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Exodus Illustrations Our Daily Bread

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EXODUS 1

How Big is your God?

What would have happened had Moses tried to figure out what was needed to accomplish God's command? One of the biggest arithmetical miracles in the world was required in the desert.

Moses led the people of Israel into the desert....Now what was he going to do with them? They had to be fed, and feeding 3—1/2 million people required a lot of food. According to the U. S. Army's Quartermaster General, Moses needed 1500 tons of food a day, filling two freight trains, each a mile long. Besides, you must remember, they were cooking the food (not to mention for keeping warm, and if anyone tells you it doesn't get cold in the desert don't believe them!). Just for cooking this took 4000 tons of firewood and a few more freight trains, each a mile long and this is only for one day!!! They were for forty YEARS in transit!!!

Let's not forget about water, shall we? If they only had enough to drink and wash a few dishes (no bathing?!), it took 11,000,000 gallons EACH DAY—enough to fill a train of tanker cars 1800 miles long.

And another thing! They had to get across the Red Sea in one night. Now if they went on a narrow path, double file, the line would be 800 miles long and require 35 days and nights to complete the crossing. So to get it over in one night there had to be a space in the Red Sea 3 miles wide so that they could walk 5,000 abreast. Think about this; very time they camped at the end of the day, a camp ground the size of Rhode Island was required, or 750 square miles.

Do you think that Moses sat down and figured out the logistics of what God told him to do before he set out from Egypt? I doubt it. He had faith that God would take care of everything. Let us have courage, we share the very same God! Source unknown

EXODUS 2

Exodus 2:11-22 Becoming Invisible

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens. Ecclesiastes 3:1

Where I live, this is the time of year when plants defy death by remaining underground until it is safe to come out again. Before the snow comes and the ground freezes, they let go of their beautiful blooms and retreat to a place where they can rest and save energy for the next growing season. Contrary to the way it looks, they are not dead; they are dormant. When the snow melts and the ground thaws, they will again lift their heads toward heaven, greeting their Creator with brilliant colors and sweet fragrances.

The seasons of life require that we sometimes enter a period of dormancy. We are not dead, but we may feel we've become invisible. During such times we may feel useless, and we may wonder whether God will ever use us again. But periods like this are for our protection and preparation. When the time is right and the conditions are safe, God will call us once again to service and worship.

Moses experienced a period of time like this. After killing an Egyptian who harmed a fellow Hebrew, Moses had to flee for his life to the distant land of the Midianites (Ex. 2:11-22). There, God protected him and prepared him for the biggest assignment of his life (3:10).

So be encouraged. We are never invisible to God.

Savior, like a shepherd lead us, much we need Thy tender care; in Thy pleasant pastures feed us, for our use Thy folds prepare.
Dorothy A. Thrupp

No one is invisible to God.

Exodus 2:11-15; 3:7-12 The Power In Meekness

In quietness and confidence shall be your strength. —Isaiah 30:15

Niagara Falls is one of the most spectacular sights I have ever seen. The roar of 6 million cubic feet of water each minute makes it the most powerful waterfall in North America. Few people, however, know that more than 50 percent of the river's water is diverted before it reaches those falls via four huge tunnels. This water passes through hydroelectric turbines that supply power to nearby areas in the US and Canada before returning to the river well past the Falls.

Some would love to have others think of their lives like Niagara Falls— wild, spectacular, and loud. But power without control dissipates into useless energy. Moses thought he could use his royal power to bring about deliverance for God's people from slavery. He misused his power by killing an Egyptian, which only dissipated his power because he lost the respect of his own people (Ex. 2:11-15). God had to teach him meekness (Num. 12:3).

The meek prosper because they are the ones who have power under control. Our Lord said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). You may be trying to live in this world by your own power. Let God teach you meekness so that you can live in, and depend on, His strength.

We strive to do the will of God

And struggle to succeed;

But we may fail to recognize

God's strength is what we need. —D. De Haan

Nothing is stronger than strength under God's control.

Exodus 2:11-25 What Have We Learned?

You shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years . . . , to humble you and test you. —Dt. 8:2

The often quoted statement "Nice guys finish last" seems all too true to the fullback of a high school football team. After they lost a game to a team that seemed intent on breaking all the rules, he asked, "Why didn't God honor us by giving us the win?"

Moses could have asked a similar question. Although brought up in the home of Egypt's king, he had chosen to identify himself with his own people, the oppressed Israelites. When he saw an Egyptian mercilessly beating an Israelite, Moses killed the man. But instead of being rewarded by God, he fled from Egypt and spent 40 years as a shepherd in Midian.

Eighty years after Moses left Egypt, he finally knew why God had allowed him to be humiliated. He understood why the Lord had permitted the Israelites to go through 40 more years of oppression and then 40 years of wilderness wandering. Just before the Jews crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, Moses told them that God's goal was to humble them and strengthen them through the long years of testing (Dt. 8:2) so they would know God in a new way and rely fully on Him.

The Lord places a higher value on our long-term moral and spiritual development than on our short-term happiness. What have we learned in our days of testing?

Our God works to transform us,

Until that work is done;

He uses trials and testings

To make us like His Son. —Sper

God uses life's setbacks to help us move ahead.

EXODUS 3

Exodus 3:13-22

Who Is God?

Thirty-five hundred years ago, Moses asked God who He was and got a peculiar answer. God said, "Say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' . . . This is My name forever" (Exodus 3:14, 15).

I have long wondered why God would call Himself by such a name, but slowly I am learning its significance. A sentence needs only two things to be complete: a subject and a verb. So when God says His name is "I AM," it conveys the concept that He is complete in Himself. He is subject and verb. He is everything we could possibly need.

Jesus put flesh on God's bare-boned answer to Moses' question, "Who are You?" Jesus left heaven to show us what it means to bear His Father's name. He told His disciples, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). He also said, "I am the bread of life" (Jn 6:48), "the light of the world" (Jn 8:12), "the good shepherd" (Jn 10:11), and "the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25). In Revelation, Jesus declared, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last" (Re 22:13). And He said, "Before Abraham was, I AM" (Jn 8:58).

If you're questioning who God is, take some time to get to know Jesus in the pages of His Word. —Julie Ackerman Link

To Moses at the burning bush

God spoke His name—it was "I AM"

And Jesus also took that name—

"I AM," the sacrificial Lamb. —Hess

Jesus is the image of the invisible God. —Colossians 1:15

Exodus 3:1-15 Don't Be Surprised

Come now, therefore, and I will send you. —Exodus 3:10

The world is undeniably in great need. Many people wonder why God doesn't intervene in our messed-up world and put things right; why He doesn't reach out and mend all the broken people.

But God has already intervened. He intervened through the birth, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. Through these powerful events, God provided salvation, an effective cure to heal the world's most deadly disease—sin.

The Lord still intervenes and saves broken lives today, but He does this mainly by using us! That's the perspective God communicated to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:7-10). After describing the sufferings of the Hebrew people, He told Moses that He had come down to deliver them from Pharaoh's tyranny. That's exactly what Moses wanted God to do. But God said, "Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people . . . out of Egypt" (v.10). Moses immediately balked by saying, "Who am I that I should go?" (v.11). God promised him, "I will certainly be with you" (v.12).

Are you praying that God will reach out and mend broken lives near you? Don't be surprised or afraid if He sends you to be part of the answer.

Lord, help me feel the hurt that others feel

When life inflicts some bitter pain,

And use me in some loving way to heal

The wounds that in their hearts remain. —D. De Haan

To be a channel of blessing, let Christ's love flow through you.

Exodus 3:5 Worthy Of Worship

Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool—He is holy. —Psalm 99:5

As Moses was tending his father-in-law's sheep in the desert, his attention was drawn to a strange sight. A bush was burning without being consumed. When Moses turned to look more closely, God said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5).

Joshua had a similar experience when he approached the captain of the host of the Lord. As Joshua drew nearer, he was given this command: "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy" (Joshua 5:15).

The experiences of Moses and Joshua teach us that a holy God demands our reverence and respect. True, we are encouraged to "come boldly to the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16). We can enter the presence of God with confidence because Jesus has opened the way for us through His death on the cross. But never are we to approach God with disrespect. Never are we to profane His name.

Our heavenly Father is not "the man upstairs." He is God, the One who is high and lifted up. And because of His majesty and holiness, we are to exalt and worship Him. As the one true God, He is worthy of our adoration. Let's give Him our highest praise.

You alone are worthy, Lord,

To be worshiped and adored;

We to You our tribute bring

As our hearts rejoice and sing. —Hess

True worship acknowledges the true worthship of God.

Exodus 3:1-12 Sunrise

Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight." —Exodus 3:3

There was a magnificent sunrise this morning, but I was too busy to enjoy it. I turned away and became preoccupied with other things. I thought about that sunrise a few moments ago, and I realize I lost an opportunity for worship this morning.

In the midst of the busyness and stresses of our days, there are patches of beauty all around us, glimpses of God's goodness that we catch here and there along the way. These are the places in the walls of the universe where heaven is breaking through—if only we will take the time to stop and to reflect upon God's love for us.

What if Moses had taken only a fleeting glance at the bush that was burning but "was not consumed"? (Ex. 3:2). What if he had ignored it and hurried on to other things? (He had those sheep to take care of, you know, and important work to do.) He would have missed an epic, life-changing encounter with the living God (vv.4-12).

Sometimes in life we must hurry. But overall, life should be less hurrying and more noticing. Life is the present. Life is being aware; it is seeing God's love breaking through. It is turning aside to the miracle of something like a sunrise. Something transitory, yet symbolic of the eternity that awaits us.

Open my eyes, that I may see

Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;

Place in my hands the wonderful key

That shall unclasp and set me free. —Scott

Lord, open our eyes that we may see.

INSIGHT: Psalm 119, the longest "chapter" in the Bible, is David's great anthem about the Word of God. In it, he calls us to honor that Word in order to honor God. He has given us His Word so that we might know Him.

Exodus 3:6

GOD'S HOLINESS

"And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God (Exodus 3:6).

According to a doctor at Johns Hopkins University, man is constituted "in nerve and tissue and brain cell and soul" to function best on faith. In other words, God made us so that we realize our greatest potential when we are free from the devastating effects of fear. Yet all of us have fears. Those who deny this are being dishonest with themselves. We are afraid of others, ourselves, the future, the past, unemployment, public opinion—the list is endless!

The Bible mentions no less than two dozen words relating to fear. They range in meaning from terror to timidity, and most carry a negative connotation. But one kind of fear—the fear of the Lord—is positive and health-producing. Scripture tells us that it is the "beginning of knowledge" (Pr. 1:7) , that it is "clean" (Ps. 19:9) , that it gives "strong confidence" (Pr 14:26) , and that it is "a fountain of life" (Pr 14:27). But most significantly, we can choose to be controlled by this fear (Pr 1:29).

Moses expressed this kind of fear when God confronted him from a burning bush that was not consumed. Moses "hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God" (Ex 3:6).

The fear of God is reverent trust. We stand in awe of God, His power, and His holiness. We believe His warnings, His commands, His promises. We hold His character in such high respect that we choose "to hate evil" (Pr 8:13) , knowing that all His commands are for our good. By fearing Him we express our devotion to Him. It is the one fear that overcomes all others. —D. J. DeHaan.

Only the fear of God can banish the fear of men

Exodus 3:6a

FEAR OF GOD

"Slaves, in all things obey ...with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord." (Colossians 3:22)

"Perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18).

Jesus commands us to love God (Matt. 22:37) , yet Paul enjoins us to fear Him (Col. 3:22). But if we love God, shouldn't we be free from fear? Doesn't perfect love cast out fear? My own experience can help answer this question. I love the Lord, but I still have some fear when I think of the day I will stand before Him. I'm not afraid He will send me to hell; I know that Jesus paid the price for my sins. Yet the thought of standing in the presence of a holy God awes me. This element of fear helps me to try to please God. The kind of fear that is cast out by love, though, is a cringing dread of eternal punishment. God has delivered me from that.

The Wind in the Willows, a children's allegory by Kenneth Grahame, illustrates the love-fear relationship.

Two animals, Mole and Rat, meet Friend and Helper, who personifies God. Mole shakes as he whispers,

"Rat, are you afraid?"

"Afraid," murmurs Rat, his eyes brimming with unutterable love—

"Afraid! Of him? Oh, never, never! And yet—and yet—oh, Mole, I am afraid!"

Daniel the prophet must have experienced that same feeling. His love for God was great, yet when he met the Lord in a vision he collapsed in fear (Dan 8:15-27) . One glimpse of God's holiness overwhelmed him with a sense of his own sinfulness.

We must love God, but we must also stand in awe of Him. The combination of love and fear is the key to holy living. —Herbert Vander Lugt

He who doesn't fear God should fear everything else

Exodus 3:7-15 Who Am I?

Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" —Exodus 3:11

Years ago, world-famous evangelist Billy Graham was scheduled to speak at Cambridge University in England, but he did not feel qualified to address the sophisticated thinkers. He had no advanced degrees and he had never attended seminary. Billy confided in a close friend: "I do not know that I have ever felt more inadequate and totally unprepared for a mission." He prayed for God's help, and God used him to share the simple truth of the gospel and the cross of Christ.

Moses also felt inadequate when God recruited him for the task of telling Pharaoh to release the Israelites. Moses asked, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" (Ex. 3:11). Although Moses may have questioned his effectiveness because he was "slow of speech" (4:10), God said, "I will certainly be with you" (3:12). Knowing he would have to share God's rescue plan and tell the Israelites who

sent him, Moses asked God, "What shall I say to them?" God replied, "I AM has sent me to you" (vv.13-14). His name, "I AM," revealed His eternal, self-existent, and all-sufficient character.

Even when we question our ability to do what God has asked us to do, He can be trusted. Our shortcomings are less important than God's sufficiency. When we ask, "Who am I?" we can remember that God said, "I AM."

Dear Lord, help me to remember that You are

with me, even when I'm unsure of my own

abilities. Give me the faith to believe that You

can help me to do anything You ask me to do.

You need not be afraid of where you're going when you know God's going with you.

Exodus 3:1-6,10-14 Burning Questions

An old Native American story tells of a young boy who was sent into the woods alone on an autumn night to prove his courage. Soon the sky darkened and the sounds of night filled the air. Trees creaked and groaned, an owl screeched, and a coyote howled. Even though he was frightened, the boy remained in the woods all night, as the test of courage required. Finally morning came, and he saw a solitary figure nearby. It was his grandfather, who had been watching over him all night long.

When Moses went deep into the desert, he saw a burning bush that didn't burn up. Then God began talking to him from the bush, commissioning him to go back to Egypt and lead the Israelites out of cruel slavery to freedom. A reluctant Moses began to ask questions: "Who am I that I should go?"

God has promised always to be present with those who believe in Jesus.

God simply answered, "I will be with you."

"Suppose I . . . say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

God replied, "I am who I am. . . . [Say to them,] I am has sent me to you' " (Ex. 3:11-14). The phrase "I am who I am" can be interpreted, "I will be who I will be" and reveals God's eternal and all-sufficient character.

God has promised always to be present with those who believe in Jesus. No matter how dark the night, the unseen God is ready to respond appropriately to our need.

Dear Father, thank You for Your never-changing character.

God is always present and at work.

