



E2E

Eternity to Eternity

BOOK 4 | LESSONS 32-41

E2E

Eternity to Eternity

NEW HOPE CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

The Biblical characters experienced new beginnings with God. Adam began a new life with recently created Eve in the garden, Noah and his family left the ark and stood before the wreckage of the post flood world, Abraham arrived in Canaan with his clan, Jacob began a new life in Egypt and then 400 years of slavery later God's people crossed the Red Sea and stared bleakly into a barren wilderness.

God brought His people to this wilderness of preparation already washed in the blood of the Passover lamb. He rescued them from the grasp of pagan Egypt and made gracious promises to them about their future. God gave them laws to distinguish them from their pagan neighbors which they ignored and worshipped the golden calf. God even met personally with them through interceding priests in a special tent called the tabernacle. As God's people moved toward the land He promised them, they failed to trust Him at Kadesh Barnea and spent 40 years wandering around the wilderness.

Do not be surprised if you feel a spiritual connection to God's people leaving Egypt. God washed us clean in the blood of our Passover lamb, Jesus. In the moment we crossed over from death to life God adopted us as His and gifted us a new identity. Banking on God's sure promises of eternity with Him, we entered a challenging wilderness of discovery. It was here that we began to know God, understand ourselves and we discovered how to walk with Him. At times, we ignored God's desires by choosing to sin and we even took time off from God's program to follow our own heart. We knew there was more to life with God but we often stubbornly chose our own instinctive thinking and behavior instead of simply trusting and obeying God. Welcome to E2E book 4.

My son Ric and I wrote the lessons. Jacob and Elaine Iverson and Jeanette McWaters offered helpful edits. Darla Prether prayed over each lesson and carefully arranged the pages and graphics. Samantha Fray gives the E2E series an online presence. I'm grateful to each of these for

their kind contributions. We pray that you enjoy reading these lessons as much we enjoyed putting them together for you.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. K. B. J.' with a period at the end. The letters are stylized and connected.

Rich Bruce, Discipleship Pastor

LESSON 32

Red Sea Crossing

On June 6, 1944 nearly 400,000 Allied soldiers and sailors stormed the beaches of Normandy, France, beginning the liberation of Europe. On Christmas Day, 1776 General George Washington and the Continental Army crossed the freezing Delaware river with 2400 soldiers, delivering a strategic blow to the British the next day. As far back as 480 BC, King Xerxes of Persia built two bridges of boats to allow his army to quickly cross the mile-wide Hellespont (now known as the Dardanelles) from Asia into Europe. After a storm destroyed the first bridges, Xerxes ordered 300 lashes for the Hellespont and shackles to be dropped into the water as a sign of enslavement.¹ During war, a well-executed water crossing can make the difference between suffering a crushing defeat and achieving a stunning victory. No wonder Xerxes feebly sought to demonstrate his dominance over a body of water with shackles and whips! In Exodus chapter 14, Pharaoh saw an opportunity to crush the children of Israel once and for all against the shores of the Red Sea, forgetting the 10 plague's lesson that Israel's God controlled nature. Instead, Pharaoh suffered the crushing blow he tried to deliver. Let's watch as God demonstrates once and for all his complete victory over Pharaoh.

Key Scripture

[After witnessing the humiliation of their gods and the death of their first-born sons, Pharaoh and the Egyptians expelled the people from Egypt. God's people gathered at the Red Sea with their animals and plunder from Egypt. In the meantime, Pharaoh changed his mind about letting the people go and the people watched in horror as the armies of Egypt bore down on them to destroy them. God responded with the following miracle:]

Exodus 14:13-31 *But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will perform for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again, ever. The LORD will fight for you, while you keep silent." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. As for you, lift up your staff and reach out with your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go*

through the midst of the sea on dry land. 17And as for Me, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. 18Then the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots, and through his horsemen.”

19Then the angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. 20So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Therefore the one did not approach the other all night.

21Then Moses reached out with his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. 22So the sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right and on their left. 23Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea. 24But at the morning watch, the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion. 25He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty; so the Egyptians each said, “Let me flee from Israel, for the LORD is fighting for them against the Egyptians.”

26Then the LORD said to Moses, “Reach out with your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen.” 27So Moses reached out with his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing right into it; then the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. 28The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, Pharaoh’s entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained. 29But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right and on their left.

30So the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31When Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses.

After the Lord killed Pharaoh’s firstborn son and countless others in Egypt, Pharaoh ordered Moses and Aaron to take the people into the wilderness to worship God as they had requested. The Egyptian people also wanted the Israelites to leave as soon as possible. As

they left, the children of Israel requested items of gold and silver and clothing from their Egyptian captors and they gladly granted them, because the Lord gave the Israelites favor (12:35-36). On their first day of freedom, God established the Jewish ordinance of Passover and he ordered Moses to consecrate all of the firstborn sons and the male offspring of Israel's domesticated animals to Him. God then led the children of Israel in a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. Although it would have been faster to travel over the route directly toward Canaan, God deliberately led the people back toward their captors, directly against the Red Sea! The text gives two reasons for this choice: God understood that the children of Israel could not handle immediate conflict with the Philistines (13:17), and God was planning a trap for Pharaoh's army to show Himself powerful on Israel's behalf. Consider the following:

1. Israel's miraculous crossing of the Red Sea has no human parallel or cause. God did not save them by giving them the wisdom and the means to construct boats or bridges to cross the Red Sea. Instead, God alone received all the glory for both defeating Israel's enemies and parting the waters of the sea (vs. 4, 17). The text emphasizes, "and the waters were like a wall to them on their right and on their left" (vs. 22, 29). This vivid imagery does not allow for naturalistic explanations such as the water being unusually low that time of year or a strong wind temporarily drying up part of the Sea. God's divine intervention on their behalf produced two results: fear and belief (Ex 14:31). The Hebrew word "yare" (fear) indicates reverence, awe, and respect for authority greater than oneself². The Israelites demonstrated faith in God by walking between two walls of water for miles, with Pharaoh's army in their rear view and an unknown life with God before them.

2. Throughout the Old Testament, God often acted in the role of divine warrior on behalf of His people. Moses explicitly stated that God would fight for the Israelites just as they experienced a crisis of belief (vs. 12). The Egyptians themselves noticed that God fought for the Israelites and tried to flee (vs. 25). Moses obeyed God's specific instructions and the waters of the Red Sea parted. Obeying and believing God did not give Moses any credit as having accomplished any human feat to secure the Israelites salvation. The stick in Moses's hand contained no mystical power. The power to part the Red Sea and destroy the enemy came solely from God and Israel's only contribution was to "stay silent" (vs. 14) and "see the salvation of the Lord" (vs. 15).

3. This story reminds us that God provides the only possible way and means of salvation. Turning to the right or the left, the Israelites would have drowned. Turning back, Pharaoh's army would have killed them. The only path to hope and deliverance was the narrow, dry road that God provided. God later provided for them in the wilderness with manna and quail and communed with them at Mt. Sinai, cementing the lesson that He would always protect and provide a way for them.

The human problem can be quickly illustrated as a small human standing beside an uncrossable chasm with a bottomless pit. The pit represents sin, which separates us from God. On the other side of the chasm lies salvation, heaven, and the presence of God. Without the cross of Christ as a bridge, no path or means exists to get to the other side. The Red Sea serves as a reminder for all time that we cannot achieve salvation in our own wisdom or by our own means. The salvation that we have in Jesus is miraculous, divine, and awe-inspiring. It should inspire both reverent fear and unshakeable belief much greater than a fear of any human army ever could.

Point to Ponder

How would my life change if I stopped talking, watched God work, and gave Him all the glory?

From Learning to Living

Are you more in awe of D-Day or of the day that God parted the Red Sea? Are you quick to talk about your own accomplishments or about the victories God has won on your behalf? For most of us, we obsess about our own priorities, schedules, toys, and concerns. We could talk for hours about our hobbies, interests, vacations, degrees, and careers, but those around us may know nothing about our "private" spiritual lives. As we mature spiritually, human wisdom and accomplishments fade away. We begin to practice what we should have been doing all along: quietly reflecting on and celebrating what God has accomplished in and through us.

