



E2E

Eternity to Eternity

BOOK 3 | LESSONS 21-31

E2E

Eternity to Eternity

NEW HOPE CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

For just a moment try to put yourself in the sandals of two of Jesus's followers, who dazed by what they saw when Jesus died on the cross, left Jerusalem along the road to Emmaus, a small village about seven miles away.

Jesus's grisly death caused them to recoil in shock and horror. All of their messianic hopes seemingly melted away as Jesus's life blood oozed from the wounds in His broken body. These two men thoughtfully bantered back and forth as they struggled to make sense of Jesus's crucifixion.

Luke 24:15-27 “15While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. 16But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. 17And He said to them, “What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?” And they stood still, looking sad. 18One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, “Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?” 19And He said to them, “What things?” And they said to Him, “The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, 20and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. 21But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. 22But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, 23and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. 24“Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see.” 25And He said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26“Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” 27Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.”

Instantly it dawned on the two followers that their hero and friend, Jesus, was alive. They were being rebuked by the same Jesus for being “slow

of heart to believe” what the prophets had predicted about the Messiah! What a shock to their system that must have been!

Like the men on the road to Emmaus, it is possible to follow God and still be unclear about His plan and calling on our lives. Even though God has proven Himself faithful through the centuries to clearly communicate His plans, His people often largely ignore studying His writings. Also, it’s fascinating that Jesus remedied the travelers’ cluelessness with a review of God’s plans beginning in Genesis and ending at His resurrection. Jesus carefully describes a chronological journey through the scriptures to give His follower’s insight into God’s intentions.

As we begin our third book of the E2E series, Abraham’s son Isaac marries Rebekah, who gives birth to Jacob and Esau. Jacob and Rebekah conspire to steal Esau’s blessing, and Jacob becomes the father of the 12 tribes of Israel, who end up in captivity in Egypt. God uses reluctant Moses to redeem His people from the clutches of a bull-headed Pharaoh. We continue to carefully teach through these stories to gain a fuller understanding of who God is, who we are, and how to relate to Him. Just like Jesus did for the travelers on the road. Thank you for journeying with us. We pray that you enjoy these studies as much as we enjoyed putting them together for you.

My sons, Sam Bruce, tribal missionary in Asia Pacific and Ric Bruce, former missionary in Thailand and winner of a national writing contest, both contributed lessons in this book. Ric carefully edited the lessons and Jeanette McWaters, a MSU retiree with journalism background, painstakingly proofread through each lesson’s draft. Darla Prether prayed over each lesson’s page arrangement and graphic design. Samantha Fray gives the E2E series an online presence. I’m grateful to each of these for their kind contributions.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "RKB". The letters are stylized and connected, with a small flourish at the end of the "B".

Rich Bruce, Discipleship Pastor

LESSON 21

Isaac and Rebekah

Recently a church attendee mentioned how cool it was that the E2E book followed along with Pastor Mark’s sermons about Abraham and God’s people and their struggles. We read in the book and hear in the weekly messages how the people continually resist the urge to do what seems right, which is simply trust and obey God. For example, Abraham is so intimidated in Canaan he fearfully barter his wife Sarah away to foreign kings—twice! (*New American Standard Bible*, Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18). Thankfully, God intervened and spared Sarah both times. When Abraham chose to barter away Sarah, he simply followed the culture’s norms, and not what God wanted.

Just like Abraham, Esau valued the things of this world more than the things of God. As you read this section, picture the heart of God searching for men and women who would shed worldly thinking and align their thinking with His.

Key Scripture

Genesis 25 *19Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham’s son: Abraham became the father of Isaac; 20and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. 21Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. 22But the children struggled together within her; and she said, “If it is so, why then am I this way?” So she went to inquire of the LORD. 23The LORD said to her,*

*“Two nations are in your womb;
And two peoples will be separated from your body;
And one people shall be stronger than the other;
And the older shall serve the younger.”*

24When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. 25Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau. 26Afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau’s heel, so his name was called Jacob; and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them. 27When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob

was a peaceful man, living in tents. 28Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. 29When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; 30and Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished." Therefore his name was called Edom. 31But Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." 32Esau said, "Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?" 33And Jacob said, "First swear to me"; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

[Later when Isaac was about to die, he ordered Esau to kill a game animal, to prepare it the way he liked it and to bring it to his "blessings of the firstborn" ceremony. Rebekah overheard the conversation and she and Jacob conspired to steal the blessing of the firstborn from Esau. They deceitfully prepared an animal from their herd to taste like a wild animal, and presented it to the dim-sighted, aged Isaac. After eating the meal, Isaac mistakenly recited the blessing over Jacob and Jacob stole the blessing from Esau! Later when Esau showed up for his blessings...(See Genesis 27:1-31)]

Genesis 27 32 Isaac his father said to him, "Who are you?" And he said, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau." 33Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who was he then that hunted game and brought it to me, so that I ate of all of it before you came, and blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed." 34When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!" 35And he said, "Your brother came deceitfully and has taken away your blessing."

[Esau vowed to kill Jacob for stealing His family blessing but before Jacob fled, Isaac had some words of wisdom for him]

Genesis 28 1So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and charged him, and said to him, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. 2Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and from there take to yourself a wife from the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. 3May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples.

Suggested Reading Genesis chapters 25-32

Isaac the child of faith was prophesied to be the guardian of God's promises, not Ishmael who was the child of Sarah's desperate lack of faith. Sarah's death created tension to get a wife for Isaac and continue the chosen race. Isaac was a full 40 years old when he married Rebekah from his fathers' relatives (Genesis 24:1-67). Esau despised his birthright as the firstborn son and forfeited his right to

be the family spokesperson, judge, and priest. When Rebekah and Jacob deceived Isaac, Esau lost out on a double portion of his fathers' inheritance, including the right to bring forth the promised Deliverer, which was God's plan to save the world.

Consider the following:

1. Isaac and Rebekah each had their favorite son. Favoritism often creates a climate of angry, hurtful competition. In these situations, those who are favored are zealous to maintain their unfairly gained status, and the rest are cruelly left out and justifiably offended. A recent study concluded that 94% of companies have policies in place to prevent favoritism yet 75% of those surveyed have witnessed it firsthand. This is especially intriguing since only 23% of respondents admit to playing favorites. The study concluded that favoritism shades allocation of workload, pay scale, and even the covering up of mistakes.¹ Isaac and Rebekah fell prey to this harmful practice. As God's children they still had worldly thinking and behavior.

God on the other hand does not play favorites. The Bible states emphatically that God does not show partiality (Acts 10:34-35; Romans 2:9-11). He chose Jacob over Esau to carry on the promises. God values all men equally, but as owner of all reality He allowed Jacob to usurp faithless Esau. Jacob now must take on the responsibility to carry on the chosen race.

2. Esau is a great picture of what God's people look like when they favor the things of this world more than the things of God. Consider these verses, "15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world," (1st John 2:15-17). Scholar Charles Ryrie explains it this way, "Satan's aim is to create a system that rivals God's kingdom but that leaves Him out. It is to promote a counterfeit order. Basically, the Cosmos [i.e., the world] is evil because it leaves God out."² Steeped in worldly values, Esau thought very little of his family's spiritual legacy. Things of this world like food, freedom from pain, and safety overshadowed the grave importance of God's redemptive program. Later, Esau became the progenitor of the Edomites, who were a continual thorn in the side of Jacob's descendants as they resettled in the land of Canaan during the time of Joshua.

God, as the creator and owner of all things, desires to move His salvation program forward. He chose Abraham's descendants to be a walking, living, breathing, redemptive analogy for the world around them to observe and follow. This requires that God's people shed the instinctive, collective thinking of the people and culture around them, and use God's attributes (like His impartiality) as a guide for their thoughts and actions. Esau and Jacob each had their own issues, but God chose Jacob to wear the mantle of spiritual leadership in the ancient world. Then God embarked upon a process to steer Jacob away from his worldly tendencies (like deceiving others) and prepare him and his descendants to take on His thinking and character. Stay tuned.

Point to Ponder

God's people belong to God not to Satan. This changes everything.

From Learning to Living

Ask God if your efforts are for His purposes or your own. If we are a *friend of this world* then our spending, recreation, and entertainment are aimed toward Hollywood's glamour or current culture's priorities. If we're acting as *citizens of Heaven*, then everything we say and do is tempered by Heavenly priorities. Kid's sports teams, friend groups, and even workplace relationships are seen as places to evangelize and disciple, instead of anxiety producing arenas where we're competing only for earthly identity and importance. It's the difference between striving to be someone *here* or simply thriving in who God says I am *everywhere*.

Prayer Point

"Impartial God, Owner of all things, show me where I am stubbornly hanging on to the thinking and behavior of this fallen world. Help me to be transparent before Your Spirit as He uses Your Word to guide me, teach me, and exchange my earthly tendencies for Your Heavenly ones."