INSIGHT: Moses' early life was marked by great opportunities for education, and his status as prince of Egypt allowed him to speak with great authority (Acts 7:22). How different from his life in the Midian desert, where he served his father-in-law as a shepherd, even as God prepared him to lead His people out of Egypt. Bill Crowder

Exodus 3:13-18 The Perfect Sentence

Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? —Exodus 15:11

As a young girl writing in my diary, my secret ambition was to compose the perfect sentence. I wondered what it would look and sound like. Perhaps it would include a strong verb and colorful adjectives.

My pursuit of the perfect sentence will never be satisfied, but I have found a statement of perfection in Exodus 3:14. When the Lord God called Moses from the burning bush, He told him that he had been chosen to bring His people out of bondage in Egypt (v.10). Moses, who was anxious about this responsibility, wondered what to say if the Israelites doubted him and asked who he was representing.

The Lord replied, "I AM WHO I AM" (v.14). By using His unique name, He offered Moses a glimpse of the nature of His eternal existence in one sentence. You might say it's a statement of perfection!

Bible commentator G. Bush writes this about God's description of Himself: "He, in distinction from all others, is the one only true God, the God who really is The eternal, self-existent, and immutable Being; the only being who can say that He always will be what He always has been."

God says, "I AM WHO I AM." He and His name are perfect. In reverence we are to bow before Him.

For Further Study

At the name of Jesus, every knee will one day bow.

To learn about His name read The Amazing Prophecy

Of Names at www.discoveryseries.org/q0207

Looking for perfection? Look to Jesus.

Exodus 3:1-12 He'll Make It Work

[God] said, "I will certainly be with you." —Exodus 3:12

Many people who have stood on the threshold of greatness have caught a glimpse of the enormous challenges ahead and backed away. We see it in election years when candidates for President of the United States contemplate the immensity of the job ahead and decide not to run.

On a smaller scale, we can all find ourselves so overwhelmed with a challenge we are asked to do for the Lord that we look harder for excuses than for ways to make it work.

Look at Moses at the burning bush. We can understand why he was so hesitant to accept God's call for him to lead the people of Israel. Like him, we have our self-doubts and limitations. He was worried about the unbelief of the people; similarly, we may be concerned that people won't respond properly to our efforts. He was worried that his lack of eloquence would disqualify him; likewise, we often find our tongue getting tied while trying to deliver God's message.

The Lord did not let Moses off the hook. Instead, God gave him a sign to persuade the people to believe him, and He promised to guide his faltering tongue. God's people will never be left without the resources they need. When He asks you to do something, He will always send a provision. He did it for Moses; He'll do it for you.

If you have some work to do,

Start this very hour;

You supply the willingness,

God supplies the power. —Anon.

God's resources are always equal to His requirements.

Exodus 3:13-22 Who Is God?

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." —Exodus 3:14

Thirty-five hundred years ago, Moses asked God who He was and got a peculiar answer. God said, "Say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' . . . This is My name forever" (Exodus 3:14-15).

I have long wondered why God would call Himself by such a name, but slowly I am learning its significance. A sentence needs only two things to be complete: a subject and a verb. So when God says His name is "I AM," it conveys the concept that He is complete in Himself. He is subject and verb. He is everything we could possibly need.

Jesus put flesh on God's bare-boned answer to Moses' question, "Who are You?" Jesus left heaven to show us what it means to bear His Father's name. He told His disciples, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). He also said, "I am the bread of life" (6:48), "the light of the world" (8:12), "the good shepherd" (10:11), and "the resurrection and the life" (11:25). In Revelation, Jesus declared, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last" (22:13). And He said, "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58).

If you're questioning who God is, take some time to get to know Jesus in the pages of His Word.

To Moses at the burning bush

God spoke His name—it was "I AM";

And Jesus also took that name—

"I AM," the sacrificial Lamb. —Hess

Jesus is the image of the invisible God. —Colossians 1:15

Exodus 3:14

ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING

"And God 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.'" (Exodus 3:14)

"For who in the heavens can be compared to the LORD?" (Psalm 89:6).

Just east of Atlanta is Stone Mountain, the largest outcropping of exposed granite in the world. On the side of the 1700-foot mountain are carvings of Stonewall Jackson, Jefferson Davis, and Robert E. Lee. To demonstrate the immensity of these figures, workmen once set a table and chairs on the scaffolding over Lee's shoulder. Then several people ate lunch on that huge projection of carved granite. Although this monument is enormous, it doesn't appear as impressive from a distance as it does when seen up close. Its greatness overwhelms close observers.

The words of Ethan in Psalm 89 suggest a similar truth about getting to know God. The psalmist's inspired song is filled with praise to the Lord. The writer magnifies His greatness, His mercy, and His faithfulness. The psalmist could say these things because he enjoyed a close personal relationship with God. Such a vision of the Almighty comes only to one who draws near to the Lord and is overwhelmed by His greatness.

The same is true for us. We come to appreciate the greatness of our God more and more as we come into closer fellowship with Him and experience His presence. Ethan could sing of Jehovah, "You have a mighty arm" (Ps 89:13). But that knowledge translates into blessing for those "who know the joyful sound" (Ps 89:15) and walk in the light of the Lord's countenance.

The nearer we come to Him the greater He becomes to us. —P. R. Van Gorder

God can take the place of anything, but nothing can take the place of God

John Henry Jowett

MAY The Tenth

GOD'S USE OF MEN

"I have surely seen the affliction of My people ...come now, therefore, I will send thee."

Exodus 3:1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.

DOES that seem a weak ending to a powerful beginning? The Lord God looks upon terrible affliction and He sends a weak man to deal with it. Could He not have sent fire from heaven? Could He not have rent the heavens and sent His ministers of calamity and disasters? Why choose a man when the arch-angel Gabriel stands ready at obedience?

This is the way of the Lord. He uses human means to divine ends. He works through man to the emancipation of men. He pours His strength into a worm, and it becomes "an instrument with teeth." He stiffens a frail reed and it becomes as an iron pillar.

And this mighty God will use thee and me. On every side there are Egypts where affliction abounds, there are homes where ignorance breeds, there are workshops where tyranny reigns, there are lands where oppression is rampant. "Come now, therefore, I will send thee." Thus saith the Lord, and He who gives the command will also give the equipment. (**John Henry Jowett - My Daily Meditation for the Circling Year**)

EXODUS 4

Exodus 4:2

The Little Things

"And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand?" Exodus 4:2

Our Scripture reading for today contains Moses' response to God's call at the burning bush. Having just been commissioned to lead the children of Israel out of bondage, he was apprehensive about how the Egyptians, and even his countrymen, would react. But the

Lord said to him, "What is that in thine hand?" "A rod," Moses answered. Then He said to him in Ex 4:17, "And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs." Most of us are familiar with the great miracles associated with that rod when Moses obeyed the Lord. It was insignificant in itself, but it became a powerful instrument when committed to the Lord.

Writing on this theme, J. W. Johnson imagined the following conversation between God and some of His faithful servants down through the centuries: "What is that in thine hand?" asked the Lord. 'A sling,' said David. 'It is enough; go up against the giant,' and the great Goliath fell before the shepherd boy. 'What is that in thine hand?' 'A sword,' answered Jonathan. 'It is enough,' and the brave youth, followed by his armor-bearer, went up against an army, and the Philistines were defeated....'What is that in thine hand?' 'A pen,' said John Bunyan, as he spoke from the arches of Bedford prison. 'It is enough,' and he wrote the story Pilgrim's Progress, which will live while the world endures."

Don't sell yourself short, friend! If God has called you to a task, He'll equip you for it. He merely asks, "What is that in thine hand?" Give it to Him, and you'll see what He can do with little things. - Richard W. De Haan

Exodus 4:1-5 What Is In Your Hand?

So the Lord said to [Moses], "What is that in your hand?" —Exodus 4:2

If you have a tendency to despair over lost opportunities or if you worry about the future, ask yourself this question: "What is right in front of me?" In other words, what circumstances and relationships are currently available to you? This question can get your focus off a past regret or a scary future and back to what God can do in your life.

It's similar to the question God asked Moses at the burning bush. Moses was troubled. Aware of his own weaknesses, he expressed fear about the Lord's call for him to lead Israel out of bondage. So God simply asked Moses, "What is that in your hand?" (Ex. 4:2). The Lord shifted Moses' attention away from his anxiety about the future and suggested he notice what was right in front of him—a shepherd's rod. God showed Moses that He could use this ordinary staff to perform miracles as a sign for unbelieving people. As Moses' trust in God grew, so did the magnitude of miracles God worked through His servant.

Do you think about past failures too much? Do you have fearful thoughts about the future? Recall God's question: "What is that in your hand?" What current circumstances and relationships can God use for your benefit and His glory? Entrust them—and your life—to Him.

Onward and upward your course plan today,

Seeking new heights as you walk Jesus' way;

Heed not past failures, but strive for the prize,

Aiming for goals fit for His holy eyes. —Brandt

You can't change the past, but you'll ruin the present by worrying about the future.

Exodus 4:1-9,17 The Tales Of Two Sticks

You shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs. —Exodus 4:17

Conventional wisdom questions how much can be accomplished with little. We tend to believe that a lot more can be done if we have large financial resources, talented manpower, and innovative ideas. But these things don't matter to God. Consider just a couple of examples:

In Judges 3:31, a relatively unknown man named Shamgar delivered Israel from the Philistines single-handedly. How? He won a great victory by killing 600 Philistines with nothing more than an oxgoad (a stick sharpened on one end to drive slow-moving animals).

In Exodus, when God asked Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, Moses was afraid the people wouldn't listen to him or follow him. So God said, "What is that in your hand?" (4:2). Moses replied, "A rod." God went on to use that rod in Moses' hand to convince the people to follow him, to turn the Nile River into blood, to bring great plagues on Egypt, to part the Red Sea, and to perform miracles in the wilderness.

Moses' rod and Shamgar's oxgoad, when dedicated to God, became mighty tools. This helps us see that God can use what little we have, when surrendered to Him, to do great things. God is not looking for people with great abilities, but for those who are dedicated to following and obeying Him.

If you use what little you may have

To serve the Lord with all your heart

You will find that He can do great things

When you begin to do your part. —Sper

Little is much when God is in it.

Exodus 4:10-17 Absolutely Nobody

Surely I am more stupid than any man, and do not have the understanding of a man. —Proverbs 30:2

He wanted to be a nobody. In 1992, a Seattle man running for the office of Washington State's lieutenant governor legally changed his name to "Absolutely Nobody." As he entered the race, he said he wanted to greet the voters, saying, "Hi, I'm Absolutely Nobody. Vote for me." He later admitted that the purpose of his campaign was to abolish the office of lieutenant governor.

This man used a name as a gimmick, but the Bible has a lot to say to those of us who present ourselves to others as a nobody. The right kind of humility is healthy. The songwriters of Israel knew how important it is to see our foolishness apart from God (Ps. 73:22; Prov. 30:2). Jesus Himself showed us that without God we won't accomplish anything of lasting value (John 5:30; 15:5).

But we read a warning in the story of Moses. There's a downside to insisting that we are "nobody" if it is to avoid doing what God commands (Ex. 4:1-17). Our motives make us into somebody who resists the loving purposes of God.

We may treat ourselves and others as having no worth. But remember, God doesn't make nobodies. Like Moses, if we surrender to God, we can do anything God wants us to do—in His strength.

Lord, take my life and make it wholly Thine;

Fill my poor heart with Thy great love divine.

Take all my will, my passion, self and pride;

I now surrender, Lord—in me abide. —Orr

Without Christ we can do nothing. With Him we can do everything He wants us to do.

Exodus 4:10-17 - Now Go!

Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say. —Exodus 4:12 (niv)

More than 10,000 evangelists and Christian leaders sat in a giant auditorium in Amsterdam in 1986 listening to world-renowned evangelist Billy Graham. I sat among them, listening as he narrated some of his experiences. Then, to my surprise, he said, "Let me tell you: every time I stand before the congregation of God's people to preach, I tremble and my knees wobble!"

What! I wondered. How can such a great preacher who has enthralled millions with his powerful sermons exhibit trembling and wobbling knees? Then he went on to describe not fear and stage fright, but intense humility and meekness as he felt inadequate for the daunting task to which God had called him. He relied on God for strength, not on his own eloquence.

Moses felt inadequate when God sent him to deliver the enslaved Israelites from their 400-year captivity in Egypt. Moses pleaded with the Lord to send someone else, with the excuse that he had never been a good speaker (see Ex. 4:10,13).

We may have similar fears when God calls us to do something for Him. But His encouragement to Moses can also spur us on: "Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say" (v.12 niv).

As Billy Graham said that day, "When God calls you, do not be afraid of trembling and wobbling knees, for He will be with you!"

What task does God have for you to do today? Depend on Him by asking for His help.

Wherever God sends us, He comes alongside us.

INSIGHT: When God called Moses to deliver His people from Egyptian bondage, Moses was reluctant to obey, giving various reasons why he was not qualified. He questioned his own identity and worthiness (3:11), his lack of authority (3:13), his credibility and acceptability (4:1), and his incapacities (v.10). Although God answered each of Moses's excuses, God was angry with Moses for resisting what He had asked him to do (v. 14).

Exodus 4:10-17 He Trains My Hands

Praise be to the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. Psalm 144:1

When former NBA player David Wood was playing for Taugrés de Baskonia, I was with him at a Spanish Basketball Cup final. Before one game, he read Psalm 144:1: "Praise be to the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle." He turned to me and said, "You see? It's as if God has written this verse just for me! He trains my hands to catch rebounds and my fingers to shoot!" David felt called to play basketball and had learned that God takes us as we are and enables us to do what He calls us to do.

We can easily dismiss ourselves as having little use to God because we feel we have nothing to offer. When God appeared to Moses and assigned him the task of telling the Israelites that He would deliver them from the Egyptians (Ex. 3:16-17), Moses felt inadequate. He said to the Lord, "I have never been eloquent . . . I am slow of speech and tongue" (4:10). Perhaps Moses had some kind of speech impediment, or he was just afraid, but God overcame his inadequacy with His sufficiency. God said, "Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say" (v. 12).

All God wants from us is to follow His plans.

All God wants from us is to follow His plans. He will sort out the rest. In His mighty hands, you can be a blessing to others.

Here I am, Lord, ready to serve You in whatever way You desire. Lead me.

Dr. Jaime Fernández Garrido is director of the evangelical radio and television program Born Again, author of various books, and composer of more than 400 hymns and choruses.

God's call to a task includes His strength to complete it.

INSIGHT: When God called Moses to deliver the Jews from Egyptian bondage, Moses protested and offered various reasons why he was not the right candidate for the job (Ex. 3). He questioned his own identity (v. 11), his lack of authority (v. 13), and his credibility and acceptability (4:1). God responded by assuring Moses of His power and presence (4:1-9). Moses then continued his protest, saying he lacked eloquence and was "slow of speech and tongue" (v. 10). But God assured Moses He would enable him to speak powerfully and effectively (v. 12). Running out of excuses, Moses asked God to "send someone else" (v. 13). He was angry with Moses for his lack of trust and being unwilling to take up the assignment (v. 14). God told Moses that He would enable him to do what He called him to do. Sim Kay Tee

Exodus 4:10-17

The Power Of Our Limits

Moses, on the occasion of his call by God, made excuses. "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exodus 4:10).

The wording suggests that Moses had a speech impediment—perhaps he stuttered. But the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord?" (Ex 4:11).