Prayer Point

"Miracle working God, remind me of the times in my life where you have displayed your great power on my behalf. Let me never take credit for your miracles."

LESSON 33

Wilderness Realities

On an ordinary Sunday in 2017, worship pastor Michael Glenn had no idea God would give him a new song. He walked into a membership class in the downstairs fellowship hall and casually asked a couple what brought them to New Hope. “The Word of God is alive here,” they replied excitedly. Taken aback, Michael began to reflect on what it meant that the Word of God lived, breathed, and changed people at New Hope. With thanksgiving in his heart and giving all the glory to God, Michael felt compelled to write a song entitled, “Your Word is Alive.” The words of the song poured onto the page, celebrating what God had accomplished among His people. Similarly, in Exodus chapter 15 Moses and Miriam spontaneously led the Israelites in an exuberant song thanking God for delivering them from the hand of Pharaoh. Unfortunately, just three days after expressing their reverence and belief in God in song, the earthly realities of growling stomachs and parched lips quickly caused the Israelites to revert to their former, ungrateful selves. Thankfully, God patiently and mercifully provided for their every need as they followed Him in the wilderness.

Key Scripture

[[As the children of Israel broke free from the clutches of Pharaoh, they sang this song...]

Exodus 15 1Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD, saying: “I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. 2“*The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father’s God, and I will exalt Him.* 3“*The LORD is a warrior; The LORD is His name.*

[As the Israelites set out enjoying a new life of freedom with God, they plodded though the desert with their plundered goods and...]

22Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. 23When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters

of Marah, because they were bitter; for that reason it was named Marah. 24So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, “What are we to drink?” 25Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet.

There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them. 26And He said, “If you will listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and listen to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer.”

[The people complain again and the Lord also provides Manna and Quail]

Exodus 16 8And Moses said, “This will happen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning; for the LORD hears your grumblings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumblings are not against us but against the LORD.” 9Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, ‘Come forward before the LORD, for He has heard your grumblings.’” 10And it came about, as Aaron spoke to the entire congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. 11And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 12“I have heard the grumblings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’” 13So it came about at evening that the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.

[The first ordinance God established with his newly redeemed people was a Sabbath]

29See, the LORD has given you the Sabbath; for that reason He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain, everyone, in his place; no one is to leave his place on the seventh day.” 30So the people rested on the seventh day.

[God answered their cries by sending manna, quail and water]

As the Israelites began their wandering in the wilderness, two huge problems emerged right away: lack of food and lack of water. Remember the Israelites left Egypt not only with hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children but also with large herds of livestock that drank thousands of gallons of water per day and required vast pasture to graze (Ex. 12:38). Rather than believe God and trust He would provide, the Israelites grumbled and complained “at” Moses (Ex. 15:24). Moses made it clear that when the people

complained against him, they really complained against God (Ex. 16:8). Consider the following:

1. Moses and Miriam's beautiful, poetic song describes the Lord as the warrior king of the Israelites who shepherds and directs His people. This song was both inspired and prophetic. It used artistic license and vivid imagery to portray real life events, describing the salvation and deliverance of the Israelites using hyperbole and graphic images. For example, verse one describes God as hurling Pharaoh's army into the sea. In the song, Redeemer God extends His loving-kindness (Hebrew "hesed") over His people but demonstrates His power over human nations and the forces of nature, producing fear and anxiety among the nations that Israel will face in the future. God's people wrote songs to remind themselves of truth while they glorified the God who had worked miracles in their midst. We should do the same.

2. Humans and livestock could not drink the waters at Marah, the first site with water the Israelites came to. After the people grumbled, God instructed Moses to throw a tree into the water to make it suitable to drink. Verse 25 reveals God's purpose in bringing the Israelites to Marah as, "...there He tested them." God laid out a simple, specific standard for His people to follow: complete obedience (15:26). Unfortunately, the Israelites did not adhere to God's standard. The old familiar pattern of grumbling repeated itself in chapter 16 when the children of Israel complained to Moses that they had nothing to eat. God granted them a flaky substance called manna in the morning and flocks of quail in the evening. God provided just enough for them and no more. If they tried to save any for the next day, it spoiled (16:19-21). When the people first saw manna, they asked, "What is it?" and the name stuck (16:31). They began to call it, essentially, whatchamacallit. This soft, flaky substance was whitish, fine, and dew-like. They baked manna into loaves and it seemed to have a sweet flavor like wafers made with honey (16:31) or like cake according to Numbers 11:8-9. The Bible compares the Word of God to daily bread. Just like the children of Israel carefully gathered a sweet, daily sustenance from God, we should hunger daily for God's Word.

3. God began to lay out aspects of the covenant that He would fully reveal at Sinai. This conditional covenant had both positive and negative reinforcement associated with it. On the positive side, God agreed to not afflict Israel with the physical sicknesses that he used to

teach Pharaoh a lesson. God would be their great physician, healing them and providing for their needs. God began to teach the Israelites about another aspect of the covenant: the Sabbath day. God did not send manna and quail on the Sabbath, which He had ordained as a day of rest since creation (Gen 2:2-3). Instead, the Israelites gathered all the manna and quail they would need for two days on the day before the Sabbath. Interestingly, Exodus 16:29-30 later became the basis for the Pharisee's false assumption that God prohibited travel on the Sabbath, which Jesus corrected during His ministry (Mark 2:24-28)¹.

The miraculous provision of sustenance in the wilderness points to the person of Jesus. Jesus called Himself the "bread sent from heaven," (Jn 6:51) and the "living water," (Jn 4:10). Unlike ordinary bread and water, Jesus fully and permanently satisfies spiritual hunger and thirst. When we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and his complete, finished work, songs like Michael's "Your Word is Alive" flow from our grateful hearts:

Your Word is alive, for far too long I failed to see
Your Word is alive, my cold religion blinding me
Your Word is alive, stirring, moving, breathing life in me
Chorus: Alive, come alive, for me; Unveil my eyes, renew my mind;
Make this heart of stone come alive

Point to Ponder

Do you easily forget the songs you sang on Sunday while you toil at work or school on Wednesday?

From Learning to Living

Does trust in God give me great confidence that He will provide for my needs? Sometimes God intentionally takes us through a wilderness period in our lives to show Himself powerful on our behalf. God led His people directly to one of the least hospitable places on the planet in order to deepen His relationship with them. Sometimes the present moment hurts, but God uses the pain to prepare us for future service to Him. Watch out for negativity! Lack of belief often manifests itself as resistance, grumbling, and complaining against God and His plan.

Prayer Point

"Jehovah Jireh, show me your provision when life feels like a barren wilderness. I believe you work all things together for my good. Help my words and actions reflect you to a broken world."

LESSON 34

The Ten Commandments

I didn't consider the implications of the fences surrounding my property until after I moved in. I had noted, of course, that a low split rail fence separated my yard from the yard of the house to the north, where a kindly baker lived. I had also noted the 3-foot chain-link fence separating my yard from the house to the west, where an elderly couple lived. Most striking, however, was a 6-foot privacy fence that extended the length of the east side of my property, walling me off completely from a small yellow house and its occupants. I quickly realized the reason for the fences, and I learned the meaning of Robert Frost's 1914 one liner, "Good fences make good neighbors." Fences help to delineate appropriate, safe boundaries for our kids, pets, and neighbors. When the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai in Exodus 19, God instructed Moses to set up boundaries around the base of Mount Sinai to prevent the people from accidentally touching the holy mountain where God's presence dwelt. Just like a physical fence, God designed and delivered 10 fundamental commandments to set them apart as His chosen people. Here's how it happened:

Key Scripture

Exodus 19 *In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. 2When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain. 3And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "This is what you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: 4'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. 5Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'* These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."

7So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. 8Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.

9Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also trust in you forever." Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD.