LESSON 22

Jacob, Leah and Rachel

Just as we sit in a stadium to observe the actions below, in His Word, God has gifted us stadium seating to witness the actions of His people. We have observed Abraham moving his family to Canaan by faith, Isaac mistakenly blessing Jacob, Jacob fleeing for his life from Esau, and Esau's seething jealousy. What a spectacle! While these stories clearly reveal mankind's doings, we must observe more closely to understand God's purposes for Jacob and ultimately for us.

Jacob is stressed about his life and preoccupied with running and checking for Esau in his rear-view mirror. In the meantime, God is intentionally preparing Jacob for life with Him. When we perceive life with God, and God's Word, as more of a training ground than a theme park, life with Him begins to make more sense. Because of his deception, Jacob found himself without Rebekah's protection. She was his beloved co-conspirator and mother. Jacob deceived Isaac but he was woefully unprepared to become the ambassador of God's promises. In the following passages God uses difficult circumstances to deconstruct Jacob's flawed perspective and replace it with His.

Key Scripture

[While Jacob's motivations for stealing Esau's birthright were not pure, Jacob was God's choice to steward the promises He made to Abraham. God made this clear in a dream as he fled for his life.]

Genesis 28:12-15 *12He [Jacob] had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie [Canaan], I will give it to you and to your descendants. 14Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15"Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."*

Genesis 29:1-6 *1Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the sons of the east. 2He looked, and saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep were lying there beside it, for from that well they watered the flocks. Now the stone on the mouth of the well was large. 3When all the flocks were gathered there, they would then roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well.4Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where are you from?" And they said, "We are from Haran." 5He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" And they said, "We know him." 6And he said to them, "Is it well with him?" And they said, "It is well, and here is Rachel his daughter coming with the sheep."*

[Jacob was gladly received by his uncle Laban (Rebekah's brother). Jacob arranged to work 7 years for Laban's daughter Rachel. After 7 long years Jacob married Rachel (or so he thought).]

Genesis 29:21-30 *Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my time is completed, that I may go in to her." 22Laban gathered all the men of the place and made a feast. 23Now in the evening he took his daughter Leah, and brought her to him; and Jacob went in to her. 24Laban also gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid. 25So it came about in the morning that, behold, it was Leah! And he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served with you? Why then have you deceived me?" 26But Laban said, "It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the firstborn. 27"Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also for the service which you shall serve with me for another seven years." 28Jacob did so and completed her week, and he gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife. 29Laban also gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid. 30So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and indeed he loved Rachel more than Leah, and he served with Laban for another seven years.*

[Jacob's wives and their handmaidens eventually bore Jacob 12 sons. These sons became the progenitors of the 12 tribes of Israel. Laban and Jacob lived in proximity to each other but tension built between them. Laban continued to deceive Jacob by making shady business deals with him. Eventually Jacob secretly packed up his family and fled Laban to return to Canaan where Esau possibly waited for vengeance. One night, as Jacob stressed about meeting Esau, God appeared to him in the form of a man and Jacob wrestled with God. As the night wore on, God finally put his hip out of joint and changed his name to Israel which means, "Struggles with God".]

Suggested Reading Genesis chapters 29-37

As seen in the passage above, Jacob is comforted by God's encouragement in his dream. Jacob stopped running from Esau and settled down with Laban, his mom's brother. However, Jacob lived

in constant tension. Esau, his arch enemy, blocked the way back to his home. Laban, his new employer, created a toxic environment with his constant dishonest treachery. Scripture records that Laban changed Jacob's wages ten times (New American Standard Bible, Genesis 31:7). God had Jacob in a pressure cooker designed to purify him of his tendency to manipulate others. Before he spent time with Laban, Jacob's life was marked by habitual deceit. After living with Laban, a few chapters later we observe Jacob humbly bowing down to receive Esau's forgiveness. A younger Jacob might have brashly made matters worse.

Consider the following:

1. Jacob's name in Hebrew means supplanter or deceiver. Jacob used his swindling skills to get what he wanted. Author and Bible teacher Paul David Tripp writes, "This is what sin does to us all. At a deep and often unnoticed level, sin replaces worship of God with worship of self. It replaces submission with self-rule. It replaces gratitude with demands for more. It replaces faith with self-reliance. It replaces vertical joy with horizontal envy. It replaces a rest in God's sovereignty with a quest for personal control. We live for our glory. We set up our rules. We ask others to serve our agenda."¹ Like most humans, Jacob lived in awe of what He wanted from life more than he lived in awe of God.²

2. God uses Jacob's difficult circumstances and the consequences from errant behavior to train him. Jacob knew that God does not deceive and manipulate. When compared to God's perfect character, Jacob's behavior was unfit as an ambassador of God. Thus, God helped Jacob grow up by placing Laban in his life, who gave him a taste of his own deceptive medicine. Jacob remained willfully ignorant for a time, but eventually submitted to God's will. Bible Scholar L Thomas Holdcroft observed that, "[Jacob] learned that human strategy and shrewdness were not the techniques that would solve his problems. He had thought that he was pitting his strength against Laban or Esau. At this point [When God wrestled Jacob], perhaps manifesting Himself as a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus, God sought to conquer his will"³ When God wrestled Jacob, God could have easily crushed him. Instead God exposed his weakness, grew him in grace, and prepared him for future service.

Modern Jews still see Jacob's wrestling with this angelic being as the epitome of their identity, and to this day struggle with God and others. A *fight to the end* mentality and *survival* are prominent cultural themes. Jacob became a transcendent symbol to them, and in that way, he's immortalized to this day.

While Jacob's tendency to deceive faded from view, we watch the spectacle as scripture records that Jacob's own sons practiced treachery. Their trickery resulted in the destruction of an entire city, Shechem (Genesis 34), and eventually to Joseph being sold into Egypt. It has been said that what parents do in moderation the kids may do in excess. Despite the failure of His people, in the end God showed Himself faithful to deliver on all that He promised.

Point to Ponder

“When awe of self replaces awe of God, God ceases to be your Lord and is reduced to being your indentured servant.” Paul David Tripp

From Learning to Living

Look for tension in your life. Carefully consider the relational struggles, unfair injustices, and negative circumstances you face. Measure your response to these difficulties by what Christ did for you on the cross. Open yourself to God's activity and ask Him what He desires for you. Humbly submit your will to His.

Prayer Point

“Dear Trainer God, You work patiently to bring my perspective and behavior into alignment with Your purposes and character. I pray that I will cooperate and join You in this process of transforming me into Your humble, obedient servant. Amen.”

LESSON 23

Joseph, Favored Child of Jacob

Scandals captivate human attention. Like a car or train wreck, we just can't look away. Tabloids in the grocery checkout aisle promise us the latest juicy celebrity gossip. Soap operas dramatize mundane relationships to garner views. Pop songs discuss the dilemmas created by love triangles and moments of spousal weakness. As Solomon wisely pointed out, "There is nothing new under the sun" (New American Standard Bible, Ecclesiastes 1:9). By this point in Genesis, we should expect dysfunction and drama among Abraham's descendants as the consequences of previous decisions by the patriarchal family play out. The story of Joseph builds on the story of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah (Genesis 29, 30). After Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin, Joseph, Rachel's oldest son, becomes the special object of Jacob's love and the envy of his brothers. As you read this story, you might be forgiven for thinking, "Great. Here we go again with the family drama." Get your popcorn ready. The performance is about to begin!

Key Scripture

Genesis 37 1Now Jacob lived in the land where his father had sojourned, in the land of Canaan. 2These are the records of the generations of Jacob. Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was still a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father. 3Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic. 4His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms.

5Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. 6He said to them, "Please listen to this dream which I have had; 7for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf." 8Then his brothers said to him, "Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

[One day Jacob sent Joseph into the wilderness to check on his brothers and the condition of the flocks. Joseph's spiteful brothers spied him from a distance...]

18When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death. 19They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer! 20"Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, 'A wild beast devoured him.' Then let us see what will become of his dreams!" 21But Reuben heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, "Let us not take his life." 22Reuben further said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father. 23So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him; 24and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it.

[They kept Joseph in the pit until a caravan of Midianites came through and they sold Joseph into slavery for 20 shekels of silver. They took Joseph's special coat, tore it, dipped it in animal blood and deceptively showed it to Jacob]

32and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, "We found this; please examine it to see whether it is your son's tunic or not." 33Then he examined it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!" 34So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. 35Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, "Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son." So his father wept for him. 36Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, the captain of the bodyguard.

