it. There's freedom and a promised land up ahead. And without their help, the I AM God is going to bring it about by showing the mighty hand of his glory (6:1). The reason for these temporary hard times is so they will get to know God's power all the better.

KNOWING GOD IN JESUS

Read John 8:31-37.

John's gospel resonates with themes from this section of Exodus.

7. Moses saw a burning bush and heard the voice of God. But he didn't see God. Nobody did. From John 1:18, what has changed that?

8. How quickly people forget! What's wrong with the statement the Jews make in John 8:33? What slavery is Jesus talking about, and what's his offer (John 8:32-36)?

When Jesus says in John 8:58, "Very truly I tell you, before Abraham was born, I AM!" he is clearly echoing Exodus 3:14. Jesus IS the "I AM" - the only one who can save his people from their slavery. But they insist that they've never been slaves… and so they don't need saving!

FEEL THE WEIGHT

Here's how it would look to live like a "Reverse-Israelite": a) You'd freely admit you're a slave to sin; and b) you wouldn't lose hope through the hard times of life because you were trusting the "I AM" God for your ultimate rescue. You'd be a hopeful sinner!

9. How would your life be different if you gave the words of Jesus about the need to be saved from sin a bit more weight?

10. It's easy to lose hope and complain in hard times like the Israelites did. What difference would it make if you didn't take Jesus' power to save so lightly?

    When have you found it hardest to trust?

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for one another in your group - ask for patience in hard times, and a real reliance in the "I AM" God to bring us to ultimate freedom from slavery to sin and all its consequences.

EXODUS 7-11: THE ONE WHO STANDS OUT

In a book full of famous events, perhaps this is the most famous of all: the plagues on Egypt. Lots of people have heard of them, but not everyone likes them: Why would an allegedly good God bring such horrible plagues on an entire nation like Egypt? Well, the answer might surprise us...

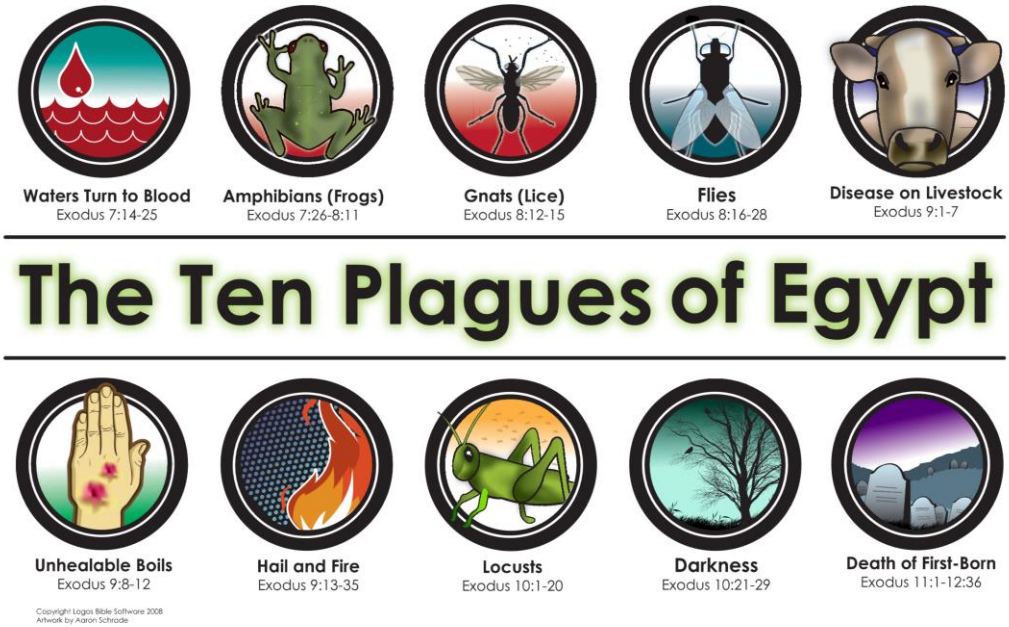
Who stands out to you as a supreme athlete in their field? Mohammed Ali, Usain Bolt, Serena Williams? What makes them stand out?

KNOWING GOD FROM EXODUS

Read Exodus 6:28-7:13

1. What is God's purpose here and how will he achieve it?

Now the stage is set for the plagues. And because Pharaoh's heart is hard, as we've already heard, he won't listen, he won't let Israel go, not until there's been 10 plagues in all:



Read the account of the first five plagues in Exodus 7:14-9:7.