Our impairments, our disabilities, our handicaps are not accidents; they are God-designed. He uses every one of our flaws for His own glory. God's way of dealing with what we call "limitations" is not to remove them but to endow them with strength and use them for good.

In the New Testament, Paul the apostle referred to an unspecified "thorn in the flesh" that he repeatedly asked the Lord to take from him (2Co 12:7, 8). But God said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2Co 12:9).

Paul even learned to "take pleasure" in his troubles. "Most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me," he said (2Co 12:9). "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2Co 12:10).—David H. Roper

All faithful saints who walk with God

Through weakness learn to trust His Word;

They're not immune to pain or tears,

But learn to rise above their fears. —D. De Haan

God's strength is best seen in our weakness

John Henry Jowett

MAY The Tenth

GOD'S USE OF MEN

"I have surely seen the affliction of My people ...come now, therefore, I will send thee."

Exodus 3:1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.

DOES that seem a weak ending to a powerful beginning? The Lord God looks upon terrible affliction and He sends a weak man to deal with it. Could He not have sent fire from heaven? Could He not have rent the heavens and sent His ministers of calamity and disasters? Why choose a man when the arch-angel Gabriel stands ready at obedience?

This is the way of the Lord. He uses human means to divine ends. He works through man to the emancipation of men. He pours His strength into a worm, and it becomes "an instrument with teeth." He stiffens a frail reed and it becomes as an iron pillar.

And this mighty God will use thee and me. On every side there are Egypts where affliction abounds, there are homes where ignorance breeds, there are workshops where tyranny reigns, there are lands where oppression is rampant. "Come now, therefore, I will send thee." Thus saith the Lord, and He who gives the command will also give the equipment. (**John Henry Jowett - My Daily Meditation for the Circling Year**)

EXODUS 5

Exodus 5:1-14, 22, 23

THE DARKEST HOUR

"Whoever walks wisely will be delivered" (Proverbs 28:26).

The local TV weatherman pointed to his map and said, "Well, friends, I'm afraid that before things get better, they're going to get worse." His forecast could have applied to Israel as God prepared to rescue His people from their slave-camp conditions. The barometer of events was falling rapidly; and the dark, threatening skies would soon turn into a churning, flashing storm of oppression. Earlier the people had talked excitedly about deliverance. Everything looked promising. But some-thing seemed to go wrong. Moses, the designer of the great escape, became Moses, the source of unneeded pain. All of his talk of freedom had only angered the Egyptians, compounding Israel's predicament. As far as Pharaoh was concerned, slaves that had time to dream of freedom had too much time. So he multiplied their production quotas and took away their resources. The situation went from bad to worse. Personally humiliated, Moses bitterly cried out to the Lord for an explanation.

Time, however, showed that the plans of the Lord were not being frustrated. The great "people's express" was getting ready to leave Egypt. All was on schedule. The Lord was deliberately testing His children by allowing their suffering to get worse before it got better.

We can find courage in this. When the world closes in, we know that our condition is not determined by the authorities of this world but by the Lord who is above the world. —M. R De Haan II

The darkest hour lies nearest the dawn

Exodus 5:1-14,22-23

The Storm Will Pass

The local TV meteorologist occasionally points to a map and says something like this: "I'm afraid that things are going to get worse before they get better."

Such a forecast could very well have applied to Israel when God sent Moses to free His people from slavery in Egypt. The barometer of events was falling rapidly, and the dark, ominous sky of oppression would soon break forth into a churning, flashing storm of cruelty unleashed by Pharaoh.

Moses had appealed to Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go into the desert to worship God, but the king accused them of loafing on the job (Exodus 5:1,17). So he multiplied their workload, and the situation went from bad to horrible (Ex 5:18). Moses cried out in bitterness to the Lord for an explanation (Ex 5:22, 23). He found it hard to believe that a glorious exodus could be just around the corner.

The plans of the Lord were not being frustrated, however. Before conditions would get better for His children, God tested them by allowing their suffering to increase.

Even when we are obedient to the Lord, the skies of adversity may not always clear immediately. Circumstances may get worse before they improve. But praise God, His grace will sustain us, and the storm will pass.—Mart De Haan

Have faith in God, the sun will shine,

Though dark your path may be today;

His love has planned your way and mine,

Have faith in God, have faith always. —Anon.

It's always darkest before the dawn.

Exodus 5:1-14,22-23 From Bad To Worse

I am the Lord; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians . . . and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm. — Exodus 6:6

It happened again. I got the urge to clean my office. Before I could resist, I had created an even bigger mess than I started with. One pile turned into many piles when I started sorting books, papers, and magazines. As the mess mushroomed, I lamented that I had started. But there was no going back.

When God recruited Moses to rescue the Hebrews from slavery, their situation went from bad to worse as well. There was no doubt that the job needed to be done. The people had been crying out to God to help them (Ex. 2:23). Reluctantly, very reluctantly, Moses agreed to appeal to Pharaoh on behalf of the Hebrews. The encounter did not go well. Instead of releasing the people, Pharaoh increased his unreasonable demands. Moses questioned whether he should have started (5:22-23). Only after a lot more trouble for a lot of people did Pharaoh let the people leave.

Whenever we set out to do something good, even when we're certain that God wants us to do it, we shouldn't be surprised when the situation gets worse before it gets better. This doesn't prove that we're doing the wrong thing; it just reminds us that we need God to accomplish everything.

There is only One who knows

All the answers to my woes;

He will all my needs supply

When in faith to Him I cry. —Morgan

The supreme need in every hour of difficulty is a vision of God. —G. C. Morgan

EXODUS 6

Exodus 6:1-9

Hurting And Hearing

When we are experiencing deep sorrow or difficult circumstances, we may feel offended if someone suggests that something good can emerge from our adversity. A well-meaning person who tries to encourage us to trust God's promises may be perceived as insensitive or even unrealistic.

That happened to the children of Israel when God was working for their deliverance from Egypt. As Pharaoh hardened his heart toward the Lord's command to let His people go, he increased the Hebrew slaves' workload by forcing them to gather the straw they needed to make bricks (Exodus 5:10, 11). They became so discouraged, they couldn't accept Moses' assurance that God had heard their cries and promised to take them to a land of their own (Ex 6:9).

There are times when our hurts and fears can close our ears to the hopeful words of God. But the Lord doesn't stop speaking to us when it's hard for us to hear. He continues working on our behalf just as He did in delivering His people from Egypt.

As we experience God's compassion and His loving care, we can begin to hear again even as the hurt continues to heal.—David C. McCasland

O yes, He cares—I know He cares!

His heart is touched with my grief;

When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,

I know my Savior cares. —Graeff

Even when we don't sense God's presence, His loving care is all around us.

Exodus 6:1-13 Not Without Hope

I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. —Exodus 6:6

"Sixteen Tons," written by Merle Travis and recorded by Tennessee Ernie Ford, became one of America's most popular songs in the mid-1950s. People seemed to identify with this coal miner's lament about feeling trapped and unable to change his situation no matter how hard he worked. Coal miners often lived in company-owned houses and were paid in "scrip"—coupons valid only at the company-owned store. Even if summoned to heaven, the miner said, he couldn't go because he owed his soul to the company store.

That sense of hopeless resignation may help us understand the feelings of the Hebrew people during their 400 years of bondage in Egypt. When Moses told them of God's promise to release them from slavery, they didn't listen to him "because of anguish of spirit" (Ex. 6:9). They were so far down they couldn't look up.

But God did something for them that they could not do for themselves. The Lord's miraculous deliverance of His people foreshadowed His powerful intervention on our behalf through His Son Jesus Christ. It was when "we were powerless to help ourselves that Christ died for sinful men" (Rom. 5:6 PHILLIPS).

When life is at its lowest ebb, we are not without hope because of the wonderful grace of God.

When trouble seeks to rob your very breath,

When tragedy hits hard and steals your days,

Recall that Christ endured the sting of death;

He gives us hope, and merits all our praise. —Gustafson

No one is hopeless whose hope is in God.

Exodus 6:1-9 The Most Depressing Day

Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid. —Matthew 14:27

Scientists in the UK have calculated that the most depressing day of the year comes in the third week of January. Winter days are dark and cold, holiday excitement has worn off just as Christmas debts are coming due, and New Year's resolutions have all been broken. The celebrations, gift-giving, and good intentions that once made us feel happy now press us down and leave us feeling hopeless.

Long ago in Egypt, the Hebrew people had high hopes that Moses would rescue them from slavery. But their hopes were dashed when Moses' good intentions led to worse conditions for them. Instead of gaining freedom, the people were pressed even harder by slave drivers who demanded that they produce the same amount of bricks with fewer resources.

Moses cried out to the Lord, "Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all" (Ex. 5:23). As Moses and the Hebrew people were about to learn, God's rescue plans sometimes don't kick in until all hope seems to be gone.

If the circumstances of your life seem to be going from bad to worse, sending you into depression and despair, remember that God always hears and answers our cries—but it's in His time, not ours.

Our strength and hope are in the Lord—

We rest secure in His sure Word;

And though we're tempted to despair,

We know we're kept within His care. —D. De Haan

Exodus 6:1-8 God's Strong Arm

I will redeem you with an outstretched arm. —Exodus 6:6

My friend Joann had a strong desire to become a concert pianist and to travel and perform as either a soloist or as a piano accompanist. While majoring in piano performance in college, she developed tendinitis in her right arm, and it became too weak to perform the solo recital that was required. She graduated with a degree in music history and literature instead.

She knew Jesus as her Savior, but she had been rebelling against Him for several years. Then through further difficult circumstances, she sensed the Lord reaching out to her, and she turned back to Him. Eventually her arm grew stronger, and her dream of traveling and performing came about. She says, "Now I could play to God's glory instead of my own. His outstretched arm restored my spiritual life and the strength in my arm to enable me to serve Him with the gift He gave me."

The Lord promised Moses that His outstretched arm would rescue the Israelites from bondage in Egypt (Ex. 6:6). He kept that promise even though His often-rebellious people doubted (14:30-31). God's mighty arm is outstretched for us as well. No matter the outcome of our situation, He can be trusted to bring about His will for each of His children. We can depend on God's strong arm.

What a fellowship, what a joy divine,

Leaning on the everlasting arms;

O how bright the path grows from day to day,

Leaning on the everlasting arms. —Hoffman

With God's strength behind you and His arms beneath you, you can face whatever lies ahead of you.

Exodus 6:28-7:13 No Match For God

He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. —1 John 4:4

During the 1930s, a missionary in a primitive African village saw firsthand the conflict between the power of the kingdom of evil and the omnipotence of God.

According to author Calvin Miller, a witch doctor had warned the missionary that the tribal god would destroy his school. A bolt of lightning fulfilled his threat. Convinced that the voodoo spirit would not have the last word, the missionary publicly proclaimed that the God of the Bible would strike the witch doctor's totem with lightning that night. To the utter amazement of the village people, that's exactly what happened! They saw this as evidence of the superior power of the missionary's God.

In the book of Exodus, Moses and Aaron could have been intimidated by Pharaoh's magicians. Their demonic power was clearly evident when their rods became serpents. But God reassured His servants and reminded them of His superior power when Aaron's rod-turned-serpent devoured the other serpents.

The power of Satan is demonstrated as he works through unbelief and false religious systems. But when we walk with God, we need not be afraid. The devil and all his forces are no match for God.

The devil prowls and seeks his prey,

His power can't be denied;

But God is greater, and we know

He's always by our side. —Sper

The power of Christ within you is greater than The power of evil around you.

Exodus 6:1-8 El-Shaddai

I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty. —Exodus 6:3

I walked out of the woods as quickly as I could. Huge thunderheads had suddenly appeared on the horizon, towering skyward and turning the morning back into night. Just before I got to my truck, a huge rainstorm broke over me. Raindrops pelted down furiously from the black sky.

But most awesome was the lightning. Some bolts struck so near I could hear them hiss. Then came the ground-shaking, deafening crack of the thunder. The air vibrated in ear-popping furor with each tremendous burst of sound. I felt tiny and helpless before such

awesome power.

A storm like that echoes in a small way the unlimited power of God Almighty. In the Hebrew text of Exodus 6:3, God's name appears as El-Shaddai. The Israelites used El-Shaddai to refer to God's great power and limitless provision for all their needs.

Because God Almighty is so powerful, we can trust Him to keep all His promises. He kept His word to Moses to free Israel from Pharaoh's hand (v.1). He promises to break us free from sin and death through His powerful work in salvation (Jn. 1:29; Rom. 7:24-25). And He will protect us from the attacks of Satan (Jn. 17:15; 1 Cor. 15:55-57).

Put your trust in El-Shaddai—the Almighty God.

The God who governs galaxies

And makes the thunder roar

Gently guides my little craft

With safety to the shore. —Berg

If we depend wholly on God, we find Him wholly dependable.

J H Jowett

JANUARY 4

THE GOD OF THEIR SUCCEEDING RACE

Exodus 6:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

"I APPEARED unto Abraham.... I will be to you a God." The covenant made with the father was renewed to the children. The father's death did not disannul the promise of the Lord. Death has no power in the realms of grace. His moth and his rust can never destroy the ministries of Divine love. Abraham died and was laid to rest, but the river of life flowed on, and the bounties of the Lord never failed. The village well quenches the thirst of many generations: and so is it through the generations with the wells of grace and salvation. The villagers have not to dig a new well when the patriarch dies: "the river of God is full of water."

And thus I am privileged to share the spiritual resources of Abraham, and the still richer resources of the Apostle Paul. Nothing was given to him that is withheld from me. He is like a great mountaineer, and he has climbed to lofty heights; but I need not be dismayed. All the strength that was given to him, in which he reached those lofty places, is mine also. I may share his elevation and his triumph. "For the promise is unto you and your children, and to all that are afar off." (**John Henry Jowett - My Daily Meditation for the Circling Year**)

EXODUS 7

Exodus 7:8-10

UNMASKING THE MAGICIANS

"Now the magicians of Egypt....cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents." (Exodus 7:11,12)

When I was young, I often wondered how the magicians of Egypt could make snakes out of their rods in the presence of Pharaoh like Aaron had done. I knew God had divinely commissioned His ambassadors to perform a miracle, but were those on Satan's side permitted special demonic power to do the same? Perhaps in reproducing some of the plagues they were, but I don't think that was true in this case.

Commentators say that serpents engraved on Egyptian monuments have the appearance of an Irish-thorn cane, with the head turned over the body as a handle. From this they conclude that the magicians knew how to paralyze a snake by putting pressure on the back of its neck so that it would become rigid. The sorcerers used these reptiles as walking sticks. The people would stare in amazement when they threw these 'canes' on the ground, for with the pressure released, the snakes would begin to crawl away. Then the magicians would seize the serpents and pinch their neck nerves, and they again became paralyzed and stiff.

Prior to the account in Exodus 7, Moses had been told to take his staff, which through God's power had become a serpent, and hold it not by the neck but "by the tail" to turn it into a rod (Ex. 4:4). Assuming that Aaron did the same thing in Pharaoh's presence, it would be obvious that his act was a true miracle and not trickery.

The devil's followers are still using deception, and they counterfeit God's power to gain attention. Because "many false prophets are

gone out into the world” (I John 4:1), beware lest they trick you. Henry G. Bosch

O Let us learn from Thy blest Word
Base error to discern,
And by Thy Spirit’s light and help
From Satan’s snares to turn. -- Bosch

Error often comes dressed in the garment of truth

EXODUS 8

Exodus 8:16-19 A Gnat Lesson

Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. —Hebrews 3:8

During one of my daily walks, I inadvertently walked through a small tornado of little insects. I didn’t think much of it at the time, but later on I found all kinds of bites on my ankles and arms. It seems I had walked through a swarm of gnats, whose bites led to uncomfortable itching and sores.