In some ways, Jacob set the example for his own children to fail. In the same way that he previously deceived his father Isaac by wearing his brother Esau's clothes to steal his birthright, Jacob's children deceived him into believing that "Joseph has surely been torn to pieces," (Genesis 37:33). Jacob became a victim of the fleshly dysfunction and deceit he'd modeled for his children and inherited from his father and grandfather. Despite this brokenness, however, God remains in control and achieves His victory. As Joseph's brothers hatch a plot to kill him, they picture themselves gloating over his body. They say, "We will see what will become of his dreams!" (Genesis 37:30). As we'll see, Joseph's dreams literally come true, and God turns what the brothers intended for evil into good when Joseph saves the entire family from a terrible future famine.

Consider the following:

1. Both Jacob and Joseph appear completely taken off guard by this plot to kill Joseph. And yet, in the story there are many clues that trouble is brewing. At the start of the chapter, Joseph tattles and gives Jacob a bad report about his brothers (Genesis 37:2). Then Jacob gives Joseph a special colorful tunic as a visible, external indication of his special love and the inheritance of the birthright¹ (Genesis 37:3). Joseph's brothers literally wouldn't speak to him. They hated him so much (Genesis 37:4). Finally, Joseph shares two dreams with his brothers that make them hate him even more (Genesis 37:5-11). In hindsight, Joseph might have been better off keeping his dreams to himself, knowing that they would create further tension with his brothers. Jacob cluelessly continues lavishing Joseph with special gifts that further inflamed tensions among the brothers. I wonder if Jacob ever regretted sending Joseph to check on his brothers far from his protection in Shechem. The original Hebrew says Jacob sent Joseph to check on the shalom of his brothers, a word they literally refused to say to Joseph when they saw him (Genesis 37:4).

2. Many parallels in the New Testament exist between this story of Joseph being sold into slavery and Jesus's betrayal and crucifixion. First, Joseph's innocence mirrors that of Jesus when He wordlessly went to the cross "like a sheep being led to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7). Second, Joseph's brothers burned with envy over his elevated position in Jacob's house and over the outward symbol of that position--his cloak of many colors they took and had stained with an animal's blood. This mirrors the envy Jewish leaders harbored for Jesus, who also schemed to murder Him after they rejected His true message (Mark 15:10). And Jesus' clothing, which would have been stained with His blood, was divided among the soldiers who crucified Him. Finally, even the bounty the Midianites paid for Joseph with 20 pieces of silver is eerily reminiscent of the 30 pieces of silver the chief priests and officers of the temple paid Judas to betray Jesus. The price of a slave had risen 10 pieces of silver from Joseph's to Jesus's day.

3. Reuben has a mixed legacy in scripture. Reuben courageously pled for his brother's life when he could have ended up in the pit with Joseph for going against the wishes of the brothers. He planned to come and rescue Joseph and take him back to their father (Gen. 37:22). Reuben's own grief has a different reason than mirroring

Jacob's heartbrokenness at the tragic events of this chapter. Reuben, as the oldest child of Jacob, should have received the extra blessing and the birthright, the same one Jacob had stolen from Esau. An episode of immorality between Reuben and Bilhah, one of Leah's handmaids with whom Jacob had children, forever stained Reuben's honor, and the birthright went to Joseph instead (Genesis 35). At the end of his life, Jacob said, "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power. Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it" (Genesis 49:3-4).

When Jesus sent His disciples out to evangelize, He charged them, "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16). Believers face constant peril while living in a world full of sin and brokenness. Families' dysfunctional behaviors can be perpetuated. Those we love dearly may hurt us deeply. The legacy we leave for others matters. We need to conduct ourselves wisely and remember that pride comes before a fall.

Point to Ponder

Moses wrote in the Bible's first chapter about fallenness and faith. How are we putting the pen to our life's page. How and what will we choose to write in our life's book today?

From Learning to Living

Challenge yourself to examine the way you treat others this week. Favoritism, cronyism, secret schemes, grudges, gloating, greediness, and divisiveness led to disaster for Jacob's children. Maybe you don't need to post on social media that smug, self-satisfied post about your accomplishments? Maybe you unintentionally treat some groups of people (i.e., political opponents) as inherently less than human or undeserving of love? Our culture inundates us with scandal and drama. We need to wisely avoid perpetuating culture's selfish schemes.

Prayer Point

Dear God of unfailing love. Make me wise as a serpent, but harmless as a dove. Don't let me naively walk into unexpected trouble, but help me to walk circumspectly, anticipating adversity from within and without. Like Joseph, give me the strength to endure hardship, even when it comes from unexpected places.

LESSON 24

Joseph, Potiphar's Slave

We all, to some degree, probably hear the same voice in our heads when someone says a cutting remark or falsely accuses us of something we didn't do. That voice jumps to our defense as fast as a cobra striking. It's our inner lawyer. It's the voice we can carry on a conversation with longer than an Ebenezer Scrooge monologue. Joseph's own brothers considered killing him and threw him into a pit. But Joseph didn't stew, bitterly condemning each of his brothers to the pit of Gehenna. He breathed a silent prayer of thanks as the Midianite caravan that rescued him turned south toward Egypt, where Joseph faced a new situation: slavery in Egypt. Let's look how Joseph handles both good and bad situations and changes in his fortune (*New American Standard Bible*, Genesis 39).

Key Scripture

Genesis 39 *Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there. 2The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.*

[Joseph excelled and became the overseer of Potiphar's house.]

6So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. 7It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." 8But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. 9"There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?"

[Potiphar's wife continued to proposition honorable Joseph until one day she viciously accused him of assaulting her.]

17Then she spoke to him [Potiphar] with these words, “The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; 18and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside.”

19Now when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, “This is what your slave did to me,” his anger burned. 20So Joseph’s master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail. 21But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer.

Suggested Reading Genesis chapter 39

When we think about slavery, our minds may immediately go to the historic slavery in the American south. Joseph, however, experienced a very different type of slavery after Potiphar bought him from the Ishmaelites. In fact, Joseph said to Potiphar’s wife, “Look, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put me in charge of all that he owns. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me” (Genesis 39:8-9). Scholars once called into question Joseph’s rise to greatness in Potiphar’s house, but Bible scholars Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown suggest that ancient Egyptians would have treated purchased slaves like Joseph much better than those acquired in war, who the Egyptians often worked to death building monuments to the Pharaohs.¹

Consider the following:

1. Throughout the life of the patriarchs, God works in the background but does not often intervene directly in human affairs. This chapter begins and ends with clear affirmations that God is working behind the scenes to make Joseph successful (Genesis 39:2,21). However, the Bible does not record God Himself speaking directly to Joseph, as He spoke to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Instead, God shaped and molded the hearts of men and women around Joseph, granting Joseph favor and respect in their eyes. Despite the lack of direct communication, Joseph chose to trust and obey God and risked his life, reputation, and position in Potiphar’s house to follow God. Joseph goes through incredible turmoil in the first two chapters of his story, going from respect and wealth to slavery and imprisonment. Through it all,

Joseph maintains his composure while accepting the next challenge and nobly rising to each occasion. Perhaps a small voice reminded him daily, “I don’t have to worry. God has got this.”

2. The text makes it clear that those who surrounded Joseph benefited from their close association with him. In the same way that Jacob, blessed by God, both prospered while working for Laban and helped Laban prosper (Genesis 30 and 31), Potiphar benefited from his appointment of Joseph as the overseer of his house, because Joseph was also blessed by God (Genesis 39:5). This concept of divine favor permeates the entire Old Testament. Not only did Abel, Seth, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob experience this divine favor as individuals, the entire nation of Israel also received special status with God. Joseph, growing up in Jacob’s house, probably heard stories like God’s choosing of Abraham, His substitution of Isaac for a ram, and Jacob’s wrestling with God a thousand times. No doubt they produced a strong sense of identity, helping him rise above the daily challenges he faced.

3. The episode describing Potiphar’s wife tempting Joseph to lie with her brings to mind what Solomon writes many years later about the adulterous woman, “For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol;” (Proverbs 5:3-5). Potiphar’s wife does her very best to seduce and tempt Joseph, using every opportunity to turn his heart away from God. Interestingly, Genesis 39 contrasts sharply with Genesis 38. Tamar seduces Judah by pretending to be a prostitute. In that story (which I recommend you read) God is working in the background to create a situation that makes Jacob repent. Tamar seduces Jacob and the incident exposes Jacob’s irresponsibility and lack of judgment. Potiphar’s wife and Tamar acted in similar ways, but they both teach us about God’s expectations for godly relationships and show how God doesn’t always intervene directly in human affairs, but shapes and molds the people around them.

Joseph grew up quickly as a slave. The Joseph we meet in Genesis 39 is a much older, wiser version of the boy we met in Genesis 37. The skillful and tactful way in which he handled Potiphar’s wife shows his wisdom and humility. Instead of a blunt refusal, he does his best

to patiently explain his reasoning to her, and even teaches her about God and His standards for sexual relationships. In the end, he quickly flees her temptations but leaves his cloak behind.