10The LORD also said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and have them wash their garments; 11and have them ready for the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12But you shall set boundaries for the people all around, saying, 'Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall certainly be put to death. 13No hand shall touch him, but he shall certainly be stoned or shot through; whether animal or person, the violator shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain." 14So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. 15He also said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman."

[As the people stood in awe before the smoke-covered mountain, YAHWEH'S voice boomed out these ten commandments]

Exodus 20:3, "You shall have no other gods before me." "You shall not make for yourself an idol." (v. 4) "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain" (V. 7) "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." (v. 8) "Honor your father and mother, that your days will be prolonged in the land which the Lord God gives you." (V. 12) "You shall not murder." "You shall not commit adultery." (v. 14) "You shall not steal." (v. 15) "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." (v. 16) "You shall not covet...anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Three months to the day after God's miraculous parting of the Red Sea, the children of Israel arrived at the Sinai wilderness. God reminded them of what He did to the Egyptian army, and how He carried them "on eagles' wings" to Him (19:4). He then gave them an overview of the covenant they were about to agree to. God promised to bless them immeasurably by making them His special people if they chose to obey Him. This communication provided the context for the commandments that came next. After the people agreed to do all the Lord commanded (19:8), Moses consecrated the people, and they waited expectantly for God to reveal His will to them. A sense of reverence and awe pervaded the people as they watched God's presence descend upon Mount Sinai and deliver the Ten Commandments to them in person. Consider the following:

1. The first half of the ten commandments delineated Israel's

responsibilities to God. The last half outlined Israel's relationship to one another, and to the peoples around them. Israel's duties to God had to come first or their relationships with others would break down. Jesus asserted years later that the first and greatest commandment is to, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Jesus summed up the second commandment this way, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:37-39). Make your relationship with God the most important thing in your life, and everything else will fall into place.

2. As their creator, God had the right, without justification, to demand the Israelites obey all His commandments. Instead of simply making this demand and promising punishment if they disobeyed, God chose to establish a covenant with His people based on the suzerain/vassal model common in antiquity. Academics Walter Elwell and Barry Beitzel say, "Modern biblical scholarship has established that the Sinai covenant and its renewals were formally patterned after a particular type of human covenant, namely the suzerainty treaty of the ancient world (an agreement between a great power and a lesser power)."¹ These agreements often consisted of a weaker nation swearing fealty (loyalty) to a stronger nation based on the good things that the suzerain (strong) nation had done for the vassal (weak) nation. God specifically cited the Red Sea deliverance as the reason Israel should obey His commands and agree to the terms of His covenant (19:4, 20:2). Under the terms of the agreement, Israel agreed to obey God in exchange for His blessings.

3. In the ancient world, human kings dictated the law of the land based on personal whims. In the book of Daniel, for example, King Nebuchadnezzar changed the law so that all citizens of Babylon had to bow down and worship a golden idol he made (Daniel 3). Famously, King Hammurabi wrote his code of 282 laws onto pillars of basalt called steles and set them in public places for all to see. Israel, on the other hand, had no capricious human king in this period. Instead, God laid out 10 simple laws as a succinct summary and an initial stipulation of His covenant with them. God, as Israel's divine Deliverer King, designed these commands to protect and help Israel. Notice the good consequences that God promises will follow if the people obey His commandments (19:5-6). While the Lord owns the entire earth, His chosen people would become a special light to the other nations, a city on a hill, and a nation of priests if they followed these rules. The uniqueness of Israel in Biblical history

stemmed not from their ancestry alone but from their obedience to God's commandments. The Jewish people to this day view the giving of the Sinaitic covenant and the Ten Commandments as the pinnacle of Biblical revelation, like Americans may view the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution for the founding of our nation.

In our culture, we associate boundaries with limitations on our personal freedom. Lists of rules and regulations feel old fashioned or outright offensive. God imposed healthy, appropriate boundaries on His people to protect them from themselves and to make them into a holy, set apart, and special nation. While the Sinaitic Covenant no longer binds Christians to follow the ten commandments, Paul acknowledges in Galatians 3:24 that the law served as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, who perfectly fulfilled the law (Matt 5:17-20). The 10 commandments should produce in us awe and reverence for God, their author. They should also remind us of our own sinfulness and the many ways in which we fall short of God's ideals.

Point to Ponder

God's commandment framework provides a wise hedge of protection from evil to this day.

From Learning to Living

We tend to concoct our own man-made religion in place of God's revelation. We think we know better than He does, so we disobey His commandments. We often violate the first half of the Ten Commandments when we worship money, fame, comfort, or power instead of God. We violate the second half of the commandments when we selfishly pursue those things that we've elevated above God at the expense of others in our lives. Look at your idols. What graven images have you made in your heart? Commit to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind and ruthlessly eliminate anything you worship in place of Him.

Prayer Point

"Communicator God, you have shown me what you expect clearly. Use your law to reveal the depths of my own depravity. Wash away my feelings of unworthiness, insignificance, bitterness, and hurt in the blood of your Son, Jesus."

LESSON 35

The Book of the Covenant | The Rest of God's Laws

The Yanomami people of Venezuela greet one another in a uniquely animistic fashion. Always on the lookout for evil spirits or warring factions that might pose as a member of their clan, they ask anyone they encounter on the trail, "Are you really you?" The answer makes the difference between loosing an arrow or loosing a warm, familial greeting. Closer to our world, multi-factor authentication or two factor authentication makes it much harder for hackers to pose as you and break into your electronic accounts. Rather than simply typing a password, multi-factor authentication systems send you an email or text message with a one-time code. Although a hacker might guess your password, they can never guess both your password and your secret code.

God used multi-factor authentication when He ratified His covenant with His people. God communicated His expectations clearly, then waited for a response. In unison, the Israelites cried out multiple times, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do!" (Ex 19:8, 24:3,7). In a sense, God asked the Israelites the question, "Are you really my people?" Let's read:

Key Scripture

God applied and elaborated on the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) in its civil and religious implications for the nation. This section was later called the "Book of the Covenant" based on that phrase in Exodus 24:7. The Book of the Covenant covers Exodus 20:22-23:33. After God thoroughly explained the covenant, He asked His people to ratify it in chapter 24.

Exodus 24 1Then He said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance. 2Moses alone, however, shall approach the LORD, but they shall not approach, nor shall the people come up with him."

3Then Moses came and reported to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!" 4And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he got up early in

the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve memorial stones for the twelve tribes of Israel. 5And he sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. 6Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it as the people listened; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" 8So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

9Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, 10and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. 11Yet He did not reach out with His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank.

12Now the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and stay there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the Law and the commandments which I have written for their instruction." 13So Moses got up along with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. 14But to the elders he said, "Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a legal matter, have him approach them." 15Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. 16The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. 17And to the eyes of the sons of Israel, the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. 18Then Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

Recommended reading: Ex 20-24

Moses spoke God's laws to the Israelites. After their clear response, God applied the law as a moment-by-moment test of the integrity of His people's new identity. Obedience to God's law sent a clear message to everyone the Israelites met, "We belong to God." A solemn covenant ceremony followed that would have had legal and binding ramifications for both God and His people. Next, Moses formally wrote down the laws, built an altar, erected 12 stones for each of the 12 tribes, offered sacrifices, and sprinkled blood from the sacrificed oxen on the stones and the people. In a captivating ceremony that God never repeated, Moses, Aaron, and the 70 elders of Israel ascended the mountain, saw God, and partook in a meal with Him. Finally, God called Moses up Mt. Sinai to receive stone tablets

containing God's commandments. Consider the following...

1. The book of the covenant addressed areas of daily life as they related to God, to fellow Israelites, and the surrounding nations. The law addressed issues such as the nuances of worship, slavery, capital punishment, physical injury, thievery, neglect, property, borrowing, sexual sin, idolatry, and poverty. The book of the covenant also discussed ceremonial concerns, such as how to keep the Sabbath and how to observe festival days. Reading the list of regulations today, we easily divorce them from their relational context. For example, Exodus 23:19b says, "You must not cook a young goat in its mother's milk." God gave this law to set Israel apart from the wicked nations surrounding them who performed evil ceremonies involving young goats. According to Andrew Reed, "Law is a reflection of relationship. Law flows from grace, and not the reverse."¹ Healthy relationships have boundaries, clear expectations, and two-way communication. God gave His laws with the goal of establishing and deepening a relationship with His people.