This experience gave me a new perspective on the plague of gnats that God visited upon Egypt when Pharaoh would not free the Israelites. The Hebrew word translated “lice” in Exodus 8:16-18 can also mean “gnats” or “mosquitoes.” Because the insects are compared to the sand of the desert, a swarm of gnats seems the most likely. The pagan priests of Pharaoh who prided themselves in their frequent washings and shavings were now covered with numerous insect bites. God had designed this plague to get Pharaoh to repent and let Israel go, but instead he hardened his heart.

Is God trying to get your attention through some circumstances in your life? Is He trying to persuade you to get back in step with Him? (Gal. 5:25). We should resist the urge to harden our hearts. But let’s instead submit to God (James 4:6-8) and ask Him what spiritual lessons He wants us to learn.

The sun that hardens clay to brick

Can soften wax to shape and mold;

So too life’s trials will harden some,

While others purify as gold. —Sper

God makes us miserable through conviction to make us joyful through confession.

Exodus 8:1-15 Out Of Chaos

Speak evil of no one, . . . be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. —Titus 3:2

Everything I observe makes me believe this is true: Order is not natural. When I consider my office, I’m astounded at how quickly it descends into chaos and how long it takes me to restore order. Order requires intervention; it does not happen naturally.

I shouldn’t be surprised. God’s role in bringing order out of chaos is a prominent biblical theme. He did it when He was creating the nation of Israel (Ex. 7–14). When God said it was time to bring the Hebrew people out of Egypt, Pharaoh objected. His nation’s economy depended on the Hebrew workers, so Pharaoh didn’t want to lose them. To change Pharaoh’s mind, God sent 10 plagues to convince him. Pharaoh’s magicians were able to duplicate the first two plagues. But they could not reverse the plagues—any of them. They could cause chaos, but they could not restore order. Only God can do that.

With effort, we can bring order to our living spaces, but none of us can bring order out of the emotional and spiritual chaos of our lives. Only God can do that. He restores order to chaotic situations when we live as God intended—speaking no evil, being peaceable and gentle, and showing humility to all (Titus 3:2).

Father, our world and our lives do have much chaos

and confusion. We need You to restore our souls.

Help us to live as You want us to live—

loving others.

When we put our problems in God’s hands, He puts His peace in our hearts.

INSIGHT: The Egyptian magicians could only mimic three of the miracles of Moses—staffs turned into serpents (Ex. 7:11), water turned to blood (7:22), and the frog plague (8:7). Unable to mimic the remaining plagues (8:16–11:10), the magicians acknowledged that they were from “the finger of God” (8:19).

Exodus 8:20-32

The Buzzing Of The Flies

I was listening to the guys at a fishing resort in Canada. "Worst year for flies we've ever seen!" "Man, you need a shotgun to protect yourself, they're so huge." "No bug spray works this year."

The bite of the black fly creates wounds that swell, get red, and itch like crazy. Get several and life is miserable--even when the fish are biting.

That is nothing compared with what happened when the fourth plague hit Egypt (Ex 8:20, 21, 22, 23, 24). As Moses predicted, the air was thick with swarms of flies. They invaded Pharaoh's palace, filled the houses of the officials, and were found everywhere in Egypt--except in the land of Goshen where the Israelites lived.

By this time Pharaoh should have been listening intently to every word Moses said. But after the flies were gone he hardened his heart (Ex 8:32), and so he set himself and his people up for even more serious judgments from the Lord.

Sometimes the Lord uses drastic measures to get our attention. The "swarms of flies" take different forms--trouble, recurring failure, guilt, the hurt looks of the people we love. Those are the times we especially need to listen to God.

So let's listen carefully to the Lord, while it is still quiet, before the buzzing of the flies begins. —David C. Egner

Master, speak, and make me ready,

When Thy voice is truly heard,

With obedience glad and steady,

Still to follow every word. --Havergal

Hardening of the heart is more serious than hardening of the arteries.

EXODUS 9

EXODUS 10

EXODUS 11

Exodus 11 Fatal Frame Of Mind

Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh; and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go. —Exodus 11:10

When Pharaoh refused to let the people of Israel leave Egypt, thousands of innocent Egyptians died because of his stubborn will. Perhaps the knowledge of what was about to happen to Egypt's firstborn on that first Passover night caused the great anger Moses felt as he left Pharaoh (Ex. 11:8). It was going to be a night of devastation and sorrow because the ruler was in a fatal frame of mind.

It's easy for me to condemn Pharaoh's willful disobedience to God, and very difficult to face my own. But this passage forces me to ask, "Is my attitude choking the life out of someone close to me?"

Oswald Chambers said: "The right of life is insisted on all through the Bible. As long as I do not murder anyone outright the law cannot touch me, but is there someone dependent on me to whom in the tiniest way I am not giving the right to live? Someone for whom I am cherishing an unforgiving dislike? 'Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer' (1 John 3:15)."

Our hearts become hard through repeated refusals to yield to God. But they can be softened by obedience. When we say "yes" to God, the result is relief and life-giving release for our families, colleagues, and friends.

What's my frame of mind today?

I thank You for Your patience, Lord,
Because I often strayed,
But, O the joy that came my way
When I Thy Word obeyed. —Stairs

EXODUS 12

Exodus 12

TRUE FREEDOM

As the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. And it came to pass, on that very same day, that the LORD brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt (Exodus 12:51).

Samuel Bowles, the nineteenth-century American journalist, speaking of slavery, pinpointed the origin of all personal emancipation when he said, "The cause of freedom is the cause of God."

Freedom has its source in the very essence of God, Who is totally free to do whatever He wishes. In contrast, we humans are rarely free to do what we desire, and pursuing our desires leads only to more bondage.

Human bondage has been people's plight since God evicted earth's first couple from Eden. The irony of the story is that Adam and Eve started down slavery street by exercising their free will. Although they were the first to plod the prison path, their sons and daughters followed their footsteps.

The Egyptian bondage stands out because God's chosen nation was held captive by pagan rulers. Their bondage was physical, but the issues were spiritual: They worshiped heathen gods and doubted God's promises. Egyptian and Israelite souls were in chains.

In the Exodus and its Passover prelude, God set Jewish bodies and hearts free. But their freedom was short-lived; Assyrian, Babylonian, and Roman domination followed.

The New Testament Jews expected Jesus to set them free from Roman rule; instead a kangaroo court tried and killed Him. What He taught them in life, He demonstrated in death: ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

A life lost is a life gained and a life found is a life freed.

Exodus 12:1-13 Invite Questions

Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you. —1 Peter 3:15

When I teach, I sometimes use the motto "Question Authority" to get the attention of my students. I am not inviting them to challenge my authority; I am encouraging them to ask me questions. Some education experts say that more learning takes place when teachers answer questions than when they impart information. By nature, we all place a higher value on what we want to know than on what someone wants to tell us.

There is, of course, a place for both types of teaching, but encouraging questions is one of the first that is found in Scripture. Even before the Israelites left Egypt, the Lord instructed Moses to institute a practice that would invite questions. The Passover celebration would serve two purposes: It would remind the adults of God's deliverance, and it would cause their children to ask about it (Ex. 12:26).

"Why" can be an annoying question, but it can also be a wonderful opportunity to give a reason for our faith (1 Peter 3:15). Instead of being impatient when others ask questions, we can be thankful they have a heart and mind open to learning. Questions give us the opportunity to answer lovingly and carefully, knowing that our words may have eternal consequences.

Lord, may I be approachable and open to listening
to others' questions. May I not feel threatened but
instead have confidence that You will give me wisdom
to know how to reply or where to find an answer. Amen.

Exodus 12:1-20 The Passover Picture

Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. —1 Corinthians 5:7

The day of Israel's first Passover was full of excitement and mystery for the Hebrew boys and girls. They saw their fathers roast lambs over an open fire. They watched them sprinkle blood from the lambs on the sides and tops of the doorframes of their houses. They listened with wide-eyed wonder as their fathers told them that an angel of death would kill the firstborn in every house that was not marked by the blood.

In the evening, wearing their sandals and dressed for immediate departure, family members gathered in groups just large enough to consume a whole lamb. They ate the Passover meal, which included bitter herbs and bread made without yeast. After midnight they gathered up their possessions and left Egypt to begin a new way of life as a free people.

Israel's slavery in Egypt pictures for us as believers in Christ the bondage to sin from which we have been delivered. The slaughtered lamb points to Jesus Christ, "our Passover, [who] was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). The sprinkling of the blood speaks of the act of faith by which we receive salvation.

Have you experienced the joy of salvation that comes to those who put their trust in the Lamb of God?

All praise to the Lamb, accepted I am,

Through faith in the Savior's adorable name;

In Him I confide, His blood is applied;

For me He has suffered, for me He has died. —Wesley

The Lamb who died to save us is the Shepherd who lives to lead us.

Honest questions can lead to faith-building answers.

Exodus 12:13-17,25-27 Your Children Will Ask

When your children say to you, "What do you mean by this service?" . . . you shall say, "It is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord." —Exodus 12:26-27

One of the most important events in Jewish history is the exodus, when God freed His people from the bondage of Egypt. Prior to leaving Egypt, the Israelites were commanded to eat a special meal called the Passover. As an act of judgment upon the Egyptians, God said that He would strike down every firstborn son, but He would pass over the houses that had the blood of a lamb on the top and sides of the door frame (Ex. 12).

To commemorate this act of judgment and grace, God's people would share in the Passover meal. God said that one day their children would ask: "What do you mean by this?" They were then responsible to retell the story of the exodus and God's salvation. God did not want the story of His great salvation to get lost in one generation.

When our children ask us about our values, lifestyle, prayer in decision-making, Bible-reading, church attendance, and worship, we have a responsibility to answer them. We are followers of Jesus. We must retell the story of how He became our Passover Lamb. His blood is the marker over our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin but are free to serve the Eternal One of heaven.

What are you teaching the children?

How great, O God, Your acts of love!

Your saving deeds would proclaim

That generations yet to come

May set their hope in Your great name. —D. De Haan

A parent's life is a child's guidebook.

Exodus 12:21-30

L'Chayim!

My friends Deb and Bryce were invited by some Jewish friends to attend their seder dinner. This is a celebration held by Jewish

families to commemorate the first Passover in Egypt (Exodus 12:24, 25, 26, 27). The entire family becomes involved, including the little children.

Deb and Bryce expected a somber evening, but they discovered a joyous celebration. At the beginning of the meal, a piece of bread was halved. One half was shared by the guests; the other half was hidden by the youngest family member. All the adults searched for it, to the child's delight. When the bread was not discovered, it was ransomed by the child amid great laughter. Then followed an evening of stories and songs, and the oft-repeated phrase: "L'Chayim! To life!"

Why not a joyous celebration? The Passover marks the deliverance of Israel from slavery and the "destroyer."

The Passover meal Jesus and His disciples shared the night before His death was a celebration too, but with serious overtones. It signaled the beginning of the events that led to His sacrifice and our redemption from sin and Satan.

From spiritual slavery to spiritual freedom. From death to life. As we celebrate our deliverance, we too can say with joy to one another, "L'Chayim! To life!" —David C. Egner

For Further Study

Learn more about our Old Testament heritage.

Read

[The Holidays Of God: The Spring Feasts](#)

[The Holidays Of God: The Fall Feasts](#)

Deliverance from sin is the greatest of all freedoms

Exodus 12:29-42

GOLDEN GODS

You shall have no other gods before Me.- Exodus 20:3

God had seized the attention of Pharaoh and the Egyptians with a series of plagues. Now they were dying to be rid of their Hebrew slaves. But God didn't want the Israelites to leave Egypt empty-handed. After all, they had 400 years of wages due them. So they asked their former masters for articles of silver, gold, and clothing, and they got them. Exodus 12:36 says that the Israelites "plundered the Egyptians."

It wasn't long, however, until God's people fell into idolatry. They used their gold to make a golden calf, which they worshiped while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the law (Ex 32:1, 2, 3, 4).

This tragic experience highlights the tension that Christians are required to maintain in relation to their possessions. There is much in our society that we may enjoy. But material things can also pose grave dangers when we use them uncritically. Os Guinness says that we are "free to utilize" but "forbidden to idolize." We are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13), and we must not become so enamored with "the riches of Egypt" that we grow complacent and forget our true calling.

Are we using our material blessings to serve the Lord or have we become slaves to them? -- Haddon W. Robinson

I have an old nature that noisily clamors

To satisfy empty desire;

But God in His goodness has sent me a Helper

Who whispers, "Your calling is higher."- Gustafson

Gold can be a helpful servant but a cruel master

EXODUS 13

Exodus 13:21-22

WILDERNESS WANDERINGS

"And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to

give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people" (Exodus 13:21, 22).

In Ruth Ainsworth's retelling of The Pied Piper of Hamelin,

"he put his pipe to his lips . . . and from every door the children ran. Boys and girls, big and little, all followed the piper . . . to live in a land where everything was better and brighter. . . . The fruit would be sweeter, the flowers would be gayer, and even the sparrows would be as bright as peacocks."

Although Israel followed a cloud by day and a fire by night on their journey to a land flowing with milk and honey, their story is no fairy tale; it is an account of real people and a loving God who guided them through four decades of desert wanderings.

The forty-year pilgrimage began when God paved a high and dry freeway through the Red Sea and then closed it up again before His enemies could use it. Israel packed no picnic lunches; God provided first-class dining daily.

But He not only gave His children fine food, He taught them how to live and worship. Unfortunately, they spurned His loving leadership. Rejecting His good guidance, most of them died in the barren land—over one million of them. But...

God is not driving the lead car in a funeral procession; He points the way to life.

Exodus 13:17-22 God's Timing

For every matter there is a time and judgment. —Ecclesiastes 8:6

Pastor Audley Black's church near the south coast of Jamaica has been in a building program since at least 2005. That was the first time I visited his church and saw that they were expanding. The last time I was there—in the spring of 2011—some of the walls were up. By that summer, they had started on the roof. When I suggested to Pastor Black that perhaps the church would be done by 2013 when I thought I might return, he said it was a possibility.

There was no hint of disappointment that this project could take 8 years or longer! No, Pastor Black and his people are excited about what God is doing, and they're patient with His timing.

We are often not that patient. We want our church to grow quickly, our young people to mature right away, and our problems to be fixed today.

Maybe we need to be reminded that some things take time—God's time. For instance, when the Israelites first left Egypt, God sent them on the long route to the Promised Land (Ex. 13:17-18). During that time He prepared them, taught them, and challenged them.

In our microwave world, we want everything done instantaneously. But sometimes that's not God's plan. Let's seek God's help and learn to accept His timing.

He does not lead me year by year,

Nor even day by day;

But step by step my path unfolds;

My Lord directs my way. —Ryberg

God's timetable may move slowly, but it does move surely.

Exodus 13:17-22 A Path Through The Woods

The Lord went before them . . . to lead the way. —Exodus 13:21

Daddy built a tepee in the woods for 5-year-old Bree and her 3-year-old sister Abby. Then he constructed a playhouse for them in a nearby fallen tree. When the leaves were off the trees, the children could see the family cabin from their hideouts. But in the tangled underbrush of summer, the girls thought they were deep in the scary woods.