Still a young man, he learned when to speak and when to stay silent, how to manage and lead others, and how to integrate with members of another culture, who spoke another language. The Egyptian worldview and values system contrasted sharply with what Joseph had learned back in Canaan and yet he adapted, overcame adversity, and even thrived despite the wickedness all around him. Perhaps most stunningly, Joseph does not even protest or retort when he is falsely accused and wrongly imprisoned. Our own inner lawyer may have struck out as fast as the cobra to craft objections, assert our rights, and fight for our freedom. But none of these things help when God is in control.

Point to Ponder

Jesus says that those who lose their lives for His sake will find it (Matthew 10:39). Could you calmly lose everything in this life just to find or follow Him?

From Learning to Living

Compare your activity and standards about morality to Joseph's example. Our culture presents endless opportunities, seemingly without consequences, to engage in activities God condemns. The best thing we can do when temptation strikes is to run, literally and metaphorically, leaving evil thoughts and activities behind us.

Prayer Point

“Father, who works behind the scenes, grant me favor in the eyes of those with whom I work, and grant me the right words to speak when I am in uncomfortable situations, especially before powerful people. Grant me Joseph's wisdom and discernment. Help me engage in wise activities that please you.”

LESSON 25

Joseph, Pharaoh's Right-Hand Man

A woman in St. Petersburg, Florida, started an *unbroken chain* of kindness at Starbucks when she bought her drink as well as the caramel macchiato ordered by the driver behind her. A sequence of 378 customers followed suit and paid for the beverage for the person behind them. The chain lasted from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on that Wednesday in 2014. Because of one person's kindness to one stranger¹, copycats across the nation paid for thousands of meals and drinks for random strangers at other restaurants and coffee shops to make the world a better place. Compare Joseph's decision in a Biblical *pay it forward* story. In one simple act of kindness, he interprets the dreams of the Pharaoh's baker and butler, which ultimately secures not only his own freedom, but it saves his own family and the entire nation of Egypt from dying in a tragic famine (*New American Standard Bible*, Genesis 40). The story reminds us that, like dominoes cascading in their fall around the table, each decision we make affects ourselves, our neighbors, and our world.

Key Scripture

[Joseph thrived in prison and the jailer put him in charge of all the prisoners. In the meantime, Pharaoh angrily jailed two of his servants, his chief baker and his chief butler. Both the baker and the butler had confusing dreams that Joseph interpreted for them. Just as Joseph foretold, the baker was executed and the butler returned to the palace to serve Pharaoh. Joseph asked the butler to "remember him" in Pharaoh's presence but the butler forgot about him until...]

Genesis 41:1-6 *1Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was standing by the Nile. 2And lo, from the Nile there came up seven cows, sleek and fat; and they grazed in the marsh grass. 3Then behold, seven other cows came up after them from the Nile, ugly and gaunt, and they stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. 4The ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke. 5He fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good. 6Then behold, seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind,*

sprouted up after them. 7The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. 8Now in the morning his spirit was troubled, so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

[Pharaoh searched desperately for someone to interpret the dream. As tensions rose in the palace, Pharaoh's butler remembered Joseph and mentioned him to Pharaoh. They brought Joseph from prison to interpret the dream. Joseph explained that the seven fat cows were seven plentiful years and the seven skinny cows who consumed the fat cows represented seven years of severe famine. Pharaoh was convinced and he exalted Joseph to second in command over all Egypt.]

Genesis 41:41-44 *41Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." 42Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put the gold necklace around his neck. 43He had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, "Bow the knee!" And he set him over all the land of Egypt. 44Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Though I am Pharaoh, yet without your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."*

Suggested reading Genesis 39:19-chapter 41

The author of the story intentionally used "the pit" (Hebrew בור¹ bor¹) to describe Joseph's dungeon (Genesis 40:15, 41:14). This word harkens back to Genesis 37, in which Joseph's brothers threw him into a literal pit or cistern while they decided what to do with him. On a human level, Joseph's confinement to yet another pit constituted a tragedy of unimaginable proportions. However, what man intended for evil, God uses in the background for good. Once again, those in positions of power over Joseph immediately recognized his potential. And again, Joseph faithfully carried out his duties, patiently waiting for God to work. Joseph's big break came when he interpreted the dreams of the baker and butler (also translated cupbearer). After his release, the butler could have immediately argued Joseph's case before the Pharaoh. Unfortunately, like we sometimes do, the baker forgot for two years Joseph's kindness until the king needed his own dreams interpreted. When Joseph provided the interpretation of that dream, the Pharaoh exalted him to the second highest position in Egypt with the goal of saving the entire nation from famine.

Consider the following:

1. Joseph did not have a superhuman ability to interpret dreams. Instead, Joseph makes it clear repeatedly in the story that God provided the interpretations (Genesis 40:8, 41:16, 25). Joseph merely repeated the messages, conveying what God told him to say, which contrasts with the seers and wise men of Egypt, who failed to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. In the same way that Moses later performed wonders that confounded the magicians and wise men of Egypt, Joseph completely blew away his secular competition. In ancient Israel, average people sought interpretations of their dreams from magicians, witches, and soothsayers to glean hints about their futures. Joseph's story would have reminded every generation of Hebrews that, "interpretations belong to God" (Genesis 40:8).

2. Hard times always come, both for nations and individuals. We all face challenges and setbacks that in the moment appear completely destructive and utterly devastating. But many of our greatest setbacks ultimately set us up for even greater success in the future. God preserved the nation of Israel and Abraham's descendants despite the many challenges each generation faced. At the national level, seven years of plenty in Egypt would not last. Seven years of famine and suffering would follow. Joseph wisely and skillfully guided the nation in preparing for future famine, even when the years of plenty could have caused complacency. Every day, Joseph made a conscious choice to have a positive outlook and to look for opportunities to show himself faithful, wise, and discerning, while trusting God's promises that neither the good times nor the bad times would last forever.

3. Whether he found himself in a literal pit, as a slave, in a dungeon, or as Pharaoh's right-hand man Joseph did not have the freedom to do whatever he wanted. Freedom meant doing whatever God wanted him to do. Many Christians today have accepted our culture's definition of freedom. They demand their rights, and protest vehemently and sometimes violently against making any small concession that inconveniences them. Joseph, by contrast, laid down his life to serve others without counting the cost to himself. Joseph still wanted to get out of prison, but he lived with a winsome, godly outlook and patiently served others. He preserved his reputation.

Joseph could have chosen to give up completely after his brothers sold him into slavery. Despite his terrible situation, Joseph did not dwell on his painful past. He waited patiently. He recognized that he could only change himself. He trusted God. Ultimately, the many twists and turns in Joseph's life make sense only in hindsight. For us, our moment-by-moment decision to have a good attitude and to trust the process that God has for us will make the difference. We can gratefully pay it forward like the woman at Starbucks, or selfishly hoard everything for ourselves.

Point to Ponder

Jesus paid it forward on His cross. Take up that cross each day and be like Him.

From Learning to Living

Take a good, hard look at your desires this week. Do you actively seek ways to encourage and support others, or do you constantly think about yourself? Do you build others up or tear them down? Do you dwell on your past hurt or on your future ability to bless others? Many of us are addicted to the dopamine hit we get from checking items off on a daily checklist: getting in that workout, delivering that project at work, or earning that accolade. Joseph achieved fame and success by giving it all up to serve others. On a deeper level, look at your emotions. Choose kindness instead of bitterness, hope instead of despair, faithfulness instead of laziness, and trust instead of disbelief. You might just start a chain reaction that changes others and even the world.

Prayer Point

“God make me more like Joseph, willing to roll with the punches of life while standing up for the truth. Remind me each day that I am more than the sum of my experiences, the money in my bank account, or the power I wield over others. Give me an attitude of gratitude so You can change the world through me.”

LESSON 26

Joseph and His Brothers

Salvador Ramos, 18 years old, entered Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas on May 24, 2022, at 11:27 AM, and took the lives of 19 young children and two teachers¹. Senseless acts of violence like the one Ramos perpetrated against innocent elementary school children are just one example of how far humans will go to take revenge on others for any perceived slight. Since Cain killed Abel, human history is littered with examples of bitter plotting, careful preparation, and premeditated murder in response to perceived and real slights. Joseph had plenty of time in Pharaoh's dungeon to plan a revenge against his brothers. For God's revelation in the dream Joseph revealed to them (*New American Standard Bible*, Genesis 37:5), Joseph knew his brothers would probably be afraid that one day they could be bowing down to him.

Key Scripture

[Just like Joseph predicted, the famine became severe after seven years of plenty. Joseph opened up the storehouses and He made Egypt even more wealthy by selling grain to the surrounding nations. Soon Jacob sent Joseph's brothers to buy grain in Egypt and the "plot thickened!"]