2. How long do the Egyptian sorcerers stay in the contest?

   How does God change tactics after that?

3. What do these plagues reveal to the world about God and his people?

4. If God hadn't hardened Pharaoh's heart, the world wouldn't have come to know this about God and his people. How do you feel about that? Is that a good enough reason for the plagues? Why or why not?

KNOWING GOD IN JESUS

In the plagues of Exodus, God revealed not just to Israel but to the whole world that he stands out as supreme over everyone and he makes his people stand out as his. But as we've seen in the last series and this one, the full revelation of God is found in Jesus…

Read Luke 11:14-28

5. How does Jesus demonstrate the "finger of God"? (Exodus 8:19//Luke 11:20)

6. How is this similar to the Exodus plagues? How is it different?

7. How should followers of Jesus stand out today? (Luke 11:27-28)

   If we did stand out like that, how would this display the power of Jesus?

FEEL THE WEIGHT

8. Do you really want to stand out to other people as a follower of Jesus? What's good about it, what's scary about it?

9. List some concrete ways your obedience to God could show people the weight you give God.

10. Does anything stop you from doing these things? What might help you to do them more?

PRAYER POINTS

EXODUS 12:1-15:21: THE ONE WHO REDEEMS

Even though God has thoroughly defeated the Egyptian sorcerers, Pharaoh's heart remains rock hard. In his quest to gain glory over Pharaoh by leading his people to freedom, God's hand falls heavily on the Egyptians. In that first Passover God redeems his people, making them his own.

KNOWING GOD IN EXODUS

1. **Read through chapter 12**. In the middle of a gripping story, suddenly we switch to a whole bunch of rules about how to commemorate these events in the future. What do you think that tells us about this moment in Israel's history?

2. What did the Israelites have to do in order to be absolutely sure that 'the destroyer' would pass over them?

3. Why do you think God told the Israelites to re-enact that same tense scenario every single year?

Having been saved out of slavery, Israel has become God's own possession. His people. This would have been very easy to forget as time went on. But God didn't want that.

Read chapter 13:1-16
Note: In the thinking of the ancient world, what you killed in sacrifice 'went up' to the gods.

4. Unlike the gods of the land of Canaan, Israel's God Yahweh was strongly opposed to child sacrifice. What, then, was necessary?

Read Exodus 13:17-14:4.

5. When you look at God's motive in delaying Israel, is He just an egotist? Why or why not?

Read Exodus 14:13-29.

6. What lessons do the Israelites need to learn? (Notice the similarity between 14:4 and 14:18.)

   There's a huge nation-defining miracle in 14:21-29. How does it demonstrate the truth of verses 13-14?

Skim through Exodus 15

7. Moses and Miriam celebrate by leading the Israelites in song in chapter 15. What's the main point of the song?

8. In 14:4 God said he was planning to gain 'glory' for himself in what he was about to do. Remember, the original word for 'glory' literally means 'weightiness.' What does the song highlight for anyone who would take God lightly?

KNOWING GOD IN JESUS

In Exodus, the Israelites and the nations learn not to take God lightly as they see his glory demonstrated in his powerful judgment on the Egyptian Army. Turning to John's gospel, we'll see his glory demonstrated in another way.

9. **Read John 1:14 and John 12:20-33**. What 'hour' is Jesus referring to, and where's the 'glory' in it?

10. God's motive in Exodus was to make 'the nations' pay attention to his glory (and stop treating him like a lightweight.) How does John 12:32 pick up on this theme? (How has it worked out in the last 2000 years or so? And today?)

FEEL THE WEIGHT

It seems Jesus has got the idea of glory completely upside down. The thought that going to a humiliating death could somehow be glorious, and that his 'lifting up on a cross' would send a message to 'all people' must have seemed crazy. But in the resurrection, and the expansion of the gospel all over the world, God proved him right!

11. How much of your time is spent trying to make yourself seem impressive, rather than humbly serving and trusting God for the outcome? (Do you really believe there's glory in sacrifice?)

PRAYER POINTS

Praise God for purchasing you from slavery to sin into the freedom of serving Him.

EXODUS 15:22-18:27: THE ONE WHO PROVIDES

It's understandable that after crossing the sea on foot and seeing Egypt's army utterly destroyed, Israel finally trusted God (14:31). But it's one thing to trust God when he's just saved you. It's another thing to keep on trusting him through real hardships long after that. As we see in this part of Exodus, Israel found that a real challenge…

When do you find it hardest to trust that God's going to look after you?