So Dad took an ax and clippers into the woods and cut a trail from the back door of the cabin to the playhouse, then to the tepee and back to the cabin. The sisters felt safe and secure because the path was easy to follow.

We may wish that God would blaze a trail for us through the deep woods of the future, but that's not His way. He doesn't leave us without guidance, though. We learn something of His loving character when we see what He did for Israel as they left Egypt. He "went before them" and showed the way by the pillars of cloud and fire (Ex. 13:21).

Today we aren't led by dramatic signs like fire and cloud. But God has given something better—the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26; Gal. 5:16,18).

You may never see a clear path through life. But as you follow the Holy Spirit's leading and God's written Word, you'll know where to turn when the way isn't clear.

He leadeth me! O blessed thought!

O words with heavenly comfort fraught!

Whate'er I do, where'er I be,

Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me. —Gilmore

You don't need to know where you're going if you know God is leading.

Exodus 13:14-16 Where History Comes Alive

When your children say to you, "What do you mean by this service?" . . . you shall say, "It is the Passover." —Exodus 12:26-27

The movie *Night at the Museum* portrays the humorous experiences of a security guard at a natural history museum. The excitement begins for him when the displays come to life at night.

Inspired by this movie, directors of a real museum created a similar experience. The staff portrayed historic figures such as knights in armor, Victorian ladies, and Egyptian royalty. When children arrived at the museum, they were told that the people in the exhibits had come alive and needed to be led back to their proper place. As the children responded, history came alive for them.

Children need not be bored by history. This is especially true of Bible stories. Take Moses, for example. He escaped death as a child, was educated as a prince, worked miracles, and received the Ten Commandments on tablets. What exciting story elements that teach children about God!

Biblical stories have been shared with children for generations—all the way back to the times of Exodus (ch.12–13) and Deuteronomy (ch.6). Moses described times when children were retold vital stories from Jewish history.

Why not set a time to read Bible stories to the children in your life? Then watch their excitement as biblical history comes alive!

The stories in the Word of God

Are there for us to see

How God has worked in people's lives

Throughout all history. —Sper

The Bible's treasures are found by those who dig for them.

Exodus 13:17-22; 14:19-20 The Cloud And The Spirit

The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way. —Exodus 13:21

The Lord led the children of Israel by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21). Commentator Arthur Pink draws a significant parallel between this cloud in the wilderness and the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer.

Pink points out that just as the cloud was a gracious gift to the Israelites, so the Holy Spirit is a gift to the trusting child of God.

Jesus said, "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper" (John 14:16). The pillar of cloud was provided to guide the children of Israel. So too, the Holy Spirit leads the Christian. Jesus said, "When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth" (16:13).

Even as the cloud remained with Israel in the wilderness, so Jesus promised that the Father would send the Spirit, who would "abide" with believers forever (14:16). Think of it! God Himself dwells within our hearts. We who know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord are temples of His Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).

When we are led by the Spirit, our lives will be characterized by love, joy, peace, and self-control (Galatians 5:16,22-23). We will be effective witnesses for Christ as we travel through the wilderness of this world.

Blest Holy Spirit from above

With all Thy quickening powers

Come, shed abroad the Savior's love

And that shall kindle ours. —Watts

The power that compels us comes from the Spirit who indwells us.

EXODUS 14

Exodus 14:19-25 “Don’t Worry, Dad!”

The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. —Isaiah 58:8

Last summer, my husband and I hosted a concert and fundraiser for childhood cancer research. We planned to have the event in our backyard, but weather forecasts were dismal. A few hours before the event, we began calling our 100+ guests to inform them of a change in venue. As our friends and family began feverishly toting food, decorations, and equipment from our house to our church gym, our daughter Rosie took a moment to give her dad a hug and remind him on behalf of the kids and grandkids that they were there for him: “Don’t worry, Dad! We’ve got your back.”

Hearing that expression is comforting because it reminds us that we’re not on our own. Someone is saying, “I’m here. I’ll take care of whatever you might miss. I’ll be a second set of eyes and hands for you.”

As the Israelites were escaping a life of slavery, Pharaoh sent his army of chariots and horsemen to give chase (Ex. 14:17). But “the Angel of God . . . and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them” (v.19). In this way, God hid and protected them throughout the night. The next day, He parted the Red Sea so they could safely cross over.

God tells us “Don’t worry” as well. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).

God’s hand that holds the ocean’s depths

Can hold my small affairs;

His hand that guides the universe

Can carry all my cares. —Anon.

Our work is to cast care; God’s work is to take care!

Exodus 14:5-22 Stand Or Go?

Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord”—Exodus 14:13

The Israelites were trapped. Soon after leaving slavery and Egypt behind, they looked up and saw a distressing sight. A cloud of dust was moving their way, and in that dust was a massive army. Pharaoh’s “disease” had returned—hardening of the heart (Ex. 14:8). As a result, he sent his chariots after Moses and his people.

Once the Egyptian army caught up with the Israelites, all seemed lost. They were trapped between a wall of soldiers and a sea of water. In panic, they cried out to both Moses and God.

Both of them responded with instructions. Moses said, “Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.” (Ex 14:13). And God told them, “Go forward” (Ex 14:15). While that may seem to be contradictory advice, both commands were from God and right. First, the people had to “stand still” or “firm” long enough to get instructions from God. What if they had rushed headlong into the Red Sea without consulting the Lord? But in standing still, they heard God’s instructions, which included both what they were to do—move on, and what Moses was to do—stretch out his hand over the sea in obedience and God would part the waters.

Do circumstances have you trapped? Stand still. Take time to consult God and His Word. Then, using His instructions, move ahead and let God guide you.

It matters not how dark the way,

How thick the clouds from day to day,

God will direct in all we do

If we take time to pray it through. —Mead

If you're looking for guidance, follow Christ as your guide.

Exodus 14:1-14 Standing Still

Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord. —Exodus 14:13

Stand still! That is a difficult thing for anyone to do. We all like to be busy.

After years of active ministry, I was laid aside for several weeks as I hovered between life and death. During that time I learned that I was not indispensable. While I "stood still," God's work went on.

I must confess that it was a difficult lesson to learn because of pride. It humbled me. It took something out of me, and yet it taught me something that I could learn only by "standing still"—the Lord could get along without me, and I had to depend on Him.

The Israelites had to learn this when they stood before the Red Sea. When the Egyptians came from behind and the deserts and mountains closed them in from the sides, Moses said, "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord" (Ex.14:13). Oh, the precious lessons God teaches us when we learn that He can handle any problem and that He will work wonders far beyond our comprehension.

Are you being forced to "stand still"? Have you learned some of these lessons? Ah, then your life has been enriched, and I know that even now you can praise God for His wonderful dealings in your life.

Stand still! God wants to talk to you!

Be still, my heart, for faithful is your Lord,

And pure and true and tried His holy Word;

Through stormy flood that rages as the sea,

His promises your steppingstones shall be. —Anon.

Don't let problems get you down—Let them remind you to look up.

Exodus 14:5-18 A Time For Action

The Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward." —Exodus 14:15

The woman chuckled as she told me about the time she woke her husband to tell him she was in labor and needed to go to the hospital. He jumped out of bed, dropped to his knees, and said, "Honey, let's pray." She told him that it was not the time to kneel and pray. It was time to get dressed and head for the hospital. It was time for action!

I think this was the type of message God gave Moses when He said of the Israelites, "Why do you cry to Me?" (Exodus 14:15). Not long before that, Pharaoh had permitted the Israelites to leave Egypt, but then he changed his mind (vv.5-6). Wanting to bring them back, he and his army chased after them (vv.7-9). The Israelites were terrified when they saw the Egyptians approaching. They were trapped at the shore of the Red Sea, with nowhere to go! But Moses assured Israel that God would deliver them. Now was a time for action—not crying to Him. It was time to "go on dry ground through the midst of the sea" (v.16).

There's a proper time for everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1), including a time to pray and a time to act. When we see someone who lacks food and clothes, it's right to provide what they need (James 2:15-16). Sometimes we need to trust God and take immediate action.

Lord, when I sense Your call to serve,

Help me to follow through;

I must not just stand by and pray

When there is work to do. —Fasick

If God has already told you what to do, you don't need to ask Him again.

Isaiah 40:25-31 Unlimited Power

[God] brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name. —Isaiah 40:26

Why don't the stars fall down?" A child may ask that question, but so does an astronomer. And they both get essentially the same answer: A mysterious power or energy upholds everything and prevents our cosmos from collapsing into chaos.

Hebrews 1:3 tells us that it is Jesus who upholds all things by the word of His power. He is the source of all the energy there is, whether the explosive potential packed inside an atom or the steaming kettle on the kitchen stove.

That energy is not simply a mindless force. No, God is the personal power who created everything out of nothing, including the stars (Genesis 1; Isaiah 40:26); who divided the Red Sea and delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 14:21-22); who brought to pass the virgin birth of Jesus (Luke 1:34-35); and who raised Him from the dead and conquered death (2 Timothy 1:10). Our God, the one and only true God, has the power to answer prayer, meet our needs, and change our lives.

So when life's problems are baffling, when you face some Red Sea impossibility, call upon the wonder-working God who upholds all things. And remember that with our almighty God, nothing is impossible.

Thou art coming to a King—

Large petitions with thee bring;

For His grace and power are such

None can ever ask too much. —Newton

God is greater than our greatest problem.

Exodus 14:1-14 A Matter Of Perspective

I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord. —Exodus 14:4

Are you part of the problem or part of the solution? Whether that question is posed during a business meeting, a church council, or a family discussion, it often springs from a sense of exasperation in trying to comprehend why someone has acted in a certain way. More often than not, the answer is a matter of perspective.

If we had been among the Israelites leaving Egypt after 400 years of slavery, we would likely have seen Pharaoh as part of the problem—and he was. Yet God saw something more.

Inexplicably, the Lord told Moses to take the people back toward Egypt and camp with their backs to the Red Sea so Pharaoh would attack them (Ex. 14:1-3). The Israelites thought they were going to die, but God said that He would gain glory and honor for Himself through Pharaoh and all his army, "and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord" (vv.4,17-18).

When we simply cannot understand why God allows circumstances that threaten to overwhelm us, it's good to remember that He has our good and His glory in mind. If we can say, "Father, please enable me to trust and honor You in this situation," then we will be in concert with His perspective and plan.

Your words of pure, eternal truth

Shall yet unshaken stay,

When all that man has thought or planned,

Like chaff shall pass away. —Anon.

Faith helps us to accept what we cannot understand.

Exodus 14:10-14 Strength in Stillness

In quietness and confidence shall be your strength. —Isaiah 30:15

Early in my Christian life the demands of commitment made me wonder if I could make it past a year without returning to my old sinful ways. But this Scripture verse helped me: "The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still" (Exod. 14:14 niv). These are the words Moses spoke to the Israelites when they had just escaped from slavery in Egypt and were being pursued by Pharaoh. They were discouraged and afraid.

As a young believer, with temptations engulfing my world, this call "to be still" encouraged me. Now, some 37 years later, remaining still and calm while trusting Him in the midst of stress-laden situations has been a constant desire for my Christian living.

“Be still, and know that I am God,” the psalmist says (Ps. 46:10). When we remain still, we get to know God, “our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (v. 1). We see our weakness apart from God and recognize our need to surrender to Him. “When I am weak, then I am strong,” says the apostle Paul (2 Cor. 12:10).

Daily we grind through stress and other frustrating situations. But we can trust that He will be faithful to His promise to care for us. May we learn to be still.

Sometimes the hectic demands on your day can crowd out your time with God. Find out how you can develop a regular time of Bible reading and prayer. Read In His Presence at www.discoveryseries.org/q0718

The Lord may calm your storm, but more often He'll calm you.

INSIGHT: After Pharaoh set the Jews free from slavery (Ex. 12:28-33), he immediately had a change of heart and summoned his elite army to recapture them (14:5-9). Although God had overwhelmingly demonstrated His great power through the 10 plagues (Ex. 7–11), the Jews chose not to trust in Him. Terrified, they accused Moses of deceiving them and leading them into the wilderness to die (14:11-12). But Moses encouraged them not to be afraid and to be still and trust the Lord (vv. 13-14). God was faithful and saved them from Pharaoh's army (vv. 21-23), and He continued to provide for them during their 40 years in the wilderness.

Exodus 14:10-22 Finding God's Pathway

Your way was in the sea, Your path in the great waters. —Psalm 77:19

The Channel Tunnel opened on May 6, 1994, nearly two centuries after it was first proposed in 1802 by Napoleon's engineer, Albert Mathieu. Today the 31-mile passage beneath the English Channel allows thousands of people, cars, and trucks to travel by train each day between England and France. For centuries, people had sailed across the Channel until this surprising new way to go under it was completed.

God planned an unexpected route for His people too—one we read about in Exodus 14:10-22. Faced with certain death, either from Pharaoh's army or by drowning, the Israelites were near panic. But God parted the Red Sea and they walked through on dry land. Years later, the psalm writer Asaph used this event as evidence of God's mighty power, “Your road led through the sea, your pathway through the mighty waters—a pathway no one knew was there! You led Your people along that road like a flock of sheep, with Moses and Aaron as their shepherds” (Ps. 77:19-20 nlt).

God can create roads where we see only obstacles. When the way ahead of us seems uncertain, it's good to remember what God has done in the past. He specializes in pathways in any circumstance—pathways that point us to His love and power.

Thank You, God, for the miraculous ways

You have worked in the past. Help me to

remember Your power and faithfulness when

I can see only trouble and difficulty.

The God who created a way for our salvation can certainly see us through our daily trials.

INSIGHT: In this lament psalm, Asaph writes of the sense of abandonment, the sleepless nights, the distress, and the anguish he felt when God did not respond to his cries for deliverance from his trials and suffering (vv.1-10). But then he remembered and recounted the mighty works God did for His people in the past (particularly His mighty deliverance at the exodus). When he reflected and meditated on who God is, he was assured of God's greatness, goodness, and guidance (vv.11-20). Where God leads, He protects and provides (v.20).

Exodus 14:26–15:2 God Is At Work

He is my God, and I will praise Him. —Exodus 15:2

Jack and Trisha were driving to the hospital late one night for the birth of their second child when the unexpected happened. Trisha began to deliver the baby! Jack called 911 and Cherie White, an emergency dispatcher, was able to talk Jack through the delivery. But the baby wouldn't breathe. So Cherie then instructed Jack how to give emergency breathing, which he had to do for 6 anxious minutes. Finally the newborn took a breath and cried. When asked later how they all got through the ordeal and remained calm, Cherie responded, “I'm glad God works midnights!”

I love to hear media reports in which God gets the glory He deserves for something good that has happened. In the Bible reading for today, it's obvious that God should get the credit for parting the Red Sea to help His people escape from Pharaoh, even though

Moses was the one who raised his rod (Ex. 14:26-27). All the Israelites and Moses gathered together and sang the Lord's praises: "Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (15:11).

When something good happens, the Lord deserves the credit, for He is the source of all that is good. Give Him the glory. Aren't you glad He works midnights?

What may seem like coincidence

As we live out our story

Is God at work behind the scenes—

So give Him all the glory. —Sper

Seeing God at work puts a song in our heart.

EXODUS 15

Exodus 15:1-18

Celebration Of Praise

You've probably never been to a worship service quite like the one the Israelites held after they reached the safe side of the Red Sea.