2. Blood covenants like the one described in Exodus 24:6-8 would appear barbaric to modern eyes. The blood served as a physical and visible symbol that ratified the covenant. The sprinkled blood made the sacredness of the ceremony visceral and real for those present. Blood would have stained their clothes, dripped into their eyes, spattered their hair, and permeated their senses. Hebrews 9:19-20 provides a few more details for us, "For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you.'" Hundreds of years later, the blood of Jesus would seal and ratify a new covenant of grace, one which Jesus discussed with His disciples at the last supper, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood," (Luke 22:20). Just as the sprinkling of blood represented the consecration of God's people in Exodus, Hebrews emphasized the difference that Jesus's blood made for believers, "Let's approach God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience..." (Heb 10:22). The sprinkled blood gives believers the multi-factor authentication we need to approach God boldly. We have nothing to hide. We belong to Him.

3. In the final verses of the ratification of the covenant, Aaron, his sons, Moses, and the 70 elders of Israel saw God and ate a meal with Him (9-11). They did not look directly at Him, as Exodus 33:20 states that no man has seen God and lived. Instead, they caught a glimpse of a blue pavement at God's feet. This rings true with what we know from Ezekiel 1:26, which describes the throne of God as made of pure blue sapphire. This special meal reminds us that God made us for fellowship with Him. Imagine sharing a meal with God Himself. How will that conversation begin? What would you ask first?

If God asked you today, "Are you really mine?", how would you answer? If you have accepted Jesus and His sacrifice for you, God's multi-factor authentication has you covered. Jesus's sprinkled blood, the Holy Spirit, and a burning desire inside you to, "do all that the Lord has commanded" automatically answer the question for you, proving your identity. You can confidently enter God's presence, an unworthy recipient of the new covenant in Jesus's blood.

Point to Ponder

Jesus's blood, the Holy Spirit, and my desire to follow God prove I belong to Him.

From Learning to Living

Watching God's interactions with His people in the past gives us confidence. God behaves predictably, communicates clearly, and desires fellowship with us. When life hurts, however, God feels distant, silent, and unpredictable. Like the confirmation of the covenant in Exodus 24 or the transfiguration of Jesus in Matthew 17, sometimes God grants us mountaintop experiences where He reveals glimpses of Himself to us. Those moments transform us forever. Write about a mountaintop experience you've had with God, and how He showed Himself to you. Re-read that account when He feels distant.

Prayer Point

"God of incomparable beauty, I have glimpsed your glory in your Word. Remind me of the miracles you've performed throughout history and in my life. Thank-you for providing so many ways to prove I'm your child."

LESSON 36

Golden Calf Compromise

A man who worked in a distant land patiently counted down the days to his wedding. Unexpectedly, his employer granted him permission to go see his fiancé two days early. Overjoyed, the bridegroom pictured his future bride and her exclamations of delight at his early arrival during the long journey home. Although he arrived in his hometown after midnight, the man could not delay seeing his bride-to-be any longer. He rushed to her house. From a distance he heard laughter, dancing, and music. As he drew closer, he saw lights, decorations, and crowds of people gathered for a great celebration on her father's lawn. He burst through the garden gate, confused by the commotion, and immediately spotted his fiancé in the arms of another man. The wedding guests cheered the smiling woman's union with her new husband. The forgotten man walked away sadly, crushed by his fiancé's betrayal. In Exodus 32, see how God's heart broke as He observed His people break their covenant vows just days after making them:

Key Scripture

Exodus 32 *Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled around Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt—we do not know what happened to him." 2Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." 3So all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. 4Then he took the gold from their hands, and fashioned it with an engraving tool and made it into a cast metal calf; and they said, "This is your god, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." 5Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD." 6So the next day they got up early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and got up to engage in lewd behavior.*

7Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have behaved corruptly. 8They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a cast metal calf, and have worshiped it

and have sacrificed to it and said, 'This is your god, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!'" 9Then the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. 10So now leave Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation."

[Moses pleaded for the people and God relented of His burning anger. Moses descended the mountain and found the people prostituting themselves before the idol. Imagine the horror Moses experienced as he watched the people of Israel breaking the laws he has just received from the God they were supposedly worshipping! Exodus 32:11-18]

19 And it came about, as soon as Moses approached the camp, that he saw the calf and the people dancing; and Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. 20 Then he took the calf which they had made and completely burned it with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink it.

Moses breaking the tablets of the covenant represented far more than a senseless act of blind rage and frustration. When Moses broke the tablets, he visibly illustrated how the people had already shattered their covenant with God. In just forty days the people had utterly forgotten their enthusiastic vow, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!" (Ex 24:3b). As punishment, Moses ground the golden calf into dust, sprinkled it into water, and made the Israelites drink it (32:20). If the people wanted their gold back, they would have to pan their own excrement to get it! Just like the shattered tablets, this graphic illustration demonstrated clearly just how far the people had fallen from fellowship with God. Consider the following:

1. Just like Adam and Eve in the garden, the Israelites began to doubt God and His Word. Up until Moses climbed the mountain to receive the stone tablets, the people had enjoyed constant communication with God via Moses. This new silence felt too long. They violated the second commandment by building themselves a golden image intended to represent the physical presence of the Lord (32:4), and then they rose to commit lewd acts together (32:6), violating other commandments in the process. According to some scholars, the people did not intentionally replace God by worshiping another god. They demanded Aaron create a physical, visible representation of Jehovah God and a physical place at which to worship Him. It seems likely that at least some of the people also violated the first commandment as well, "You shall have no other Gods before me,"

(Exodus 20:3). We often follow the same path when we break God's laws. First, we begin to doubt when God doesn't conform to our ideals. God's perceived silence feels like confirmation of our doubts. Second, we place something or someone above God or we recreate God in our own image. Finally, we commit acts that dishonor God and debase our bodies and minds.

2. In his final sermon, New Testament martyr Stephen stated that the children of Israel, "Rejected [God] and turned back to Egypt in their hearts, saying to Aaron, 'Make us a god...'" (Acts 7:39-40). It felt as natural for the people to bow down to a golden calf as it was to breathe. Seemingly without any qualms or misgivings, they blended man-made religion into their worship of God! The text doesn't specify, but perhaps Aaron modeled this golden cow after Apis, the Egyptian god of fertility and agriculture, which Egyptians represented as a sacred bull.¹ Note the overlap between the rituals performed during the covenant ceremony (Ex. 24) and the rituals the people performed in front of the golden calf. In both chapters, they built an altar, offered peace and burnt offerings, and shared a covenant meal. Humans still pervert God's instructions and create blended, man-made versions of true religion today. Some Christians reduce God to a cosmic Santa Clause or a captive genie in a bottle who grants wishes. Our culture offers us endless tropes and cheap knockoffs to worship in place of the true God.

3. Discerning Aaron's culpability in the story is difficult. Bible commentators Jamieson, Faucet, and Brown hold the view that the people essentially forced Aaron to build the golden calf. The NASB translation states "the people assembled around Aaron," (32:1) but Jamieson, Faucet, and Brown claim the Hebrew word *al* (around) should be translated "against Aaron in a tumultuous manner, to compel him to do what they wished."² Aaron certainly lost sight of the truth and sinned. In Exodus 32:21-24, Aaron essentially claimed he threw some gold into a pot and out popped a golden calf, as if by magic! While Aaron was not immediately punished for his actions, he never entered the promised land, and Leviticus 10 tells us he watched his sons Nadab and Abihu die at the hand of the Lord after they violated God's instructions. Like Aaron, we quickly generate excuses and fantastical scenarios to explain away our guilt. God sees through these false narratives to our hearts.