Genesis 42:1-7 *1Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, "Why are you staring at one another?" 2He said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down there and buy some for us from that place, so that we may live and not die." 3Then ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt. 4But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, "I am afraid that harm may befall him." 5So the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those who were coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also.*

6Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. 7When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly. And he said to them, "Where have you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food."

[Joseph, unrecognized by his brothers, tested them by accusing them of spying. He jailed them for three days. Then he demanded that they leave Canaan but return to Egypt with Benjamin. He held Simeon hostage in the meantime and secretly placed his brothers' money back in their grain sacks causing them even more grief. When the brothers returned to Egypt for more grain, Joseph hosted them at a royal dinner. All of this kindness was very confusing to the brothers. As they prepared to leave for Canaan, Joseph commanded that his personal drinking cup be placed in beloved Benjamin's grain sack. Later, he sent his guards to arrest Benjamin for "stealing" the cup and so the dejected group returned and "fell to the ground" before Joseph, begging for Benjamin's life.]

Genesis 45:1-5 *1Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, "Have everyone go out from me." So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it. 3Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. 4Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.*

Suggested reading Genesis chapters 42-50

Joseph experiences powerful, conflicting emotions when he first sees his brothers walk into the palace to buy grain. Imagine the look on his face! Surprise, horror, anger, sadness, and unspeakable joy must have flashed over it. No one would have faulted him if his fleshly, human nature likely screamed for revenge. He could sell his brothers into slavery, throw them into prison, or have them killed immediately. Instead, he chose forgiveness. Joseph's willingness to forgive his brothers did not immediately restore his relationship with them. After many years in Egypt, Joseph looked and acted like an Egyptian (Genesis 42:8) and initially, chose to speak to his brothers through an interpreter rather than using their native Hebrew. He wanted to test his brothers before revealing himself to them. He needed to know they had truly changed. When Joseph finally reveals himself to them, expressions of love, compassion, mercy, and tenderness explode out of him in one of the most vividly heart-rending passages in scripture.

Consider the following:

1. Joseph depicts Jesus's sacrificial love and forgiveness for us. Although, like Joseph's brothers, we deserve only wrath and destruction, Jesus forgives us like Joseph forgave his brothers. Interestingly, the Bible refers to Jesus as our brother, "For those whom he foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Romans 8:29). Like Jesus, Joseph held absolute power over his brothers. They were at the end of their ability to provide for themselves. They threw themselves at his feet seeking to save themselves and their families back home in Canaan. In this case, Joseph saves them physically from famine. Jesus, however, saves us from eternal punishment and the Father's wrath. Scholars disagree about the reason that Joseph tests his brothers, and likely Joseph had many reasons. One good explanation is that Joseph sought to bring his brothers to the end of themselves in the same way that Jesus brings us to the end of ourselves before offering salvation. Jesus wants to ensure that He has our complete trust, and that we understand our neediness and sinfulness fully before we accept His offer of complete forgiveness.

2. Perhaps the most theologically rich and interesting section of these eight chapters is Joseph's explanation for why he ended up in Egypt in the first place (Genesis 45:5-8). Joseph recognized God's sovereignty, even over something that his brothers intended as a tragedy. Once again, we see Joseph's incredible growth not only in his maturity and wisdom but in his spiritual walk with God. Joseph gets life with God now. He puts away bitterness, strife, malice, hatred, and anger. He chooses to forgive not just man, but God also. He concludes, "So it was not you who sent me here, but God" (Genesis 45:5).

3. Although God already forgave us once and for all through Jesus' finished work on the cross, He waits for us to confess our sins and to turn back to Him before fully restoring a relationship with us. Joseph waited to hear that his brothers had truly changed their murderous, vengeful ways before revealing himself to them. He wanted to confirm his brothers had not given Benjamin the same treatment he endured, and that they had learned a valuable lesson. Abuse victims often return to their abusers prematurely before the individual has

truly changed their abusive ways. If someone hurts you repeatedly, take some time and wait and see if that person truly changes rather than continue putting yourself back into vulnerable and dangerous situations.

The climax of the story is when Judah, the firstborn, offers to take the place of Benjamin whom Joseph threatened to throw in prison. At this point, Joseph can no longer bear to hide his identity from his brothers. He sends the servants from the room and weeps as he reveals who he is. The pinnacle of each of our lives comes the day we surrender fully to Jesus, admitting our weakness and neediness. Have you taken that step? If not, consider giving your life fully to Him today. You will never regret it.

Point to Ponder

Surrender doesn't mean weakness when you surrender to King Jesus.

From Learning to Living

Remember God's sovereignty in every circumstance. God established the current government over you (Proverbs 21:1-9), God put you in your family of origin (Proverbs 30:11-17), and God determines the length of your days on earth (Psalm 139:16). Considering God's sovereignty, who do you need to forgive right now? Forgiving someone doesn't mean putting yourself back into a dangerous situation. It means taking the first step today and letting go of any lingering bitterness that may poison your relationship with God and others around you.

Prayer Point

“Dear Sovereign God. You hold my life in Your hands. Make me like Your servant Joseph, who trusted in You even when life seemed so dangerous and confusing. Please finish Your good work in me that began when I surrendered at the cross of Jesus. Help me to run to You for all my needs .”

LESSON 27

Moses, Pharaoh's Grandson

Joseph and Jacob died in Egypt. During his time there, Joseph garnered notoriety, great wealth, and vast tracts of land for the current, contemporary Pharaoh, who greatly rewarded Joseph and his family for saving them from the great famine (*New American Standard Bible*, Genesis 41). Fast forward 300 years later and the whole situation drastically changes. The Egyptians and subsequent Pharaohs didn't care about Joseph and the events in Genesis 37-50. The opening chapters of Exodus describe a Pharaoh who not only does not remember Joseph, but views Jacob's descendants as outsiders, who are likely to side with invading enemies rather than their Egyptian overlords. He even implements a genocidal plan to forcibly cull the Hebrew's numbers by working them to death and killing all male babies born to the women.

Key Scripture

Exodus 1:8-14 Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 9 And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. 10 Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, otherwise they will multiply, and in the event of war, they will also join those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land." 11 So they appointed taskmasters over them to oppress them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses. 12 But the more they oppressed them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they dreaded the sons of Israel. 13 The Egyptians used violence to compel the sons of Israel to labor; 14 and they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and at all kinds of labor in the field, all their labors which they violently had them perform as slaves.

[Pharaoh ordered the midwives to kill all males born to Hebrew women. The midwives feared God and refused to kill the male babies. They told Pharaoh that the Hebrew women gave birth before they could attend to them. Acting cruelly, Pharaoh ordered "all his people" (Exodus 1:22) to throw the Hebrew newborn males into the Nile River! One Jewish mother from the tribe of Levi hid her baby for three months and when she could keep him a secret no longer, she made a little basket out of papyrus and tar, placed her baby

inside and set him afloat in the Nile to see what would happen.]

Exodus 2:5-10 *The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the Nile, with her maidens walking alongside the Nile; and she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid, and she brought it to her. 6When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the boy was crying. And she had pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." 7Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women that she may nurse the child for you?" 8Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go ahead." So the girl went and called the child's mother. 9Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. 10The child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. And she named him Moses, and said, "Because I drew him out of the water."*

[Moses grew up in Pharaoh's household. One day he saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew slave. Moses became enraged and killed the abuser and hid his body in the sand. When Pharaoh discovered what Moses had done he set out to kill him but Moses fled East to an area called Midian.]

Suggested Reading Exodus Chapter 1,2

Although enslaved, God's people thrived in the land allotted to them in Goshen. As they grew in number and strength, Pharaoh and all of Egypt become increasingly intimidated by them and cruelly put them to forced labor. As the reigning people, Egyptians commit atrocities towards those they consider as *other*. Even today some people still look strangely, and even act violently against *other* people who are unlike them. God used a Levite family and a mother's courage to put His plan of redemption in motion.