The people had just seen God save them from certain, watery death. They had come within an eyelash of being pushed into the sea by the charging forces of Pharaoh's army. Relentlessly, the charioted soldiers had chased them down (Ex. 14:5, 6, 7, 8, 9). In panic, the children of Israel had cried out for help (Ex. 14:10).

The Lord parted the sea, allowing the people to cross (Ex. 14:16,21,22). But when the Egyptians rode onto the seabed, God caused the waters to cascade down on them (Ex. 14:28).

That's when the celebration began! Joyously, the people praised God for His strength and salvation (Ex. 15:2), His power (Ex. 15:6), His greatness (Ex. 15:7), His holiness (Ex. 15:11), His mercy, redemption, and guidance (Ex. 15:13), and His eternal reign over them (Ex. 15:18). They poured out their hearts in worship to the God of their salvation.

Look over the attributes for which the Israelites praised God. Review how His character has touched your life. Find ways to honor Him in worship. The God who parted the sea is the God who makes a way for you. Give Him your celebration of praise! —Dave Branon

When we think of the power of God,

Of His wonderful works in His Word,

We can't help but rejoice in His Son,

That the gospel of grace we have heard. --Hess

God's great power deserves our grateful praise.

Exodus 15:19-27

Life After Miracles

On the other side of every miraculous intervention by God on our behalf, there is a road of faith to travel. Whether God's power has touched our health, finances, or family relationships, we must not only praise and thank the Lord but obey Him as well.

After God opened the Red Sea for His people, then released the waters to overwhelm Pharaoh's pursuing army, there was a great celebration of praise to the Lord (Exodus 15:1-21). But then it was time to move on in the journey toward the land of promise. "So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur" (Ex. 15:22). There they traveled for 3 days without finding water, and they began to complain.

In the divine plan, supernatural intervention is not an end in itself, but it is a means of teaching us that we can always trust and obey the leadership of Almighty God. Will we listen to His voice and obey His Word? If He leads us through the sea, will He not also guide us to a well?

The stunning events recorded in Exodus show that it's possible to experience God's power yet remain spiritually unchanged. To keep that from happening to us, let's use the sweet memory of yesterday's miracle to encourage a bigger step of faith today. —David C. McCasland

Sometimes we see a miracle,

And faith in God revives;

Yet we should see God's gracious hand

At work throughout our lives. —Hess

The God who delivered us yesterday is worthy of our obedience today.

Exodus 15:1–2,13–18 Our Strength And Song

The Lord shall reign forever and ever. —Exodus 15:18

Often called “The March King,” composer and band director John Philip Sousa created music that has been played by bands around the world for more than a hundred years. As Loras John Schissel, music historian and conductor of the Virginia Grand Military Band, said, “Sousa is to marches what Beethoven is to symphonies.” Sousa understood the power of music to motivate, encourage, and inspire people.

In Old Testament times, the people of Israel were often inspired to compose and sing songs to celebrate God's help during times of need. When the Lord saved His people from certain destruction by Pharaoh's army, “Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the Lord . . . ‘I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation’” (Ex. 15:1-2).

Music has the power to lift our spirits by reminding us of God's faithfulness in the past. When we're discouraged, we can sing songs and hymns that raise our eyes from the challenging circumstances we face to see the power and presence of the Lord. We are reminded that He is our strength, our song, and our salvation.

Trust in Him, ye saints, forever—

He is faithful, changing never;

Neither force nor guile can sever

Those He loves from Him. —Kelly

Songs of praise raise our eyes to see God's faithfulness.

INSIGHT: Moses' song after the Israelites had passed through the Red Sea and were delivered from the pursuing Egyptians has two perspectives—one looking back and one looking forward. In the first verses, Moses reflects on what God has done to deliver His people (vv. 1-2). In the later verses, Moses looks forward to what God will do to establish His people in their new land (vv. 13-18).

Exodus 15:1-21 One More Miracle

I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously! —Exodus 15:1

If you are looking for a praise and worship pattern, look no further than Exodus 15.

There you find the Israelites heaping honor on God. The people were just hours removed from one of the greatest rescues in history. The Lord had protected them from the rampaging Egyptians, and their praises reflected the renewed trust in God that this event brought them.

It's appropriate to pour out our unbridled praise on God when we see Him work in great and miraculous ways. But those aren't the only times He deserves our adoration. Too often we wait for God to perform a big answer to prayer before we feel like singing His praises.

But think about this: God doesn't owe us any miracles. He doesn't need to do anything to prove His greatness. He has already given us an incredible display of His power in His creation. He has made the ultimate sacrifice to purchase our redemption. Through His power, He has conducted the most miraculous transaction known to mankind—He brought us from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Waiting for a miracle? God's done plenty of them already. Recalling what He has done and echoing the praise in Exodus 15, let's give God our unconditional worship.

Sing praise to God who reigns above,

The God of all creation,

The God of power, the God of love,

The God of our salvation. —Schutz

Praise flows naturally from a grateful heart.

Exodus 15:22-27 The Same Hand

He cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet. —Exodus 15:25

The children of Israel had not gone far from the shore of the Red Sea when the realities of their new freedom began to register. They no longer enjoyed the ample food and water supply of Egypt. Now, after traveling 3 days into the wilderness, the large crowd had no water. And when they finally arrived at the oasis of Marah, the water was bitter (Ex. 15:23).

Thus the children of Israel were compelled to rely on a miracle. So they cried out to Moses, and Moses cried out to the Lord. The Lord showed him a tree, which Moses cast into the water. Miraculously, the water turned sweet.

The transformation of the water was a miracle akin to the plague of blood sent to Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Ex. 7:14-25). Egypt's clean water had been sullied with blood by the hand of the Lord. The lesson of Marah was clear—the same hand that turned water into blood could turn bitter water into sweet. The same power that brought curses on Egypt could bring health to Israel.

If you have a seemingly impossible need today, remember that the hand that supplied your greatest need—forgiveness of sin—is the same hand that can adequately supply all your needs. Trust Him to accomplish things that seem impossible.

When our problems overwhelm us,

God wants us to look to Him;

He provides the right solutions—

Lighting paths that once were dim. —Sper

Impossibilities compel us to rely on God.

Exodus 15:22-27

From Bitter To Sweet

Joy and sorrow are often close companions. Just as the Israelites went from the thrill of victory at the Red Sea to the bitter waters of Marah just 3 days later (Exodus 15:22, 23), our rejoicing can quickly turn into anguish.

At Marah, the Lord told Moses to throw a tree into the water, which made it "sweet" and drinkable (Ex. 15:25). Another "tree," when "cast into" the bitter circumstances of our lives, can make them sweet. It is the cross of Jesus (1Peter 2:24). Our outlook will be transformed as we contemplate His sacrificial death and His submission to the will of God (Luke 22:42).

Our pain may come from the ill-will of others, or worse, from their neglect. Nevertheless, our Lord has permitted it. We may not understand why, yet it is the will of our Father and Friend, whose wisdom and love are infinite.

When we say yes to God as His Spirit reveals His will to us through His Word, the bitter circumstances of our lives can become sweet. We must not grumble against what the Lord permits. Instead, we must do all that He asks us to do. Jesus said that we are to take up our cross daily and follow Him (Luke 9:23).

When we remember Jesus' cross and submit to the Father as He did, bitter experiences can become sweet. —David H. Roper

Lord, I've not always understood

What plan You have for me;

Yet I will glory in Your cross

And bear mine patiently. —Anon.

God uses our difficulties to make us better—not bitter.

Exodus 15:22-27a

A Tree Of Healing

While waiting in the church parking lot, I switched on the car radio and heard the distinctive voice of Bible teacher J. Vernon McGee. "When the experiences of life are bitter," he asked, "what can make them sweet?" Just then I glanced in the rearview mirror and saw a boy walking with his mother toward the church. He held her arm as they moved slowly, every step an effort because of his cerebral palsy. They had come to worship God.

So, what can sweeten the painful experiences of life? McGee's answer: "Only the cross of Christ." He cited the healing of the bitter waters of Marah in Exodus 15, which he saw as a prophetic picture of Christ's sacrifice for our sin. Moses "cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet" (Ex. 15:25).

The New Testament uses "the tree" as a metaphor to describe the cross on which our Savior died. In 1Peter 2:24, for example, we read that Christ "Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree."

Today, as we embrace all that the cross means, we can find healing of heart and the transforming power of God's love that sweetens the bitterest waters of life. —David C. McCasland

Christ takes each sin, each pain, each loss,

And by the power of His cross

Transforms our brokenness and shame,

So that we may glorify His name. --DJD

The cross of Christ can sweeten the most bitter experience of life.

Exodus 15:22-27b

Into The Desert

After the Israelites miraculously crossed the Red Sea, they were led into the desert. How strange that God would lead them from a place of revelation and power to a place of disappointment and dire need!

But God wanted to show them that life is a combination of bitter and sweet, triumph and defeat. When the Israelites arrived at Marah, they complained because the water was bitter (Ex. 15:23). After Moses interceded (Ex. 15:25), God reminded them to keep His commandments (Ex. 15:26). Then He brought them to the abundance and refreshment of Elim (Ex. 15:27).

The Lord wanted to teach them that each experience on their journey would reveal their hearts. This test showed they were living by sight and not by faith.

They also learned that God was involved in their daily affairs. He wanted them to know that He not only could part the sea, but He would also supply water for His people. He knew their needs because He planned their way.

If you are being led into a wilderness of disappointment and bitterness right now, trust God, for He knows exactly where you are and what you need. As you obey His commands, He will lead you out of the desert and into a place of spiritual abundance, healing, and refreshment. —Marvin Williams

We shrink from this life's challenges—we plead

For watered pastures never touched by pain;

But God will often let us sense our need

Before He sends His cool, refreshing rain. —Gustafson

The more bitter the desert experience, the sweeter the water of the oasis

Exodus 15:22-27

AN OASIS IN THE DESERT

"He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters." (Psalm 23:2).

A humble Christian, when beset by a tremendous trial, misquoted Scripture but found great comfort in it. He said, "I'm so glad the Bible tells us, 'It came to pass' and not 'It came to stay.'— Those particular words do not speak of the temporal nature of difficulties, but in other places the Bible clearly teaches that God will see us through our trials. Life is not all hardship. If it were, discouragement would overwhelm us and we would give up.

In Exodus 15 we read that the children of Israel tasted the bitter waters of Marah. But then God led them to Elim where they enjoyed wells of sweet water and the coolness of sheltering palms. The people knew that both stops were by God's direction. His "glory cloud" hovered over them to point the way. When it moved, the Israelites moved; when it stopped, they stopped. That cloud clearly marked both Marah and Elim.

Whenever God leads us to a campsite at Marah, where we experience bitterness, sorrow, or disappointment, we must keep in mind that we will one day drink the sweet water of Elim's wells and feel the refreshing shade of its palms. God's comfort will surely come—both on earth and in heaven. And when we are enjoying the encouragement of Elim, we should rejoice, knowing that God is strengthening us for the rest of the journey. —P. R. Van Gorder.

In every desert of calamity, God has an oasis of comfort.

Exodus 15:22-27 The Road To Blessing

So [Moses] cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. —Exodus 15:25

Robyn and Steve have a counseling ministry that provides very little income. Recently, a family crisis forced them to embark on a 5,000-mile round trip in their well-used minivan.

After attending to the crisis, they started back to Michigan. While about 2,000 miles from home, their van began to sputter and stall. A mechanic looked at it and told them, "It's done. You need a new engine."

Unable to afford one, they had no choice but to coax the van home. Three days, a case of oil, and a lot of prayers later, they miraculously limped into their driveway. Then they heard of a "car missionary" who assisted people in ministry. Amazed that the van had made it, he offered to replace the engine free of charge. If Steve had gotten the van fixed en route, it would have cost him thousands of dollars he didn't have.

In Exodus 15, the Israelites were led by God into the desert. Three days into their trip, they ran out of water and had no way to get it. But God knew about the problem. In fact, a solution awaited them in Marah (Exodus 15:25) and Elim (Exodus 15:27). God not only fixed their water problem but also provided a place to rest.

Even when our situation looks difficult, we can trust that God is leading. He already knows what we'll need when we get there.

I know not by what methods rare

The Lord provides for me;

I only know that all my needs

He meets so graciously. —Adams

Facing an impossibility gives us the opportunity to trust God.

Exodus 15:26 The Great Healer

am the Lord, who heals you. —Exodus 15:26

The doctors I know are smart, hard-working, and compassionate. They have relieved my suffering on many occasions, and I am grateful for their expertise in diagnosing illnesses, prescribing medication, setting broken bones, and stitching up wounds. But this does not mean that I place my faith in physicians rather than in God.

For reasons known only to God, He appointed humans to be His partners in the work of caring for creation (Gen. 2:15), and doctors are among them. Doctors study medical science and learn how God designed the body. They use this knowledge to help restore us to a healthy condition. But the only reason doctors can do anything to make us better is that God created us with the ability to heal. Surgeons would be useless if incisions didn't heal.

Scientists can learn how God created our bodies to function, and they devise therapies to help restore or cure us, but they are not healers; God is (Ex. 15:26). Doctors simply cooperate with God's original intent and design.

So I am grateful for science and doctors, but my praise and thanksgiving go to God, who designed an orderly universe and who created us with minds that can discover how it works. I believe, therefore, that all healing is divine because no healing takes place apart from God.

Father God, You are the Great Physician, and I ask for healing, whether mind, body, spirit, or in all of these. I believe You will give what is best. Thank You for Your goodness, kindness, and love in all things.

When you think of all that's good, give thanks to God.

INSIGHT: Genesis 2:7-15 gives us a glimpse into the perfect living environment of Adam and Eve before the fall. God provided everything necessary for their sustenance and enjoyment—food (Genesis 2:9), water (Genesis 2:10), and other natural resources (Genesis 2:10-12)—and gave man the responsibility to manage these resources (Genesis 2:15). God had originally intended for humanity to live forever, but after the fall Adam and Eve were prevented from eating from the Tree of Life so that they would not live forever in their sinful condition (Genesis 3:22-24).

Exodus 15:22-16:5

THE SPORT OF SCAPEGOATING

"Then the whole congregation... murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness" (Exodus 16:2).

Fred Grimm, a Christian probation officer, told of a father who made a scapegoat of his son by blaming him for family conflicts. Although the man and his wife had been fighting for years, the father told his son,

"It's always because of your big mouth that your mother and I fight. If I leave you and your mother, it will be your fault."

The youngster's problems were compounded when the father died suddenly from a stroke and the mother accused her son of having caused his father's death. The boy was devastated.

Blaming others for our problems is not only unjust and cruel, it's displeasing to the Lord. The children of Israel did this in the wilderness shortly after their deliverance from the land of Egypt. When food and water were short, they panicked and blamed Moses and Aaron for getting them into their predicament. They made scapegoats of their leaders. Yet God mercifully overlooked their lack of faith and unfair criticism of His servants in those two incidents. Later, though, when the Israelites committed the same sin again, He judged them severely (see Numbers 16:1ff).

Scapegoating can do great damage. Instead of looking for someone else to blame for our problems, we need to analyze our situation, acknowledge our failures, and ask God for forgiveness and help.—H. V. Lugt

We won't get closer to God by passing judgment on others.