The law serves as a schoolmaster to bring us to God, (Galatians 3:3,4) and it served this purpose in Exodus 32. Later, in Exodus 35-40, the people generously and obediently responded to God's tabernacle instructions in a sign of true repentance. In chapter 40, God's presence entering the tabernacle demonstrated His forgiveness and restoration of the covenant pact. As God eloquently stated in Exodus 34:6-7, "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in faithfulness and truth; who keeps faithfulness for thousands, who forgives wrongdoing, violation of His Law, and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished..." Today, the law continues to bring us to Christ (Gal. 2:24). The law's rigid, inflexible nature reveals our sin, but we see God's love, grace, and forgiveness in Jesus.

Point to Ponder

Waiting on God's promises is hard, but compromise has consequences.

From Learning to Living

Like the fiancé waiting for her bridegroom, Christians waiting for Jesus to return often drift away to other, more immediate concerns. Jesus can feel far away. We question His intentions toward us, our understanding of His instructions, and whether He is still on His throne. In life's confusion, our inner dialogue makes up stories about God and His faithfulness. To counteract this tendency, lean on the promises found in the written Word of God, rather than on human wisdom. When Jesus returns, will He find you in the arms of something or someone else?

Prayer Point

"God of second chances, thank you for turning from your burning wrath against me and forgiving me. Help me identify areas of compromise in my life. Thank-you for giving your law so that we would know your standards clearly. Help me to live in light of your grace, constantly reminding myself of who you declared me to be."

LESSON 37

God Meets With Mankind

William Whyte said, “The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion it has taken place.” Unlike fallen humans who frequently make mistakes in communication, God always communicates clearly with man. For example, God gave Moses detailed instructions about how to build a sanctuary or tabernacle tent. The tabernacle served as a mobile focus of God’s presence, His Shekinah glory (Ex 40:34). From it, God delivered comfort, direction, and chastisement to His people. As you read through the instructions for the tabernacle in Exodus 25-31, note the rich details God provided to Moses. Faithfulness to God’s aesthetic and dimensional requirements demonstrated faith and complete obedience on the part of the chosen people. Similarly, the people’s joyful and abundant contributions in the form of offerings demonstrated their love for Him. Finally, the beautiful craftsmanship of the skilled workers who built items for the tabernacle and worshipped God as they worked. God left nothing to chance or to human imagination when he gave Moses these detailed instructions:

Key Scripture

Exodus 25 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Tell the sons of Israel to take a contribution for Me; from everyone whose heart moves him you shall take My contribution. 3 This is the contribution which you are to take from them: gold, silver, and bronze, 4 violet, purple, and scarlet material, fine linen, goat hair, 5 rams’ skins dyed red, fine leather, acacia wood, 6 oil for lighting, balsam oil for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, 7 onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece. 8 Have them construct a sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them. 9 According to all that I am going to show you as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, so you shall construct it.

Ark of the Covenant

10 “Now they shall construct an ark of acacia wood two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high. 11 You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and you shall make a gold molding around it.

Exodus 26

The Veil and Curtain

31 “You shall also make a veil of violet, purple, and scarlet material, and fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim, the work of a skilled embroiderer. 32 Then you shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, their hooks also of gold, on four bases of silver. 33 You shall hang up the veil under the clasps, and bring in the ark of the testimony there within the veil; and the veil shall serve as a partition for you between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place.

Exodus 27

The Bronze Altar

1 “Now you shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide; the altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits. 2 You shall make its horns on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze.

Exodus 28

Garments of the Priests

1 “Then bring forward to yourself your brother Aaron, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to serve as priest to Me—Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s sons. 2 And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty.

God’s physical presence in the tabernacle comforted His people during the transitional and difficult period ahead. The future proved tumultuous and confusing as they sought to establish themselves in a new land hostile to them and to their God. Hundreds of years later, King Solomon finally built a permanent temple in Jerusalem. God’s presence descended to dwell physically in that structure (2 Chronicles 7). God told Solomon at that time, “If My people who are called by my name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear them from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to prayer made in this place.” God’s physical presence spoke volumes about His attentiveness to Israel’s needs. Consider the following:

1. God designed everything in the tabernacle to convey His glory and holiness. The Ark of the Covenant, with its golden cherubim and precious contents, stayed out of sight in the Holy of Holies. Ornate veils and curtains physically separated man from God’s Shekinah glory. Only the high priest would view the ark once a year on the Day of Atonement. These things visibly and physically illustrated God’s

unique status as “set apart” from His worshippers. As one moved from the outer court into the inner sanctuary, the vessels and furniture became more ornate and the materials more costly. For example, the altar in the outer tabernacle courtyard was overlaid with bronze while the items in the inner sanctuary were overlaid with gold. Similarly, the priests who served in the outer court wore robes of plain linen while the high priest wore an ornate, sacred breastplate over a colorful apron called an ephod, designed to depict God’s kingly status. As Exodus 28:2 states, the garments created an impression of glory and beauty. In some ways, the tabernacle became a mobile Mount Sinai. Just like the tabernacle, Sinai featured distinct boundaries delineating appropriate zones for the general assembly, the elders, and Moses, the sole person allowed to approach God’s glory at the peak.

2. Bible scholar Andrew Reid notes the tabernacle served as a step closer toward God’s original design in Eden. God once walked and talked freely with Adam and Eve, but sin broke the innocent fellowship they enjoyed. Reid wrote, “Through the medium of the sanctuary, God is conveyed as being enthroned in the midst of his people. He was present or immanent among his people. However, at the same time, the tabernacle with its glorious promise of God’s presence also demonstrated that there was a proper way to approach him.”² Looking back at God’s redemptive history, we can see God continues to push humanity closer toward His Eden ideal. For believers today, Jesus serves as our High Priest and perfect sacrifice. We praise Jesus as Immanuel, God with us (Is 7:14). Unlike the high priest who entered the Holy of Holies once a year by the blood of animals, Jesus entered once by His own blood, according to Hebrews 9:12. He ushers us into the Holy of Holies, covered by His blood. Hebrews 5:16 says, “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Just like He did in the tabernacle, however, God provides only one very specific way to approach His throne: the blood of Jesus. Nothing else will suffice.

3. The tabernacle represented a culturally appropriate and relevant way to communicate truth in the late bronze age. Archeological evidence reveals other nations in the ancient near east, including Egypt, also set up mobile tabernacles or tents that glorified their false gods.³ Today, we have the benefit of God’s complete revelation, but we continue to develop new ways to communicate the redemptive

message of Jesus to a dying world. Things like stage lights, projector screens, surround sound, and swiveling cameras have their Old Testament equivalents in the skill and craftsmanship that the Israelites poured into producing breastplates, curtains, and altars. When your message matters, you spare no expense to communicate it clearly.

Point to Ponder

The Word became flesh and dwelt (tabernacled) among us, and we have seen His glory. (John 1:14)

From Learning to Living

Our culture has unique barriers to accepting the gospel, just like the Israelites did. As we take the message of Jesus to a lost and dying world, the tabernacle teaches us two crucial lessons for today. First, we should imitate God in His communicative clarity as we share the gospel. Second, we should not diminish God's holiness. Sometimes in our haste to get the message out, we compromise with our culture. Some churches have gone overboard on the visual production of a polished performance while softening or eliminating the divisive truth of the gospel and God's holiness. Be careful in your own witnessing to craft a message that clearly presents Jesus as Savior while also honoring God as King.

Prayer Point

“God, thank-you that I can boldly approach you. Thank-you for dwelling in me, and for working through me. Make me a clean, earthen vessel of your Shekinah glory, broken and spilled out to a lost and dying world.”

LESSON 38

God Requires a Blood Substitute

The things that matter most cost a great deal. An original painting by a great master costs much more than an imitation from Amazon. A PhD costs more in time and money than a Bachelor's degree. A Lexus costs more than a Toyota. Similarly, burnt offerings in the Levitical system cost God's people a great deal more than a simple grain offering or a peace offering. 2 Samuel 24:24 states, "I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." Only burnt offerings required the total surrender of the whole animal. Seeing all that delicious meat go up in smoke reminded the Israelites of the high price God demanded to declare his people clean or "atoned" in His sight. Read the Levitical instructions below carefully, keeping this information in mind.