Consider the following:

1. Throughout their history, Egyptians enslaved and systematically culled many people groups. Typically, generations of overwork weaken an enslaved culture to make the population manageable and servile. This time, the Egyptian's evil plan backfired! The more harshly the Egyptian taskmasters apply the whip, the more the descendants of Jacob grow in number and strength. As we'll see later in the story, the smug, self-assured Egyptians have no inkling of God's power to bless His chosen people. Perhaps if they knew about God's immutable promises made to Abraham (Genesis 15:13-14), they would have picked on another people group and let the Israelites

go. Bible scholar Franz Delitzsch comments, “The promised blessing was manifested chiefly in the fact that all the measures adopted by the cunning of Pharaoh to weaken and diminish the Israelites, instead of checking, served to promote their continuous increase!”¹

2. Driven by fear, Pharaoh orders the midwives of Egypt to kill all newborn Hebrew male children. However, the midwives fear God and lie to Pharaoh, telling him that the Hebrew women gave birth so quickly that their births ended before they arrived to kill the babies. Thwarted by the midwives, Pharaoh then issues a severe order to halt the out-of-control Hebrew growth he feared. “Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile!” (Exodus 1:22). Amid this tragedy, a Levite family hid their son in their home until they could hide him no longer. Placing their son in a floating basket must have been the most difficult thing they had ever done. But God has a plan. Pharaoh’s daughter stumbles upon this beautiful boy in his floating basket. She adopts him and allows his own mother, his own flesh and blood to nurse and nurture him. How formative those years must have been before the boy moved into the Palace of the ruler of Egypt. Moses learned life with God from his Hebrew family first and worldly leadership as an Egyptian prince in training second. Bible scholar William Lasor notes, “Although no details are given, Moses apparently grew up in the Egyptian court, receiving an education for royalty. He was certainly trained in reading, archery, and administration. These skills equipped him for posts of confidence and responsibility in government administration.”²

3. As a young adult, Moses clearly identifies more closely with his Hebrew ancestry than with his adopted Egyptian family. One day he murders an Egyptian taskmaster, who was forcing a fellow Hebrew to work for Pharaoh. Moses buries the body in the sand. This crime of passion is noticed by the Hebrews themselves, and two of them condemn Moses for it. When Pharaoh discovers the crime, he orders Moses killed. But Moses flees to the wilderness. He had jumped the gun and got out ahead of God’s plan to deliver the Israelites, committing what God had clearly declared a serious violation of human rights. Years spent herding sheep in the wilderness gave him a different kind of training and plenty of time to think about the mistakes he made as a young man. Moses made poor choices and he stumbled and fell, just like we do.

God's heart also broke when He saw the suffering of His people, and God has plans to rectify the situation in His time. In his redemptive plan, God prepares the people He uses for service. Moses and his family endure one of the worst genocides imaginable. They may have felt distant and disconnected from God. Yet God worked behind the scenes as He has throughout eternity to save His people from their slavery to sin and death. Moses' survival alone is nothing short of a miracle. God protects him and prepares him for service by giving him all the best training available in the ancient world. From Hebrew training with his mother, to education for royalty in the Egyptian court, and to shepherding in the wilderness, God spares him from Pharaoh's wrath. God is a God of the impossible!

Point to Ponder

God uses hard things to prepare us for service with Him.

From Learning to Living

Consider that faith always comes with a call to action. We are called to justice. We are called to walk humbly with God. We follow His calling even when it contradicts the status quo. Do you have the faith of the Egyptian midwives, who refused to follow Pharaoh's orders to murder the Hebrew babies? Do you stand with God or follow the crowd?

Prayer Point

“My father God who transforms brokenness into wholeness. Right now, in an unjust world I want to stand for You. Break my heart for the things that break Yours: widows, orphans, and the most helpless who are downtrodden. Make me aware of needs right now. Show me where can I put my faith into action today.”

LESSON 28

Moses Called from Midian

In the west we often take our names for granted. Parents often choose symbolic and religious names for their children. But many cultures use names to signify deep meaning or serious offense. For example, a common myth involves Alexander the Great¹ when he caught a soldier asleep on guard duty and demanded to know the soldier's name. The soldier fearfully mumbled, "Alexander." Rather than have the young man killed, Alexander demanded, "Change your conduct, or change your name." Names in the ancient world frequently indicated a circumstance that took place around the child's birth or certain character traits the child possessed. When the Pharaoh's daughter pulled a basket out of the Nile and saw the Hebrew baby, she named him Moses which means to *draw out*. The passage below describes how the God of the universe, the God who weaves His plan throughout eternity, introduces Himself, and continues to draw Moses into His plans to redeem the Hebrews.

Moses is now in Midian herding sheep (*New American Standard Bible*, Exodus 3) rather than enjoying the life of Egyptian royalty 40 years earlier, where he ran ahead of God's plan. In a fit of rage, he murdered an abusive Egyptian taskmaster. When Pharaoh discovers his crime Moses flees Egypt to the wilderness to avoid prosecution. Read the following passage and observe how God still works to include Moses in His plan.

Key Scripture

Exodus 3:1-6 *Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. 3So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." 4When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5Then He*

said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” 6He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

[As Moses stood before the burning bush, God reiterated the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by promising to bring the suffering Jewish people out of Egypt. God interrupted Moses’s idyllic existence in Midian and commanded him to lead His people out of Egypt and back to the Promised Land.]

Exodus 3:13-16 Then Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” 14God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” 15God, furthermore, said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations. 16Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt.’”

[God prophesied to Moses that Pharaoh would not let the people go and God would pour wrath out on him. God gave Moses two convincing miracles that would testify to God’s power in him. The first was to place his hand in his garment and draw it back out as leprous and the second was to take water from the Nile and turn it into blood.]

Suggested Reading - Exodus chapters 2-4

Throughout biblical history, when God initiated something new, He used impressive sight and sound effects. Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the garden features flaming swords guarding Eden, Noah’s family begins their new life with a rainbow, and Abraham witnesses a flaming torch and a smoking pot pass through two halves of sacrificed animals, sealing the new covenant God made with him (Genesis 15:17). Moses experiences the voice of God booming from a burning bush, which causes him to take a closer look. He could not have understood the reality that Yahweh God, the I AM, planned to use him, a murderer, to bring His people out of Egypt, where they had

been enslaved for over four hundred years.

Consider the following:

1. God already has His redemptive plan mapped out and He commands Moses to take part in it. God told Abraham his descendants would be, “enslaved and mistreated.” Yet after 400 years they would, “Come out with great possessions” (Genesis 15:13-14). Yahweh makes 400-year plans, not always today’s 10-year plans that fit man’s thinking. Sovereign God expects His servant Moses to respond to His calling. But we also see God’s compassion for Moses. He tenderly addresses each of Moses’s concerns. Bible scholar William Lasor comments about this sudden direction change for Moses, “Suddenly all was transformed, the Shepherd was to become the deliverer. Indeed, so radical was the call that Moses raised a series of objections.”¹ Moses had a clear command and a clear choice from God. He could either trust and obey those obvious commands or keep running.

2. God’s name matters . If you have ever seen the film *Moana*, there is a scene at the climax of the movie where Moana realizes the *Te Ka* is the benevolent goddess *Te Fiti* in a different form. She sings, “I know your name!” and thus calms and controls the goddess using her name. Even today, animistic people groups go to great lengths to discover the names of their gods in order to manipulate them. Knowing a deity’s name allows control of that deity. However, throughout the Bible, God actively opposes manipulative and controlling religious tendencies. God reveals His name to Moses to establish a relationship with His people. It was an introduction. Walvoord and Zuck explain “Thus the name Yahweh, related to the verb ‘to be’ probably speaks of God’s self existence, but it speaks to more than that. It usually speaks of His relationship to His people. For example, as LORD, He redeemed them (Exodus 6:6), was faithful to them (Exodus 34:5-7), and made a covenant with them (Genesis 15:18).”² The Israelites were affected greatly by living among a sinful, idol worshipping Egyptian population. God was preparing the Israelite people to enter into a special relationship with Him by revealing His true name and character.

Moses’s burning bush is a pivotal story of Israel becoming God’s elect nation. In it, God continues unveiling His plan to send the

redeemer and to lead His chosen people from the slavery of sin. The one who will be called *God with us* had chosen to send this savior through the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yahweh God still has an eternal plan. God calls you and I His ministers of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19) and His ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20). How can we participate with Him in our lifetime?

Point to Ponder

We often plan without considering first His plan.

From Learning to Living

Yahweh, the I AM revealed Himself and made Himself known. When you pray do you pray to a personal God with a name, or a faceless God who seems far off and disinterested? I AM that I AM, the personal God, the covenant God, wants a relationship with you. Seek ways to build your friendship with the great I AM.

Prayer Point

“Daddy, Father Yahweh. You revealed Your name because You desire a close relationship with me. Help me always remember that You are not a distant and uninterested God, but One that desires relationship, and who will always be faithful to those of us who believe in your Son.”

LESSON 29

Moses Confronts Pharaoh

God sends Moses on a seemingly impossible mission, but thankfully God specializes in the impossible. After spending 40 years in exile herding sheep in Midian, God comes to Moses and instructs him to go to Egypt and confront the most powerful man on earth. He is to deliver a simple message to Pharaoh, “Let my people go” (New American Standard Bible, Exodus 5). Moses has many arguments against the task. One lament is, “I have never been eloquent. . . . slow to speech and slow of tongue” (Exodus 4:10). So, God agrees to let Aaron, his brother, speak for him (Exodus 4:14). Unfortunately, when the message is delivered Pharaoh hardens his heart, wages war against God, and heaps even more misery on God’s people. Pharaoh needs a lesson in who God is. God’s sovereign activity, Moses’s ignorant indictments against God, and Pharaoh’s stubborn rebellion leap from the following verses.