EXODUS 16

Exodus 16:1-12 No Reverse

You shall know that the Lord has brought you out of the land of Egypt. —Exodus 16:6

The first time I saw her, I fell in love. She was a beauty. Sleek. Clean. Radiant. As soon as I spied the 1962 Ford Thunderbird at the used-car lot, her shiny exterior and killer interior beckoned me. I knew this was the car for me. So I plunked down \$800 and purchased my very first car.

But there was a problem lurking inside my prized possession. A few months after I bought my T-Bird, it suddenly became particular about which way I could go. It allowed me to go forward, but I couldn't go backward. It had no reverse.

Although not having reverse is a problem in a car, sometimes it's good for us to be a little like my old T-Bird. We need to keep going forward—without the possibility of putting life into reverse. In our walk with Jesus, we need to refuse to go backward. Paul said it simply: We need to "press toward the goal" (Phil. 3:14).

Perhaps the children of Israel could have used my T-Bird's transmission. We read in Exodus 16 that they were in danger of putting life into reverse. Despite the many miracles God had performed, they longed for Egypt and failed to trust that He could guide them forward.

We need to keep moving ahead in our walk with God. Don't back up. Look forward. Press on.

When long and steep the path appears

Or heavy is the task,

Our Father says, "Press on, My child;

One step is all I ask." —D. De Haan

When facing a crisis, trust God and move forward.

Exodus 16:1-5 A Hill Too High

Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. —Matthew 6:34

My wife and I like to rollerblade. Near the end of one of our favorite routes is a long hill. When we first started taking this route, I tried to encourage Sue by saying, "Are you ready for the hill?" just before pushing our way to the top. But one day she said, "Could you please not say that? You make it sound like a huge mountain, and that discourages me."

It was better for Sue to face the hill thinking only about one "step," or one rollerblade push, at a time instead of an entire steep hill to conquer.

Life can be like that. If we peer too far ahead of today, the challenges may feel like a Mt. Everest climb. They can appear impossible to handle if we think we have to be "ready for the hill."

The Bible reminds us that today is all we need to tackle. We don't need to worry about tomorrow's tasks (Matt. 6:34). Imagine Moses thinking, "I've got to feed all these people for who knows how long. How can I get that much food?" God took care of that mountain with manna—but only enough for one day at a time (Ex. 16:4).

Every hill in life is too high if we think we must climb it all at once. But no hill is insurmountable if we take it one step forward at a time—with God's help.

He whose heart is kind beyond all measure

Gives unto each day what He deems best—

Lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure,

Mingling toil with peace and rest. —Berg

God is there to give us strength for every hill we have to climb.

Exodus 16:4 One Day At A Time

Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. —Matthew 6:34

A frail, elderly woman fell and broke her hip. The doctor set the bones as best he could, but he knew that she would have a long and uncomfortable recovery.

The next day when he visited her in the hospital, he found her in great anxiety. "Oh, Doctor," she asked, "how long am I going to have to stay in bed?"

With wisdom and kindness he gently replied, "Only one day—one day at a time!"

That was a wise answer. It reminds me of the words of the Lord Jesus. He taught a similar lesson when He said, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matthew 6:34).

Not only that, tomorrow's worries may never come to pass. A godly woman who had lived long enough to learn some important lessons about life said, "I've had a lot of trouble in my life—and most of it never happened!"

Are you burdened by worries about what might happen tomorrow? Do the days ahead seem dark and full of difficulties? Remember that grace and guidance are given to us like manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16:4), one day at a time! —Henry G. Bosch

Each day God sends His grace

To strengthen you and me;

We need to use today's supply,

And let tomorrow be. —Anon.

God gives grace just when we need it.

Exodus 16:15 What Is It?

When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" Exodus 16:15

My mother taught Sunday school for decades. One week she wanted to explain how God supplied food for the Israelites in the wilderness. To make the story come alive, she created something to represent "manna" for the kids in her class. She cut bread into small pieces and topped them with honey. Her recipe was inspired by the Bible's description of manna that says it "tasted like wafers made with honey" (Ex. 16:31).

When the Israelites first encountered God's bread from heaven, it appeared on the ground outside their tents like frost. "When [they] saw it, they said to each other, 'What is it?' " (v. 15). The Hebrew word man means "what," so they called it manna. They discovered they could grind it and form it into loaves or cook it in a pot (Num. 11:7-8). Whatever it was, it had a baffling arrival (Ex. 16:4,14), a unique consistency (v. 14), and a short expiration date (vv. 19-20).

Sometimes God provides for us in surprising ways. This reminds us that He is not bound by our expectations, and we can't predict what He will choose to do. While we wait, focusing on who He is rather than what we think He should do will help us find joy and satisfaction in our relationship with Him.

Dear God, please help me to freely accept Your provision and the way You choose to deliver it. Thank You for caring for me and meeting my needs.

Those who let God provide will always be satisfied.

EXODUS 17

Exodus 17:11

INVISIBLE SUPPORT

Prison guards couldn't understand how Irina Ratushinskaya could be so joyful. She was cold, sick, and hungry in a cruel Soviet prison camp. But Irina says she understands how: People were praying for her.

Irina is convinced that she and other prisoners experienced God's presence like "the sense of delicious warmth in a freezing land" because Christians all around the world were asking God to help them. After she was set free, Irina wrote a poem to express her gratitude to God and fellow believers. She included the words, "My dear ones, thank you all."

In our Scripture lesson we see that the Israelites prevailed over the superior Amalekite army when Moses lifted his staff toward heaven -- a symbol of intercessory prayer. His praying on the hill, possibly unseen by the Israelites, gave them the invisible support they needed.

Sick, suffering, sorrowing people cannot see their fellow believers who are praying for them. But many people have told me they are amazed at the sense of God's presence in their affliction, and they know this to be the result of the prayers of their friends.

May we faithfully intercede for those who are struggling. Let's be a source of invisible support. -- Herbert Vander Lugt

Support for people who're in need

Comes when we pray and intercede;

God's strength is given to His own

When we go to the Father's throne.--Sper

God's intervention is often the result of our intercession.

Exodus 17:1-7 A Bad Habit

They tempted the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" —Exodus 17:7

Most people have a bad habit or two. Some habits are just irritating, such as talking too much or too fast. Others are much more serious.

Consider, for example, the bad habit developed by the people of ancient Israel. They had just been delivered from slavery (Exodus 14:30), and they ought to have been thankful. Instead, they started to complain to Moses and Aaron, “Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt!” (16:3).

We read in Exodus 17 that their complaining escalated into a quarrel. In reality, their complaint was with God, but they picked a fight with Moses because he was the leader. They said, “Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” (v.3). The people even began questioning if God was really with them (v.7). Yet He always met their needs.

If we’re honest, we would have to admit that we sometimes complain when God isn’t coming through for us the way we want. We accuse Him of being absent or disinterested. But when our heart is concerned with God’s purposes rather than our own, we will be patient and trust Him to provide all that we need. Then we won’t develop the bad habit of complaining.

Those Christians who with thankful hearts

Praise God throughout the day

Won’t tend to grumble and complain

When things don’t go their way. —Branon

To conquer the habit of complaining, count your blessings.

Exodus 17:1-7 Desert Pete

The word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith. —Hebrews 4:2

In the 1960s, the Kingston Trio released a song called “Desert Pete.” The ballad tells of a thirsty cowboy who is crossing the desert and finds a hand pump. Next to it, Desert Pete has left a note urging the reader not to drink from the jar hidden there but to use its contents to prime the pump.

The cowboy resists the temptation to drink and uses the water as the note instructs. In reward for his obedience, he receives an abundance of cold, satisfying water. Had he not acted in faith, he would have had only a jar of unsatisfying, warm water to drink.

This reminds me of Israel’s journey through the wilderness. When their thirst became overwhelming (Ex. 17:1-7), Moses sought the Lord. He was told to strike the rock of Horeb with his staff. Moses believed and obeyed, and water gushed from the stone.

Sadly, Israel would not consistently follow Moses’ example of faith. Ultimately, “the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith” (Heb. 4:2).

Sometimes life can seem like an arid desert. But God can quench our spiritual thirst in the most unlikely circumstances. When by faith we believe the promises of God’s Word, we can experience rivers of living water and grace for our daily needs.

Drink deep of God’s goodness, His faithfulness too,

Leave no room for doubting and fear;

His Word is the water of life pure and true,

Refreshing and cooling and clear. —Hess

Only Jesus, the Living Water, can satisfy our thirst for God.

Exodus 17:1-6 Fellow Workers

We are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. —1 Corinthians 3:9

When it came time for Moses to strike the rock in the desert to get water for the thirsty Israelites, his part was very small—just strike the rock. Anyone in Israel could have done it. The main thing was what God was doing in the heart of the earth to provide a bountiful river of water.

But the two worked together: Moses before the people; God in the hidden depths of the earth. Moses and God were fellow workers.

There are always two agents in every fruitful work: willing workers and a faithful God. The human part is to do whatever God has asked us to do—strike the rock. God’s work is to make the water flow.

Was Moses weighed down with anxiety that day as he approached the rock, thinking that he might fail? I doubt it. He had only to

follow the Lord in obedience. God had promised to do the rest. And Moses had seen God work mighty miracles in the past.

Are you anxious about the task God has given you to do today? Do you believe that everything depends on you? Just strike the rock. God is working in secret to pour out rivers of water for every man, woman, and child. And when living waters begin to flow, praise Him.

Just do your part and He'll do His.

As a fellow worker with the Lord,

Do the work He's given you today;

You will find His blessings all outpoured-

He will do His part if you obey. -Hess

"Apart from Me, you can do nothing." -Jesus

Exodus 17:12

A Helping Hand

"... and Aaron and Hur held up his hands" Exodus 17:12

Exodus 17 records a most interesting experience in the life of Moses. As long as his hands, grasping the rod of God, were up-held, Joshua and the Israelites prevailed against the Amalekites. As the battle progressed, however, Moses' hands became so heavy that he could no longer retain his posture. Aaron and Hur then held his hands up for him, and victory was achieved.

Even as Moses needed the assistance of Aaron and Hur, so today those called to spiritual leadership need the undergirding of the people to whom they minister. I am thinking especially of pastors. I don't know of another work so demanding, discouraging, and fraught with potential pitfalls. These men need our support and encouragement. By the way, how long has it been since you took your pastor's hand and verbally expressed your gratitude for his ministry? A word properly timed will be, in effect, "holding up his hands," and will help to assure spiritual victory in your church.

A terrible fire was raging, and many attempts were being made to save a child who stood at a top window frantically waving and calling for help. One man, braver than the rest, put forth a last bold endeavor to rescue the boy. Sensing the almost impossible odds, and fearing he might fail, someone in the crowd cried, "Cheer him, cheer him!" The people caught the words and shouted loudly. Inspired and encouraged by their support, the man doubled his efforts and rescued the child from the flames.

Do you know any Christian worker who is similarly trying by all means in his power to snatch "brands from the burning," and to save immortal souls? Cheer him, and then see how your kind sympathy helps him to work on with fresh courage and renewed energy.

Why not make this "appreciation week" for your pastor? Encourage him, "cheer him"!

O "hold up the hands" of the worker for Christ,
Encourage his soul by your prayer;
A handclasp, a smile, or a word of good cheer,
Will help him life's burdens to bear. — G. W.

**Wouldn't it be fine if all those who point a critical finger
would hold out a helping hand instead?**

EXODUS 17:12

A Paraplegic's Partner

In 1989, paraplegic Mark Wellman climbed the sheer granite face of Yosemite's El Capitan. On the last day of his climb, The Fresno Bee ran a picture of Wellman being carried triumphantly on the shoulders of climbing companion Mike Corbett. The caption read, "Paraplegic and partner prove no wall is too high to climb." What the story did not say is that in helping Wellman scale El Capitan once, Corbett had to make that difficult, demanding ascent three times!

Today's Bible reading focuses on Moses, whose upheld hands brought God's help in a crucial battle. But don't forget Aaron and Hur. They had to climb the same mountain themselves, and their support of Moses' arms took time, strength, and commitment on their part. The principle is this: People who serve the Lord "behind the scenes" often pay a higher price than those who are in the center of public attention. —D. C. Egner.

We need each other if we are to do what God wants us to do.

EXODUS 18

Exodus 18:13-27

WILLING HEART, WISE HEAD

"Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out" (Exodus 18:18).

Over the years, social service jobs have drawn concerned young people into careers of helping others. In time, many of them become what some psychologists call "burned-out Samaritans." After listening to so many people's problems and trying to help, they get to the place where they can't take any more. This happens to doctors, ministers, social workers, psychiatrists, and policemen. To save themselves emotionally, they must either quit, stop caring, or readjust.

As Christians, we too are subject to burnout because helping others is part of our calling. We may feel overwhelmed by the complexity, intensity, and sheer volume of human need. We discover that we can't keep burying ourselves in all the pain without paying the price. We too have to quit, stop caring, or readjust. If we stop trying to help others, we break our fellowship with Christ. If we become unfeeling, we fall far short of His example. But we can readjust by making changes that will ease our burden. Like Moses who heeded the good counsel of his father-in-law Jethro and began delegating responsibility, we must recognize our human limitations and learn to act wisely.

Some believers assume that the more godly we are, the more we will keep pushing until we just "wear out for the Lord." And some devout Christians do just that. But according to the Bible, it's wiser to adjust our service. Then we won't become burned-out Samaritans.—M. R. De Haan II

A willing heart must always be kept under the control of a wise head.

Exodus 18:13-27 Wearing Yourself Out

You will surely wear yourselves out. —Exodus 18:18

My friend Jeff was asked by his daughter to officiate at her wedding. This would be a great joy as they traveled to an exotic and romantic location for the ceremony. But there was one major problem—because the wedding party was very small, Jeff would have to perform three separate roles that could be in conflict. He would be the officiating minister, the father of the bride, and the wedding photographer!

Have you ever felt as if you were wearing too many hats? Jethro thought his son-in-law Moses was (Ex. 18). Leading the Israelites, arbitrating personal disputes, and handing down legal judgments for a great multitude was taking its toll. Finally, Jethro approached Moses, telling him: "This thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself" (Exodus 18:18). He wisely counseled Moses to delegate smaller disputes to other advisors and take the more challenging cases himself (Exodus 18:22).

Whether you're a mother with small children, an overwhelmed business executive, or an overworked church volunteer, you too can take a lesson from Moses. Why not prayerfully discern if there may be tasks you can delegate to others or even discontinue—so that you don't wear yourself out.

Father, we need help with our priorities.

Teach us to understand what's most important and

needs to be accomplished, and to let go of what we can

so that we are at our best for You. Amen.

If we don't come apart and rest awhile, we may just plain come apart! —Havner

Exodus 18:13-24 Minister Mentor

Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. —Exodus 18:24

In 1959, when Lee Kuan Yew assumed the position of Prime Minister of Singapore, his leadership began a long process of national transformation. Initially, disagreements between ethnic groups and a weak economic base made the future of this tiny nation uncertain. By 1990, when Lee stepped down from his position, Singapore had become a model country for ethnic harmony and a thriving economy. After serving as Senior Minister, Lee became Minister Mentor in 2004. Since then he has been an invaluable

resource to Singapore's cabinet and to other leaders around the world.

Insights from the older generation can greatly benefit the younger generation. Although Moses had been used by God to perform miracles and deliver Israel out of bondage in Egypt, he still listened to the advice of his father-in-law Jethro (Ex. 18:24). Jethro had watched his son-in-law care for the concerns of the people and observed: "Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you" (Exodus 18:18). Moses followed Jethro's advice to select, train, and delegate others to share the workload (Exodus 18:22-24).