Key Scripture

Leviticus 1

The Law of Burnt Offerings

1 Now the Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When anyone of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or the flock. 3 If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, so that he may be accepted before the Lord. 4 And he shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, so that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf. 5 Then he shall slaughter the bull before the Lord; and Aaron's sons the priests shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

Leviticus 16

Law of Atonement

2 The Lord said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the atoning cover which is on the ark, or he will die; for I will appear in the cloud over the atoning cover. 3 Aaron shall enter the Holy Place with this: with a bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering.

The sacrificial system traces its roots back to Adam and Eve's sin in the garden. Although Adam and Eve sinned, their guilt was transferred to the innocent animals God slaughtered to cover their nakedness and sin. After this event, burnt offerings began to play a key role in Old Testament worship. For example, Noah offered a burnt offering to God after disembarking from the ark (Genesis 8:20). Abraham intended to offer Isaac as a burnt offering until God substituted a ram for Isaac, which became the burnt offering in his place (Gen 22:2). The prophet Samuel offered a lamb as a burnt offering while crying out to the Lord for deliverance from the hand of the Philistines (1 Samuel 7:9). Other examples abound. Although God commanded daily burnt offerings on behalf of the entire assembly, individuals also made burnt offerings at will during times of thanksgiving, after committing sin, or while seeking an answer from God about a specific issue. Consider the following:

1. Leviticus gives us rich, abundant detail about the sacrificial process and the theological implications of the various offerings God demanded. Leviticus 1:9 states, "and the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord." This pleasing aroma signified God accepted the offering given. In Leviticus 1, the Spirit of God outlines in detail the types of animals accepted for a burnt offering of atonement: male bulls, sheep, or goats without any blemish. The individual who brought a sacrifice would lay his hand on the offering, symbolically transferring his guilt and shame to the helpless animal, harkening back to Adam and Eve. According to F. Duane Lindsey, "The word translated 'to lay his hand on' means 'resting or supporting oneself' on the animal. Through this act the worshiper identified himself with the animal as his substitute."¹ The apostle Paul talked about the ultimate fulfillment of this symbol when he wrote, "He made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him," (2 Cor 5:21). In the same way that Old Testament Israelites rested in the efficacy of their atonement covering (the blood of animals) we rest or lean on the efficacy of our atonement covering (the blood of Jesus).

2. Once a year, a High Priest entered the Holy of Holies behind the veil of the tabernacle on the Day of Atonement after completing a burnt offering and a sin offering. On this day the priest risked his life

if he failed to follow any of the instructions perfectly and accidentally viewed the Shekinah glory of God. On that special day, Aaron not only sprinkled blood on the altar outside in the court of the tabernacle but he would also sprinkle blood on the ark of the covenant itself. This event expressed Israel's need for God and marked a turning or repentance from sin for the entire community. Only this purification ritual could symbolically cleanse the stain of sin from the people and allow God's presence to continue to physically dwell with the Israelites.

3. Modern readers often wonder why the Old Testament system of sacrifice required so much blood. In Genesis 4, God rejected Abel's bloodless sacrifice of crops from his garden. Blood contains the life essence of the animal sacrificed (Lev 17:13-14). In the case of the burnt offering, blood served a cleansing and purification function for both the offerer and for the altar, to make it ritually pure in preparation for the holy ceremony. According to the IVP Bible Background Commentary, "The sprinkling of the blood on all sides of the altar is the symbolic means of applying the death of the animal to the purging of any contamination that might interfere with the entreaty that is being made on the occasion of the sacrifice. The blood represents the life/death of the animal, and the altar represents the sanctuary (God's presence) and is specifically the place where a request before God would be made."²

4. Unfortunately, the blood of bulls, lambs and goats could never completely remove sin. The sacrificial system implemented by God at Mount Sinai only temporarily covered up or put a Band-Aid on the real problem. Jesus became the perfect sacrifice that fully atoned for the sins of mankind. Sin has costly consequences. Because sin separates us from God, Jesus had to go to great lengths and sacrifice his own body, becoming our offering to God. Just like the offerings that ancient Israelites offered at the tent of meeting, the blood of Jesus had to be shed for sin to be forgiven.

We struggle to read Leviticus today because we feel disconnected from things like blood sacrifices. We often read these detailed instructions with a secret sigh of relief, "Phew, I'm glad I don't have to worry about any of that!" God intended, however, that we would read Leviticus to learn about His character. Leviticus shows us that God always devises a way to restore sinners to a right relationship

with Him. Leviticus teaches us that true discipleship will cost us dearly. Leviticus reminds us that our behavior, attitudes, habits, and routines can separate us from God. Ultimately, Jesus's sacrifice drips off every page, fulfills every analogy, and completes the full picture of tabernacle worship.

Point to Ponder

If following Jesus Christ doesn't cost you anything, it's because you've bought into 'American Christianity.' -Paul Washer

From Learning to Living

Have you become lax in your approach to worshipping or following God? Our culture increasingly discourages formality, ceremony, and respect for authority. The God revealed in Leviticus, however, specified meticulous and detailed procedures for approaching Him. The cost for violating even one instruction on the day of atonement meant death for the High Priest. Only unblemished animals offered produced a pleasing aroma acceptable to God. Today, the only basis for a right relationship with God is through Jesus's blood. The New Testament provides details on how a Christian should live in areas of purity, reverence for God, and proper worship.

Prayer Point

"Dear heavenly Father, thank you for rescuing me through the blood of Jesus. You repaired our relationship once and for all so I could sacrifice diligently for You. Help me to 'count the cost' of following you."

LESSON 39

Kadesh Barnea: Resistance or Rest

To this point in history, God has regularly led his people to faith stretching moments of decision. Picture Adam's and Eve's decision at the forbidden fruit tree in the Garden of Eden, or Noah pondering a set of immense boat plans, Abraham possessing a land teeming with Canaanites, or Joseph sentenced to waste away in a dungeon in Egypt. Each one of these had a simple choice. They could choose to either move forward with God in childlike trust or reject His ownership over their lives and figure things out on their own.

In the following passage God brought His people to a difficult moment of decision at Kadesh Barnea. In Numbers 13 God said in effect, "I brought you this far. I promised to overcome all the obstacles. Now trust me and enter my promised land." God gifted His people the opportunity to trust Him in an extremely challenging and perplexing situation. Will they trust God's heart more than their own human instincts? Read the following passage to see what they decide.

Key Scripture

God's people arrive at a place called Kadesh Barnea. They are so close to the Promised Land! About 35 miles south of where they could have begun possessing the cities God gave them.

Numbers 13

1Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2"Send out men for yourself to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am going to give the sons of Israel; you shall send a man from each of their fathers' tribes, every one a leader among them."

[Prominent men were chosen from every tribe. Joshua represented the tribe of Ephraim and Caleb the tribe of Judah]

17When Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, he said to them, "Go up there into the Negev; then go up into the hill country. 18See what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many. 19And how is the land in which

they live, is it good or bad? And how are the cities in which they live, are the people in open camps or in fortifications? 20And how is the land, is it productive or unproductive? Are there trees in it or not? And show yourselves courageous and get some of the fruit of the land.”

[The spies went to spy out the land. They returned with a cluster of grapes so large they had to carry it with a pole! However, the spies also observed heavily fortified cities and fierce people groups. They reported all this to Moses.]

27 So they reported to him and said, “We came into the land where you sent us, and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And indeed, we saw the descendants of Anak there!

[This bad news disheartened God’s people and put them in an uproar. God was angered by their lack of faith. However, Caleb’s response honored God.]

30 Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will certainly prevail over it.” 31 But the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, because they are too strong for us.” 32 So they brought a bad report of the land which they had spied out to the sons of Israel, saying, “The land through which we have gone to spy out is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are people of great stature. 33 We also saw the Nephilim there (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”

Numbers 14:1-10

Then all the congregation raised their voices and cried out, and the people wept that night. 2 And all the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the entire congregation said to them, “If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or even if we had died in this wilderness! 3 So why is the Lord bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder! Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?” 4 So they said to one another, “Let’s appoint a leader and return to Egypt!”