Key Scripture

Exodus 5:1-4 *And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.’” 2But Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go.” 3Then they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, otherwise He will fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.” 4But the king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why do you draw the people away from their work? Get back to your labors!”*

[Pharaoh angrily commanded the guards to punish God’s people by forcing them to gather their own straw to make bricks while enforcing existing production quotas. Their backbreaking work became even more miserable.]

Exodus 5:22-23 *Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, “O Lord, why have You brought harm to this people? Why did You ever send me? 23“Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done harm to this people, and You have not delivered Your people at all.”*

[God tenderly responded to Moses's accusations in the following verses...]

Exodus 6:6-8 *Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. 7'Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. 8'I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the LORD.'*"

Exodus 7:1-5 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. 2You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. 3But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. 4When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments. 5"The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst."*

Suggested Reading Exodus chapters 5-7

In the ancient world, people groups worshipped vast pantheons of gods. These gods each demanded unique sacrificial ceremonies, often in disparate locations and at specifically prescribed festival times. Egyptian overlords frequently made accommodations to allow enslaved people groups to worship their gods under the assumption that any blessings the enslaved people received from their gods would also benefit the Egyptians themselves. As Bible commentators Keil and Delitzsch note, "The demand presented to Pharaoh on the part of the God of the Israelites, that he would let His people go into the wilderness and sacrifice to Him, appears so natural and reasonable, that Pharaoh could not have refused their request, if there had been a single trace of the fear of God in his heart."¹ These verses highlight how greedy, prideful, and cruel the Pharaoh had grown. Worshipped by the Egyptians as a god himself, Pharaoh seemed to stop acknowledging any other god's existence.

Moses fumes about God's apparent lack of care for His people. God graciously responds to Moses's disrespect and reminds him of His

intentions. Hundreds of years earlier God swore in a sacred oath that He would give Abraham a land, offspring, and abundant blessings. The Israelites were to be caretakers of His promise to redeem all the people of the earth back to Himself. Now God is stepping into human history to free His people from Egypt and take them to the land He promised them. God would redeem His people from Egypt to fulfill His previous covenant promises to Abraham and prove to Egypt that He is the one true God (Exodus 6:6-8; Exodus 7:5).

Consider the following:

1. The beautiful theme of redemption ties all of scripture together. God introduces it explicitly for the first time when He says, “I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgements” (Exodus 6:6). The Hebrew word for redeem is *gaal*. Ancient Hebrews used it when a close relative would buy back (or ransom) a property that a creditor seized. God takes on the persona of a kinsman redeemer reclaiming His captive people from Pharaoh’s grasp. God intentionally designs His deliverance to shock, awe, and convince the witnesses of His preeminence.

2. Moses baselessly accuses God of failure to act even as God tirelessly orchestrates the deliverance for which Moses trusted Him. Finite humans often misunderstand our infinite God. The next time we put Him on trial, remember He is the great I AM and we are not. Not only did God clearly state His agenda to redeem, but He also includes His people in His plans. God promises to make Moses like God to Pharaoh and to make Aaron Moses’s prophet (Exodus 7:1). God could have chosen a different way, but He chose human ambassadors to deliver His message to hard hearted Pharaoh. God’s practice of using a human to mediate on His behalf might prompt us to think, “I’m God’s child so what message has God entrusted me to give, and who needs to hear it?”

3. A world that worships self has become fashionable. People tend to discredit and dislike everything that hurts them or others. We rejoice when God punishes a despot like Pharaoh, but we lash out at God if He allows pain and suffering in the life of one of His people. Instead of God’s character, feelings become the standard of right and wrong. So, if we feel it’s wrong then it must be wrong because we feel it.

The unspoken logic in a postmodern world might be, “Someone is in pain, all pain is bad because it hurts, therefore the God who could prevent this pain is bad.” As author A.W Tozer wrestled with God’s integrity concerning suffering he concluded that, “the being of God is its own defense.”² God doesn’t need any character witnesses at a trial because His character is his defense!

4. A fundamental question is are we born into this world as innocent and corrupted later? Or do we leave the womb with a natural inclination toward evil but need training and correction? The biblical narratives continually affirm that mankind is wired for good. Our natures, however, are hopelessly corrupt. We need God, our creator, to teach us lessons about reality. God is not the author of evil. He uses the tough lessons of evil happenings to train His children to be used in His service. He wants to equip us to share with others His message of redemption. Welcome to life with God.

Point to Ponder

One stronger than me and free from sin stepped into time and liberated me from Satan’s grasp.

From Learning to Living

Like Moses we tend to doubt God’s goodness in situations we do not understand. Consider if, like Moses, our desire to fully understand God’s plan skews our ability to trust Him completely. Be encouraged with the fact that God actively brings His eternal plans to completion. Our primary responsibility as His child is to trust Him and cooperate with Him despite limited information.

Prayer Point

“God of eternal promises. Thank You for including me in Your plans. Moving forward with You, help me to trust You with the unknowns while I’m obeying in the areas You have made clear to me.”

LESSON 30

God vs. gods

God is a faithful communicator even to pagan Pharaohs. God sent Moses, a member of Pharaoh's own family, with a private message in his own Egyptian language to be delivered personally to his own palace! (*New American Standard Bible*, Exodus 5). God even proved Himself by providing Moses mind-bending miracles to perform right in front of Pharaoh! God wants to give Pharaoh a chance, convince him that He is God, and help him avoid the pain of His judgement. Pharaoh responds to God's outpouring of grace by hardening his heart, lamely replicating the miracles, and stoking the fires of persecution over his people. Pharaoh is not easily convinced by God's mercy. He discovers it by the frightening outburst of God's wrath.

Read the following verses and observe how many times Pharaoh hardens his heart, and how each time God deals with Pharaoh's rebellion.

Key Scripture

Exodus 7:14-17 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go. 15Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he is going out to the water, and station yourself to meet him on the bank of the Nile; and you shall take in your hand the staff that was turned into a serpent. 16" You shall say to him, "The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness. But behold, you have not listened until now." 17" Thus says the LORD, By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the staff that is in my hand, and it will be turned to blood.*

[Scripture records that the Egyptians had to dig on the banks of the Nile to find drinking water and the entire Nile became contaminated with decaying sea creatures. Seven days later...]

Exodus 8:2 *But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I am going to strike your entire territory with frogs.*

[Pharaoh then begged Moses to ask the Lord to remove the frogs. As soon as

the frogs were confined to the Nile, Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let God's people go.]

Exodus 8:16 *Then the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Extend your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may turn into gnats [lice] through all the land of Egypt.'"*

[and then Pharaoh hardened his heart again so God initiated another plague...]

Exodus 8:21 *For if you are not going to let My people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies...*

[God filled Egypt with pesky flies that made life miserable for the Egyptians. God spared the Land of Goshen where Israel lived. After Pharaoh found relief scripture records that, "Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also..." (Exodus 8:32) and refused to let God's people go. So God warned Pharaoh to let His people go or...]

Exodus 9:3 *Behold, the hand of the Lord will come with a very severe plague on your livestock which are in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the herds, and on the flocks.*

[God killed an untold number of farm animals but when Pharaoh saw that Israel's livestock were unaffected, scripture states, "...the heart of Pharaoh was hardened" (Ex 9:7) and God responded by sending a punishing hail storm.]

Exodus 9:18 *Behold, about this time tomorrow, I will send a very heavy hail, such as has not been seen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now.*

[The hail destroyed crops everywhere except in the Land of Goshen where Israel lived. In spite of the devastation scripture records again that after the storm ceased, Pharaoh "...sinned again and hardened his heart." (Exodus 9:34) God called Moses and he told Pharaoh...]

Exodus 10:4 *For if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory.*

[The locusts devastated what was left of Egypt. They ate "every green thing". Pharaoh rushed to Moses and begged him to have God stop the plague. As the locusts left, scripture records that, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go" (Exodus 10:20). God called for Moses and said...]

Exodus 10:21 *Then the Lord said to Moses, "Reach out with your hand toward the sky, so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even a darkness which may be felt."*

[As the darkness paralyzed Egypt, Pharaoh gave Moses' permission to go and worship Jehovah but to leave their flocks behind. Moses rejected his

terms and Pharaoh angrily dismissed him warning that if he saw Moses' face again, he would kill him. Moses departed with an ominous promise to Pharaoh that indeed, he would never see his face again.]

Recommended Reading Exodus chapters 7-10

God's judgement devastates the Egyptians. The ruinous plagues destroy the country physically, emotionally, economically, and religiously. The ancient world would have reverberated with the news of a weakened Egypt, whose gods were humiliated by the God of an enslaved people.