KNOWING GOD IN EXODUS

Read Exodus 15:22-17:7

1. List all the reasons the Israelites worry:

   15:24

   16:3

   17:2

   17:7

2. Given what they've seen God do for them in Exodus 1-15, how reasonable are these worries?

3. When God did provide the food they needed, he only let them gather enough for each day (16:4-5). Why do you think that was?

4. Why do you think the people kept disobeying and gathering more (16:19-20, 27-29)?

5. God provided food and water when needed. But that's not all. In the rest of chapter 17 God rescues them when they're attacked. In chapter 18 Moses can't lead the people on his own so God provides elders to help him. So what do we learn about God's character from all this taken together?

KNOWING GOD IN JESUS

This section of Israel's journey with God reveals something striking about him. He always provides his people with whatever they need, even when it looks like he won't. But he only gives what's needed, not what's wanted, so they'll keep on trusting him, not their stockpile of stuff. Of course, Jesus Christ is the full revelation of God. So we shouldn't be surprised that we see the same thing in Jesus. What might be surprising is how he provides for his followers…

Read John 6:1-14, 25-51 listening for its connections with the part of Exodus we've just read

6. What do the people really want from Jesus?

   What does Jesus offer them instead?

   Most of the people here think that's not providing what they need most. But what do you think?

FEEL THE WEIGHT

In Jesus, God has shown us that he's weighty enough to lean on always. But it can be hard to remember that…

7. What does it take for you (Something going wrong? Not enough sleep? Unanswered prayer? God feels distant?) to doubt that God will provide what you need?

8. In those times, it can be hard to feel the weight of what God's already provided for you in Jesus. But what difference would it make if you did? What practical things could you do to help yourself remember?

PRAYER POINTS

EXODUS 19-24: THE ONE WHO SETS APART

God has now rescued his people from slavery to Egypt, but his plans for them don't stop there! Israel is set apart to play a special role: to be a kingdom of priests, standing between God and all the other nations.

The catch? In order to represent the heavyweight God to the nations, Israel will need to obey their God's weighty commands.

KNOWING GOD IN EXODUS

Read Exodus 19:1-8 | The Job Offer

1. How would you describe the role Israel has been saved to play on the global stage?

2. How did Israel respond to the job offer?

Read Exodus 19:9-23 | The New Boss

3. What new perspective does this passage give on what it means for Israel to be 'holy'?

Read Exodus 20:1-21 | The Job Description

4. How might these 10 commands from God enable Israel to do their job?

Read Exodus 21:22-36 | The Spirit of the Law

5. Reading through these commands, what is their common objective?

In the context of a more brutal world than ours, God's instructions were designed to ensure that his people didn't take their God, or their responsibility to represent him to the world, lightly. That means to love God (commands 1-4) and to love neighbours (commands 5-10). All the other commands are expansions on that. The vulnerable are to be protected and avenged, and those injured are to have justice.

KNOWING GOD IN JESUS

Unfortunately, Israel failed to live as God commanded them to. They took his words and their responsibility to represent him to the world lightly. This culminated in their taking the 'God become man' Jesus lightly and rejecting him. But even in this, God had a new plan for a new people...

Read 1 Peter 2:4-12

6. Instead of being descended from Israel, what is the new criterion for being a part of God's new special people?
7. How is this similar to Israel's role? How is it different?

FEEL THE WEIGHT

8. How much weight do you give to God's purpose in saving you?

9. Do you see bringing Glory to God as the most important purpose of your life?

10. How could your way of living help others feel the weight of God?

Being saved by Jesus doesn't mean we can do whatever we want. We were saved to represent our God to the world, by doing good deeds that will bring Him glory and declaring the praises of the one who freed us from slavery to sin and darkness and brought us into his light.

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for each other, that we would treat our privilege of being God's representatives with the weight it deserves.

EXODUS 32-34: THE ONE WHO IS MERCIFUL

Last week we left Exodus on a happy note. Israel accepted their role in God's purposes: keeping God's commands so other nations will come to know God too. But this week we see it doesn't last long. Moses goes up the mountain to receive instructions concerning the Tabernacle (that's next week) and Israel's commitment to God quickly fades…

Have you ever had a friend abuse your friendship? How did that make you feel?