5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel. 6 And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; 7 and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, “The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. 8 If the Lord is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us—a land which flows with milk and honey. 9 Only do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection is gone from them,

and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.” 10 But all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Then the glory of the Lord appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel.

Using the grape harvest as an estimating tool, the spies left Kadesh Barnea at the end of July. Two months after leaving Egypt. The spies reached the Northernmost regions of the Promised Land and passed through Hebron, where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob were buried in the cave that Abraham had purchased hundreds of years before (Gen 23:17). Altogether, the spies walked over 250 miles and likely returned the middle of September. God intended their journey to be a euphoric discovery of all the good things He had prepared for them. Instead, they anticipated defeat and became angry with God and their leaders. This human capacity to waffle between a walk of faith and a walk of sight should give us pause. Consider the following:

1. This rebellion at Kadesh Barnea revealed stark differences between God and man. On the one hand, God’s kind intentions toward His people included a detailed plan of deliverance and rest. God desired to place His representatives (Israel) in a strategic land to witness to the world! In contrast Israel displayed selfishness, fatalism, and frustration. The Kadesh crowd committed “assumacide” about God’s good intentions by exclaiming, “So why is the Lord bringing us into this land to fall by the sword?” (Num 14:3). Bringing God down to their level was like passing judgement on God. When we are tempted to put God’s character “on trial” He patiently teaches us that, “The being of God is its own defense.”¹ In other words, God is good and infuses all His actions with goodness. He can and should be trusted!

2. In God’s response to Moses, note the relational overtones toward Israel in spite of their unbelief at Kadesh Barnea, “How long will this people spurn me? And how long will they not believe in me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?” (Num 14:11). Moses replied by interceding for Israel and God forgave them at Moses’s word (vs. 20). Then God swore two solemn oaths. The first was that despite Israel’s unbelief, “...all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord,” (vs. 21), and the second was, “...your corpses will fall in this wilderness,” (vs. 32). Except for Joshua and Caleb, who trusted God, not one adult of that generation entered the Promised Land. Remember this thought when you struggle with the goodness of God: “It’s the judgment of God that makes the grace of

God matter”- Dennis McCallum.

3. Just before the men left to spy out the land, God gave Joshua a new name (Numbers 13:16). God changed his name from Hoshea meaning, “He saves,” to Joshua which means, “The Lord saves.” The Greek equivalent to Joshua’s new name is Jesus!² In Joshua’s name, God left us yet another breadcrumb in the Old Testament to point us to Christ in the New Testament.

Point to Ponder

“God is too good to be unkind and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart.” - Charles Spurgeon

From Learning to Living

Consider for a moment how many of these critical moments of decision like Kadesh Barnea God has brought you to in your relationship with Him. Choose to trust His heart more than your human wisdom and rest comfortably in His care.

Prayer Point

“Dear gracious God. You are moving your redemption program forward and you desire to place me in strategic and often difficult places to testify of your grace. I will give my time, my resources, and even my life to serve your purposes. All I have is yours.”

LESSON 40

Wilderness of Unbelief

You might have heard about the crew of Peruvian sailors who came upon a strange sight in South America some years ago. An exhausted, dehydrated crew of Spanish sailors lay sprawled out on their ship's deck, anchored off the coast of Brasil. The Peruvians hailed the Spanish ship and asked how they could help. The Spanish replied desperately, "Water! We need water!" The Peruvians, somewhat surprised, replied, "Lower your buckets!" The Spanish sailors responded weakly, "We need fresh water, or we'll die!" But the Peruvians continued to insist that the Spanish crew lower their buckets. Out of desperation, the Spanish crew gave up. Pulling the first bucket up, they discovered to their surprise that the water tasted sweet! Unknowingly, the ship had been anchored in the mouth of the Amazon river for days. Too far from the coast to see the land, the crew languished unaware that the powerful Amazon pumped millions of gallons of fresh water under their ship each day. These men nearly died of thirst inches from the thing they desperately needed!¹ Something similar took place while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness in Numbers 20. Desperately thirsty, they forgot God had sworn to lead them safely through the wilderness to the promised land.

Key Scripture

[After Israel failed to believe and move forward with God, the nation began to be plagued by tragedy. Korah, a member of the priestly tribe, rebelled against Aaron and Moses and God killed 14,700 people.]

Numbers 20 *1Then the sons of Israel, the whole congregation, came to the wilderness of Zin in the first month; and the people stayed at Kadesh. Now Miriam died there and was buried there.*

2There was no water for the congregation, and they assembled against Moses and Aaron. 3Then the people argued with Moses and spoke, saying, "If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD! 4Why then have you brought the LORD'S assembly into this wilderness, for us and our livestock to die here? 5Why did you make us come up from Egypt, to bring us into this wretched place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, nor is there water

to drink!" 6Then Moses and Aaron came in from the presence of the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them; 7then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 8"Take the staff; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it shall yield its water. So you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and have the congregation and their livestock drink."

9So Moses took the staff from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him; 10and Moses and Aaron summoned the assembly in front of the rock. And he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" 11Then Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their livestock drank. 12But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Since you did not trust in Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, for that reason you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

[Miriam, Aaron's sister, died. Aaron was stripped of his priestly garments and they were awarded to his son. Aaron died soon after and Israel mourned for him for thirty days. The land of Edom (Esau's descendants) refused to allow Israel safe passage through its land and as a result, the people grew travel-weary and thirsty. The Israelites lacked water so they began to grumble, complain and viciously accuse Moses. God responded with another severe punishment.]

Numbers 21 5So the people spoke against God and Moses: "Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we are disgusted with this miserable food." 6Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 7So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and against you; intercede with the LORD, that He will remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people. 8Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and put it on a flag pole; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, and looks at it, will live." 9So Moses made a bronze serpent and put it on the flag pole; and it came about, that if a serpent bit someone, and he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

First, note the fact that God patiently provided Israel with water in chapter 20. God is gracious. Next, note the fact that God provided a sure way of salvation, the bronze serpent, in chapter 21. God is merciful. The children of Israel forgot God's unchanging character. They obsessed about the negative aspects of their situation. They complained bitterly against Moses, God's representative. They questioned God's purposes, His plan, and His timing, even though

God had explicitly told them exactly how long they would wander in the wilderness in Numbers 14:34, “According to the number of days which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt a year, even forty years, and you will know My opposition.” No amount of complaining or arguing would change that punishment. The Israelite problem, it turns out, went much deeper than lack of water. Even their leaders lacked belief. Consider the following:

1. Numbers 20 marks the end of an era. Moses’s leadership over Israel will come to an untimely end due to his lack of faith, as demonstrated by his blatant disobedience. God told Moses in Numbers 20:8, “Speak to the rock... that it shall yield its water.” Instead, Moses struck the rock with his staff twice. While we can defend Moses by saying that he made a simple human mistake born of rage and frustration, this unacceptable failure had consequences (Num 20:12). Soon Moses passed the reins to his protégé Joshua, who led the people faithfully from that point forward. God also implicated Aaron in this incident. “Aaron will be gathered to his people; for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the sons of Israel, because you rebelled against My command at the waters of Meribah, (Num 20:24).” Aaron lost his priestly robes, and then died shortly thereafter on Mount Hor. In the blink of an eye, after 40+ years of faithfulness, both these men lost everything. The way you cross life’s finish line matters as much as the way you ran the race.

2. The same word translated “bronze” in 21:9 can also be translated “copper.”² Scholars increasingly believe the snake Moses created in the wilderness was likely made of copper, due to its red color and the fact that many copper mines have been excavated in the area around Mount Hor. Regardless of the material he used, Moses made the serpent as God commanded to save the people from the consequences of their sin. Those who accepted God’s method of salvation and willingly looked at the serpent Moses hoisted up on a pole escaped God’s punishment for their sin. Jesus would use this example to refer to Himself in John 3:14 “And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” The serpent in the wilderness became a “type” or a symbol of Christ, who did not just heal physical snakebites but healed the relationship between God and man.