Consider the following:

1. The term *animist* applies to people groups that attribute a human-like soul to inanimate objects such as trees, rivers, or mountains. The Egyptians, for example, viewed the Nile River as a living being and worshipped it as Hapy, a god. Elders taught young Egyptian boys and girls that the river was not just water, but it embodied the Nile's fertility and blessings. It was a god, a living being. It sent yearly flood waters to irrigate crops and bring riches to Egypt. When the Egyptians swam in the Nile, they felt they were swimming inside a living being of sorts. They would not want to anger the god of the Nile.

2. Each one of the ten plagues is designed to humiliate one or more of Egypt's gods. When God turns the Nile into blood, He establishes His pre-eminence over the god of the Nile. Pharaoh should have responded in worship but instead, he chose more rebellion. Frogs, the second plague, targets the goddess of fertility, Heqet, which is thought to have a woman's body and a frog's head. According to legend, Heqet breathes the breath of life into those created by her husband, the god of dust, named Khnum. Egypt's gods continue to be degraded with the remaining plagues (Exodus 8:16-10:21). As Westerners we might feel a sense of superiority over the ancient people with our current, informed scientific worldviews. We may even comfort ourselves with the thought, "I would never believe in such fairy tales." Yet we bow down to the modern trinity of me, myself, and I!

3. A false notion is, "If we all find our own way to God, somehow He is pleased with our misguided but sincere efforts." But God does not

promote this false idea. Throughout the biblical story, starting with Adam's and Eve's efforts to please Him their own way, He rejects it. God also does not mimic mankind's made-up gods. For example, God does not take on the persona of a false god to relate to humans. God requires that His people, like the Egyptians, completely abandon old thinking to take on His.

4. Theological debates have raged for millennia about the meaning of God hardening Pharaoh's heart (Exodus. 9:12; 10:1; 10:20; 10:27; 11:10; 14:8). God certainly did not make Pharaoh commit evil acts against his will. Bible scholar Allen Ross gives us these thoughts to consider, "If a creature chooses one course of action long enough, that creature soon discovers he or she no longer has a choice. Pharaoh had believed all his life that he was God and could do whatever he wished. For him to now 'knuckle under' to this 'god' of the despicable Hebrews would be to deny all he had ever believed. He no longer had the freedom to do that. Was Yahweh the ultimate cause of Pharaoh's inability to allow the people to go? Absolutely! He made a world in which a pattern of choices ultimately renders one unable to choose otherwise."¹

Biblical stories highlight God's attributes and man's tendencies. God exalts Himself over all things and man tends to exalt all things but God. Pharaoh will ultimately bow his knee in submission after one last terrible plague. Stay tuned.

Point to Ponder

All paths lead to God but only one path will present you before God without fault and with great joy. – Kevin Deyoung

From Learning to Living

Do you have a *pattern* of choices that render you unable to make wise decisions? What about your finances, health, work, etc. Take a moment and exalt God. Declare Him the Lord of all you do.

Prayer Point

"Dear God of Heaven above and earth below. You have established Yourself as the God of all reality. Help me to anchor what I do, think, feel and say to who You are and who You have declared me to be."

LESSON 31

Passover

An Asmat tribal man, hardened by fifty years in the harsh swamps, lives in Safan, a remote village in Asia. Sam Bruce had the privilege of sharing the Passover story (*New American Standard Bible*, Exodus 12) with Wewap in his own tribal language for the first time. Wewap seemed genuinely frightened as he considered his impossible situation. He asked, “Where can I find a perfect lamb?” Staring blankly into the thick jungle where only wild pigs and cassowary birds thrived in a tangled mess of leaves and marsh, Sam pretends to look puzzled at the concerned Wewap and asks, “Why do you need a lamb?” Wewap replies, “I need to cover my sins with the blood.” Then he continues, “I don’t have just a few sins, my sins are overwhelming. I must find a perfect lamb’s blood for my doorposts, then I can remain in the lamb’s blood and not fear judgment!” Wewap had three insights that shook him. He saw God’s character, he saw God’s plan for salvation, and he saw his need!

God has one more event for the land of Egypt. In previous plagues, God spared the land of Goshen. But to avoid this final crushing blow to the Egyptians, the Israelites need to shed the blood of an innocent substitutionary lamb. Read the following verses with this in mind.

Key Scripture

Exodus 12:1-13 *Now the LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, 2“This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you. 3“Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, ‘On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers’ households, a lamb for each household. 4‘Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the number of persons in them; according to what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb. 5‘Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6‘You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight. 7‘Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel*

of the houses in which they eat it. 8'They shall eat the flesh that same night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 9'Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, both its head and its legs along with its entrails. 10'And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire. 11'Now you shall eat it in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste—it is the LORD'S Passover. 12'For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments—I am the LORD. 13'The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

Exodus 12:23-27 “For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you. 24“And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. 25“When you enter the land which the LORD will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite. 26“And when your children say to you, ‘What does this rite mean to you?’ 27you shall say, ‘It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.’” And the people bowed low and worshiped.

Exodus 13:15 ‘It came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.’

Recommended Reading Exodus chapters 12-15

God orchestrates the final event that simultaneously extinguishes the Egyptians confidence in Ptah, a false god of life, punishes Egypt for mistreating God’s people, and provides a blood bought redemption for the Israelites. Consider the three dawning realizations that Wehap experienced after hearing this scripture:

1. First, Wehap had to know God’s character, and these stories reveal His integrity. God shows He reigns supreme when he dismantles Egypt’s gods. During the Passover, God reasserts His rightful status as the sovereign Lord of the Universe. God’s declaration that Passover be a lasting ordinance reveals His eternity. That first Passover night,

God illustrates his eternity by initiating a radically new program that stretches from eternity past into eternity future. God's plan to shape His people into a spiritual community illustrates His organizational ability. Renowned Bible teachers Walvoord and Zuck note, "The phrase 'the whole community of Israel' is used here for the first time in the whole Old Testament to refer to the nation. The word suggests a new beginning."¹ Significantly, God even re-orders the calendar around this date. Passover becomes the first day of the first month in the Jewish calendar (Exodus 12:2).

2. Wewap also had to consider God's plan for salvation. God told His people to take a perfect lamb, kill it, and paint the blood of the sacrificed lamb onto the doorposts of their home. This sounded so strange to Wewap. "Who wants blood all over their front door?" he wondered. However, this bloody display became a beautiful illustration of God's saving power. Wewap heard how God's people hid behind the lamb's blood and the Angel of Death passed over them. God gives clear directions for both the type and the preparation of the lamb (Exodus 5-11). Similarly, God clearly communicates specific steps and instructions to appropriate His gift of salvation. Thousands of years after God's people left Egypt, Wewap had a choice to make. And so do we.

And finally, Wehap saw his need. But does mankind really need God? People have a long history of stubbornly resisting God's loving advances towards them. Egypt put unfounded confidence in an invented religion filled with bickering gods, complex afterlives, and ritualistic burial practices. Notice God's proclamation, "Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments—I am the Lord" (Exodus 12:12). Walvoord and Zuck explain: "Pharaoh's eldest son and successor supposedly had divine properties. Min, the Egyptian god of reproduction, and Isis, the goddess of love who attends women at childbirth, were judged as impotent by this climactic plague and catastrophe."² In one terrible judgement, Yahweh God exposes the entire Egyptian religion as a fraud. Peoples' needs have always been to recognize the futility of trusting in self-made religion and humbly submit to their Creator.

Imagine the grieving Egyptians heart-rending cries of grief as they mourn the loss of their oldest children. In one fell blow God demands an accounting of rebellion from every single unbelieving Egyptian

family. The sacrificial lamb's blood covers believing Hebrew's sin debts for a time and allows the Angel of Death to pass over. Pastor Rich Bruce wrote, "From this point in history until the cross, the shed blood of an innocent animal would act as a temporary substitute, or covering, for God's people." Where is your lamb? Are you, like Wewap, in desperate search for a sin covering or has the blood of Jesus washed you white as snow.

The grand stage of God's ultimate plan for history has just one performance, and it plays continuously for all of eternity past, present, and future: the redemption of man. The angels watch enthralled. This dramatic Passover scene serves as a lesson that points to a more perfect lamb to come. God long ago promised a lamb who by one death and one sacrifice would redeem once and for all and do away with sin forever!

Point to Ponder

God's perfect character and my desperate need demand one perfect sacrifice.

From Learning to Living

From Learning to Living: Have you stopped to consider how to fit into God's eternal plan to redeem mankind? Have you thought about the implications that Almighty God desires to involve you in a deeply personal relationship so He can partner with you in His grand plan? Have you thought about those around you who haven't heard this good news? You could start those difficult conversations with something as simple as, "Have you ever heard the story of the Passover?"

Prayer Point

"Dear God who demands an account for all sin. You know my heart and search my thoughts. Show me Your plan."

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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