KNOWING GOD IN EXODUS

Read Exodus 32:1-14

1. Why do the Israelites make the golden calf?

2. What does God say they deserve for that? Why should that be?

3. What reasons does Moses give for sparing Israel? Where in Exodus have we heard these divine motivations before?

It seems there's a tension between God's justice and God's mercy. It plays out again in chapter 33 where God says he can't accompany Israel into the Promised Land, because he'd have to punish a sinful nation like them. But Moses objects, "How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" and so once again God's mercy wins out. This merciful God is someone Moses wants to know even more deeply...

Read Exodus 33:18-23

4. Look again at what Moses asks to see and what God offers to show him. What significance can you see in that?

Moses gets what he asked for… **Read Exodus 34:5-7**

5. What two aspects does God himself see as central to his own glory?

   Which seems to be emphasised more than the other?

KNOWING GOD IN JESUS

The words in Exodus 34:6 translated “love and faithfulness” can also be translated “grace and truth”. Once we realise that, it becomes clear that while Moses could only see the afterglow of God’s glory, we can now see God’s full glory somewhere else...

Read John 1:14-18

6. How does this passage recall the parts of Exodus we’ve just read?

7. If God’s true glory is seen is his combination of mercy and justice, or grace and truth, how would the cross of Jesus display God’s glory more than anything else?

FEEL THE WEIGHT

8. What’s challenging about the full weight of God’s justice? What’s comforting about it?

9. What’s comforting about the full depth of God’s mercy? What’s challenging about it?

10. Do you ever wonder what God is like and how he feels about you? Pleased? Angry?

    How can Jesus show you the real truth about that?

PRAYER POINTS

EXODUS 25-31 & 35-40: THE ONE WHO COMES NEAR

It's easy to get lost in the details of Exodus 25-40. It's full of detailed instructions from God about how to build the tabernacle, the tent where he will meet with his people. While the detail can be overwhelming at times, it's there to help us feel the weight of what's necessary for sinful people to be in God's presence.

Ever since creation, God had always intended to be with his people – in Genesis 2, God walks with Adam and Eve in the Garden. But that scene was replaced with separation and alienation after mankind's rebellion against God. From that point on, God works towards re-establishing a relationship with his people - which is tangibly seen in the building of the tabernacle.

KNOWING GOD IN EXODUS

Read Exodus 25:1-9

1. What are the Israelites asked to do in verses 1-7 before the construction begins?

2. What's the purpose of the Tabernacle?

3. Using the following floor plan, skim through chapters 25-27 and fill in what was to be placed in the tabernacle. Why do you think there is so much detail about the tabernacle (almost half of Exodus is dedicated to planning and building it)?

Even though God's promising to live with his people (the high point of Exodus), the people of Israel don't feel the full weight of their new housemate. Last week we saw how the people turned from God and created their own god to serve (the golden calf). Despite Israel's failure, God is gracious and he promises to live with Israel if they continue to be faithful.

In light of God's justice and mercy (Exodus 34:6-10), the Israelites are quick to change their tune and promise to be obedient as they fully grasp the full weight of God. Chapters 35-40 describe how the Israelites obediently construct the tabernacle from the designs found earlier in Exodus.

Read Exodus 40:33-38

4. What shows that God is living with his people?

5. Even though God is living with his people, there still seems to be a separation between God and his people (v.35). Why do you think this is?

6. Do you think knowing God lived with you would have been comforting for Israel? Why or why not? (Think back to what they've experienced with God so far in Exodus.)

Even though God lives with his people, the full weight of God is too overwhelming – even Moses can't enter the tabernacle when God is in residence. God desires to have a personal relationship with his people, but as long as sin remains, seeing him face to face is just not possible.

KNOWING GOD IN JESUS

Read John 1:14-18

7. It's helpful to note that the word "dwelling" in verse 14 could be translated "tabernacled". What is John saying about God's presence and glory now?

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

8. Who or what is God's temple or tabernacle now? What are some of the weighty implications of this?

FEEL THE WEIGHT

If you trust in Jesus, God now lives in you by his Spirit. Just like the Tabernacle, only better. The God of Exodus! Living with you! That's heavy!

9. If you trust in Jesus, the weighty God of Exodus is with you at all times. How is this challenging? How is it comforting? (**Read 1 Corinthians 6:18-20** as an example of how this affects one area of life.)

PRAYER POINTS