In John 7:37-38, Jesus stood and cried out, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. The one who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” Jesus alone can grant the Holy Spirit, the seal of the believer, through His finished work on the cross. By “looking” to Jesus, we access living water that does not quench physical thirst, but spiritual thirst. We have the good news of fresh water for those who will die of thirst just inches from the source without knowing.

Point to Ponder

Who needs living water in your life? Have you told them to lower their bucket?

From Learning to Living

Think about your life. Do you see and experience God’s grace and mercy despite the difficulties you face? God knows about the difficulties. Sometimes He intentionally leads us through difficult circumstances (the wilderness) to lead us to Him. Before you complain, say a few words about God’s unchanging character and your belief in Him. Remember that we serve a crucified savior who taught us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us.

Prayer Point

“God of the wilderness, sometimes my heart wanders from you. I know you bring difficult things into my life to test me but sometimes it feels like you don’t have my best interest at heart. Show me the truth of your love toward me in your Word. Help me to look to Jesus, my refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. I will not fear, though the earth gives way, and the mountains fall into the sea (Psalm 46).”

LESSON 41

God Commissions Joshua

High school principals often face difficult challenges. But they are generally well-meaning leaders and carry their weighty responsibilities with grace and kindness. Principals are often called to stand bravely between order and chaos, and between weaker students and bullies. They usually wait patiently while students explain the behavior that lands them in their office. In one school, a principal emerged angrily from his office after a student threw another through a glass trophy case in the hallway! Miraculously, no one was hurt. But in that moment, students were grateful for an able leader to responsibly handle the situation. Most likely, we can name the leaders we presently serve under, and depending on the type of leader they are, we can choose to be grateful for them. Good leadership takes us from where we are to where we need to be.

Joshua became a leader of God's people when God commissioned him to lead the people into the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Num 27:18-23). But remember, Moses's disobedience disqualified him from entering the Promised Land (Deut. 34). Interestingly, God didn't ask Joshua's permission to heap this responsibility on his shoulders (Josh 1). God created Joshua, redeemed Joshua from Egypt with lamb's blood, and gifted him a new identity. God didn't have to ask permission. Joshua belonged to Him. Read the following verses with these thoughts in mind.

Key Scripture

***Numbers 27:18-23** So the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; 19 and have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and commission him in their sight. 20 And you shall put some of your authority on him, so that all the congregation of the sons of Israel will obey him. 21 Moreover, he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the Lord. At his command they shall go out, and at his command they shall come in, both he and all the sons of Israel with him, all the congregation." 22 Then Moses did just as the Lord commanded him; he*

took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. 23 Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, just as the Lord had spoken through Moses.

Deuteronomy 34:1-5 Now Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, 2 and all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, 3 and the Negev and the territory in the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. 4 Then the Lord said to him, “This is the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants’; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not go over there.” 5 So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, in accordance with the word of the Lord.

Joshua 1:1-6 Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’s servant, saying, 2 “Moses My servant is dead; so now arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel. 3 Every place on which the sole of your foot steps, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. 4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be your territory. 5 No one will be able to oppose you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not desert you nor abandon you. 6 Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.

Joshua’s commissioning took place before God, His priests, and the very people he would lead into dangerous circumstances. Moses charged Joshua to put God’s purposes above his personal priorities. Moses, the disqualified leader, laid his hands on Joshua, “conferring a blessing.”¹ This means that Moses initiated positive circumstances on Joshua, his replacement. Moses humbly, but willingly, relinquished his rights to the leadership position that he had shared with God for 40 years.

1. Throughout biblical history, in a world ruled by ego and brute force, God created his own style of leader called servant leaders. Servant leaders like Moses and Joshua placed God’s calling and the needs of their people above their own. Jesus modeled servant leadership when he knelt to wash the dirty feet of his disciples at the Last Supper. After he finished, he told his astonished disciples, “Now that I, your

Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet." (John 13:1-17) Jesus showed them that they could fulfill God's purposes while humbly serving others. The concept of servant leadership has caught on in our secular world. Scholar Justin A. Irving notes, "While servant leadership is a Biblically consistent model of leadership practice—and this alone is enough for leaders to utilize servant leadership practices—it is also helpful to know that servant leadership is demonstrably effective."² God chose the ideal leadership style to move His people forward.

2. Moses modeled servant leadership but he still had a less than ideal reaction to the non-stop whining and belly aching of God's people (Numbers 20). The people blamed Moses for every little discomfort and challenge they faced in the wilderness. This time, God's people faced a lack of water and nagging uncertainty about their future. Moses had enough, and fumed over their ungrateful attitude. When God instructed him to speak to a rock to extract water for the people, Moses instead angrily struck the rock twice! (Numbers 20:8-10) This seemingly insignificant act had dire consequences, because God denied Moses the very thing that he sacrificed so much for: entrance to the promised land! (Deut. 34:4)

3. Moses' rebellious act still reveals many aspects of God's nature and character because God still treated Moses with extreme tenderness. In the ancient world even though Moses brought shame on God by being spiteful, and culturally, Moses spat in God's face, God still escorted Moses to the top of Mt. Nebo and gave him a personal tour of the Promised Land (Deut. 34:1). What a wonderfully relational God we serve! Moses failed and suffered the consequences, but God did not view Him as a failure.

4. God declared, "Every place on which the sole of your foot steps, I have given it to you..." (Joshua 1:3), which means people already possessed the Promised Land, and would fully enjoy it when they trusted Him. Imagine someone you know hid a sum of money, told you the location, and offered it to you if you retrieved it. You knew about the money but unless you trusted the giver and went and found it, you would never possess it. This biblical principle of reckoning means you trust something is true with your mind, heart, and will. God gave His people the opportunity to trust His promises were true

and move forward by faith.

Have you ever considered God's own leadership style? He is infinitely creative yet unassuming. He sits on the throne of the universe, makes a way for us to approach Him, and gifts the riches of His grace to underserving recipients, who can possess it by simply taking Him at His word!

Point to Ponder

Since we already possess untold riches in Christ (Ephesian Ch. 1-3), couldn't we encourage each other with, "God blessed you," instead of the usual, "God bless you?"

From Learning to Living

Use the Google search engine and type, "215 things that are true of me now that I'm saved." Middletown Bible eChurch did a study of how many things we already possess in Christ. Enjoy!

Prayer Point

"God, thank You for being a kind generous leader who tenderly gives and guides us. You gifted us the unfathomable riches of Jesus to enjoy so we can thrive and not strive."

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The purpose of the Small Group Ministry is to be a vessel, through community, for discipleship. Small Groups are meant to reinforce the four scriptural principles set forth as the purpose of New Hope Church:

*“The purpose of this church is to glorify God by producing maturing followers (disciples) of Jesus Christ through the four scriptural principles of **Learning, Loving, Worship and Prayer.**”*

Small Groups will seek to accomplish this through creating a safe and supportive atmosphere for people to wrestle with the truths of God as they mature in their faith.

As Pastor Mark says, “What you believe about GOD determines what you DO next.” Based on this week’s Scripture, sermon, and devotional reading, please consider the following questions placed within these two categories:

GOD

1. What do you believe about God? What do you learn about God’s character from this week’s Scripture passage, message, and devotional?
2. What stirs up praise, love, or thankfulness to God? During prayer time, PRAISE HIM for who He is, His character, His attributes, or THANK HIM for what He has done/is doing.

DO

1. What do you learn about humanity or yourself specifically from this week’s Scripture passage, message, and devotional?
2. Is there something God is asking you to do? What do you believe you are to do next? How will you seek to be obedient to what you are learning?
3. What is the tension/challenge in obeying God? Can you identify what you are feeling or what’s causing a reaction?
4. How can your small group support you in yielding to what God wants you to do?
5. How can you pray for yourself or others according to these verses?

PRAYER TIME

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HOPE

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BOOK 4

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