Whom has God placed in your life to advise you as a "minister mentor"?

Following Through

What are your weakest character traits?

Do you know a fellow believer who is strong in these areas?

Could that person become your spiritual mentor?

Those who are mature in the faith can help others to mature in their faith.

Exodus 18:13-24 A Time For Good Counsel

So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. —Exodus 18:24

Because of the busy lives many of us lead, it's not hard to recognize ourselves in the over-extended situation of Moses in Exodus 18. As the sole judge for the masses, he was surrounded "from morning until evening" (v.13) by people who needed his help.

In fact, I've had people—particularly young parents—tell me that they identify with Moses. It seems that we need to learn two life skills for survival: an eagerness to listen (v.24) and the willingness to accept help (v.25). Sometimes we don't accept help because of pride, but that's not always the case.

With Moses, and often with us, it's simply that life is moving so quickly and making so many demands on us (Exodus 18:13-15) that we barely have time to react—let alone to contemplate or go to someone else for advice. Perhaps this is one reason the Scriptures remind us to surround ourselves with counselors who will offer their experience and wisdom even when we're too busy to ask for it. We see this in the story of what Jethro did for Moses when he told his son-in-law to delegate some of his responsibilities (Exodus 18:17-23).

Don't be overwhelmed. Instead, seek godly counsel and then follow through on what you are told.

Lord, give us ears to hear advice

From loved ones wise and humble;

So when life's challenges appear,

We will not have to stumble. —Sper

He who will not be counseled will not be helped.

Exodus 18:13-27 Exhausted?

If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure. —Exodus 18:23

People who kill time and waste opportunities create problems for themselves. "They're irresponsible!" we complain. On the other hand, some people encounter problems because they are over-responsible. They say to themselves, "If I don't do it, no one will. Even if others would do it, they wouldn't get it right." This attitude has been called "the perfectionist's myth," and those who live it are labeled "exhausted martyrs."

Perhaps you know someone like this. Perhaps it's you.

Exodus 18 describes Moses as a dedicated, over-responsible person. Day after day he was the sole judge of the people and their countless questions. His father-in-law Jethro said, "This thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself" (v.18). He advised Moses to concentrate on teaching. He said he should judge only big problems and appoint reliable men to judge smaller matters (Exodus 18:19-22). "If you do this thing," Jethro concluded, "and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure" (Exodus 18:23).

Are you exhausted because you've been trying to do everything by yourself? Ask God for wisdom and the strength to do what He wants you to do. Don't try to do it all yourself. Then you too "will be able to endure."

Lord, help me know from day to day

The work I cannot carry through;

Then grant me wisdom to discern

The tasks that You would have me do. —DJD

Don't try to do everything—do only what God wants you to do.

Exodus 18:19

THE WISDOM OF AGE

No matter how long you've been at this thing called life, it's wise to turn to older people for advice. I know I feel more comfortable about making big decisions if I first talk to my dad and my father-in-law about them. When they confirm my fears or affirm my decisions about something, I feel I'm on solid ground.

Moses was no spring chicken when he got some much-needed advice from his father-in-law Jethro. He observed that Moses was about to suffer burnout if he continued to try to do all the work of judging for the children of Israel by himself. So he told Moses, "The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone" (Ex 18:18). Moses could easily have said, "Look, Dad, I'm in charge here. I know what I'm doing. After all, I've been around for a while, and I've gained a little wisdom too." Instead, he listened carefully and divided the work just as Jethro suggested. As a result, things went more smoothly, and the work got done more efficiently.

In God's design of things, He has provided for each of us a powerful, wise resource in the older people in our lives. Let's never neglect their insight and good advice. We can learn from the wisdom of age. -- J. David Branon

The older saints who trust God's Word

Have fought the battles you now fight;

They've trod the paths that you now walk --

Their wisdom teaches truth and right.--JDB

To avoid the mistakes of youth, draw from the wisdom of age.

EXODUS 19

EXODUS 19

TRUE WORTH-SHIP

Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling (Psalm 2:11).

My father was a stickler for showing reverence to God. He became indignant when someone quoted a Bible verse in a humorous vein or referred to God lightly. He insisted that all his children sit up straight when he read the Bible at the table, which he did at every meal. He addressed the Lord in a manner that demonstrated his wonder that we as sinful creatures could communicate with the holy Maker of all things. Thus, he instilled in all eight of his sons a healthy fear of God—an attitude that led to sincere worship and grateful obedience.

The Almighty God wants us to call Him "Father," and He invites us to come boldly into His presence. Yet hundreds of Bible passages in both the Old and the New Testaments make it clear that we must never lose an attitude of reverential awe. Exodus 19 records a unique combination of awesome events that gave the Israelites a proper sense of reverence. God caused a huge fire to rise from the top of the mountain. He produced deafening roars of rolling thunder and blinding flashes of fierce lightning. He made the mountain quake. He generated a trumpet sound that grew louder and louder. And the sound of His voice when He spoke to Moses filled the people with profound respect and reverential fear.

How great and holy is our God. How small and weak are we humans. A continual awareness of this contrast will cause us to "serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling." —Herbert Vander Lugt

True worship acknowledges the true worth-ship of God.

Exodus 19:1-8 Our Main Calling

I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. —Exodus 19:4

In our performance-driven world, Christians often assume that God's main calling on their lives is to work for Him. But working for Christ should be secondary to our devotion to Him. As Oswald Chambers warned: "The greatest competitor of devotion to Jesus is service for Him."

I encountered this subtle "competitor" soon after the Lord led our family to start a ministry among street addicts. We loved these searching youths, and I devoted my entire attention and energy to helping them experience Christ's saving power.

Then Derek, one of our seekers, ran back to London and to drugs. This loss shocked me into realizing that I had become so absorbed in our work that my devotion to Jesus had lost its importance. God used my distresses as "eagles' wings" to carry me away from my worship of work and back to my first love—Jesus!

God did the same for Israel in Moses' day. He delivered the Hebrews from an impossible taskmaster and brought them on "eagles' wings" back to Himself (Exodus 19:4).

Praise God, Derek soon returned. Meanwhile, I had learned a lesson that's vital for all followers of Jesus. Our God-given work must never compete with our main calling: devotion to Christ.

Striving for souls, I loved the work too well;

Then disappointments came; I could not tell

The reason, till He said, "I am thine all;

Unto Myself I call." —Cowman

Many Christians are strong on service but weak on worship.

EXODUS 20

Exodus 20:1-17

Murphy's Laws

Murphy's Laws are observations about life that seem to have the weight of experience behind them. You've probably heard this one: "If anything can go wrong, it will." Here's another one: "You can't do just one thing; everything has its consequences."

My own experience seems to confirm many of Murphy's Laws, but it's that second one that I would hang on the wall as a motto. Wrong choices have their consequences. For example, if a man or woman chooses to live for pleasure, that will affect their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren (Exodus 20:4, 5). If you walk away from God, you may discover that your children have taken that trip with you. Later, even if you return to Him, they may not.

But there is also good news. Devotion to the Lord has its consequences too. Men and women who live in faith before God can have a strong influence on their children and their children's children. If they live a long life, they can witness the effect their faith has had on several generations. What satisfaction it brings to older people to see their posterity living for Christ!

So Murphy and the Bible agree on this point: "You can't do just one thing; everything has its consequences." —Haddon W. Robinson

If you sow seeds of wickedness,

Sin's harvest you will reap;

But scattered seeds of righteousness

Yield blessings you can keep. —Sper

People who follow Christ lead others in the right direction.

Exodus 20:1-17 Beware Of What You Want

You shall not covet. —Exodus 20:17

Sometimes I wonder why God didn't list the Ten Commandments in reverse order, since the 10th commandment correlates to the first sin—desire. Eve's sin wasn't simply her desire for a piece of fruit; it was the desire for knowledge that Satan told her would make her like God (Gen. 3:5). Eve's covetousness caused her to violate both the first and tenth commands that God later gave to Moses.

When we don't covet, we pretty much eliminate our reasons to disobey the other commands. Wanting what isn't ours causes us to lie, steal, commit adultery, murder, and refuse to honor our parents. We refuse to rest because we can't get what we want in 6 days of work. We misuse God's name when we use it to justify something that we want to do. We make gods out of wealth and relationships because we don't want to have to put all our trust in God.

I have a hard time coming up with sins that don't involve some form of covetousness. Yet because it's the last in the list, we tend to think of it as being the least important. But it's not. When we stop sin while it is still in our hearts and heads, we avoid making others the victim of our sin, and we avoid many of the serious consequences of sin.

When you covet someone else's things,

Thinking that they're better than your own,

Just remember that God's gifts to you

Were designed for you and you alone. —Hess

Contentment is realizing that God has already given me all I need.

Exodus 20:1-6

Is Work Your God?

The ability to work is a wonderful gift, but are we taking it too far? In the past, people left their jobs at the office, but now they come home to e-mail and phone messages.

Dr. Dave Arnett, associate professor of management at Dallas Baptist University, says, "I don't know whether work is taking over family and community, or whether family and community are giving up their place to work. But I know the movement is going on. Everyone's job seems to be who they are." We tend to equate our identity with what we do for a living.

The president of the Families and Work Institute says, "How busy you are has become the red badge of courage. . . . It's become a status symbol," even though people complain about it.

Making a god out of work is not a new problem. In the first commandment, God said, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). That includes our jobs. Through God's gift of work, we can honor Him, care for our families, and help people in need. Work is not to be our main source of fulfillment; that must come from God Himself.

No matter what our occupation, we must keep work in perspective. God and family are more important than dedication to a job. Work is a gift, not a god. —David C. McCasland

FOR FURTHER STUDY

See Ecclesiastes 2:17-26.

Read [How Can I Find Satisfaction In My Work?](#)

Exodus 20:1-7

The Name

It's not easy to keep up with the shorthand that accompanies today's fast-paced, youth-oriented electronic communication. In IM-speak (Instant Message talk) or text-message language, "laughing out loud" becomes "lol." "By the way" is "btw." And regrettably, some people use "omg" for "Oh, my God!"

This last phrase seems to be on the lips of many who receive startling news. But as Christians, we need to stop before we utter this or any other phrase that flippantly uses God's name.

In Matthew 6, when Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, the first thing He told them to say was this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (Mt 6:9). Clearly, God's name itself is special. It encompasses His nature, His teachings, and His moral authority. To speak the name of God is to call on the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

In every way possible, we should honor and protect God's holy name, preserving its use for those occasions when we are speaking of Him or addressing Him in faith.

Let's be careful never to turn the hallowed name of our awesome and mighty God into just another flippant phrase on our lips or in a text message. —Dave Branon

May all I am and do and say

Give glory to my Lord alway;

And may no act of mine cause shame

Nor bring reproach upon His name. —Anon.

God's name: handle with care.

Exodus 20:3

Who Is On The Throne?

According to English poet Oliver Reynolds, an old man had a family altar where he burned incense to an engraving of Napoleon. When asked why he worshiped the picture as a god, the man replied that he would worship anything.

Imagine venerating a picture of that French general! Imagine burning incense to the portrait of a human being who has no meaningful relationship to his worshipers! That's idolatry at its worst!

We don't think of ourselves as idolaters, of course, but are we in subtle ways disobeying God's commandment: "You shall have no other gods before Me"? (Exodus 20:3). We would never dream of bowing down to the picture of any mortal, however famous or powerful. But who is on the throne of our hearts?

Are we giving a loved one first place in our lives? Is that person number one in our affections? Maybe we're worshiping money. Or perhaps our job is our top priority.

Jesus said, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve" (Luke 4:8). Are we worshiping and serving only Him?

Spend some time alone with God to examine your heart. Make sure that you haven't become an idolater. —Vernon C Grounds

Unless we worship only God

Our lives cannot be truly free;

For we were made for Him alone—

All else is but idolatry. —D. De Haan

An idol is anything that takes the place of God

Exodus 20:1-20

The Gift Of Family

Through her books and lectures, Edith Schaeffer has become much appreciated for her insights into the value of life's ordinary days. When she and her husband Francis were first married, both sets of parents lived nearby. The newlyweds divided each Sunday afternoon and evening between the Schaeffers and the Seviles.

After a few years, Edith and Francis moved to Switzerland, where they could talk with their parents only once a year in a brief phone conversation.

Looking back half a century later, Edith wrote of being glad for the way they had used those Sunday afternoons. She noted that "proximity of loved ones is not an endless situation." She concluded that a package labeled "time to care for parents and exhibit love" doesn't just arrive someday. We must show love while we can.

The fifth of the Ten Commandments says: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12). The command to love and respect our parents applies equally to children living at home, newly independent young couples, and empty-nesters.

Seize each moment you have to love and honor your family. The opportunity won't last forever. —David C. McCasland

Putting It Into Action

Plan a regular time to call a family member.

Help an aged relative with a project or housework.

Write a letter to someone you love but cannot visit.

Time is one of the greatest gifts we can give each other.

Exodus 20:1-17a

Windmills And Fences

It was my special privilege to spend some time on the Clyde Peterson ranch in eastern Wyoming. He raises beef cattle and Rambouillet sheep on a spread that covers thousands of acres.

Clyde told me that the success of a ranch like his, where grass is sparse and high winds blow, depends on two factors: windmills and fences. The fences are essential because they restrict the livestock to certain grazing areas while allowing grass to grow in other sections. And the windmills pump the life-giving water for the animals.

Come to think of it, fences and water are basic to a Christian's spiritual health as well. God's "fences" are the laws and principles of His Word, like God's commandments in Exodus 20 and Matthew 22:37, 38, 39, 40, and the exhortations of Galatians 5:16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21. Our "water" comes from Christ, who gives us an ever-present flow of spiritual refreshment "springing up into everlasting life" (Jn. 4:14).

Without the fences of God's commands or the water Christ provides, we would be as spiritually lifeless as the bleached bones that dot the western prairies. But we have the privilege to graze in His pastures and to drink freely of the Water of Life. --D C Egner

Like sheep that sometimes wander from the flock

In tangled paths of life to lose their way,

I need my Shepherd's hand and watchful eye

To keep me always, lest I go astray. --Sanders

If the Lord is your Shepherd, you have everything you need.

Exodus 20:17 Good But Guilty

Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. —James 2:10

Was the apostle Paul right when he declared that "there is none righteous" and "all have sinned"? (Romans 3:10,23). Or is that verdict of condemnation too sweeping?

Many people might protest. They don't see themselves as rebels against the laws of society or the laws of God. They consider themselves to be good people. So why condemn them as deserving God's judgment?

According to James, "Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). In God's eyes, it takes only one act of disobedience to put us in the company of those who have broken His law and deserve His judgment.

Can any of us claim that we've never violated one of God's laws? What about the command not to covet? (Exodus 20:17). The truth is that all of us at some time or other have been guilty of longing to possess what belongs to someone else. Paul himself confessed that he was guilty of this sin and deserved God's judgment (Romans 7:7-10).

We may be relatively good, but in the eyes of a perfectly holy God we've fallen far short of His standards. We all need the guilt-cleansing grace that Jesus Christ alone provides.

Have you humbly acknowledged your guilt and received the gift of forgiveness that Jesus offers? —V C G

I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus—

Trusting only Thee;

Trusting Thee for full salvation,

Great and free. —Havergal

Christ died for sinners—both good and bad.

Exodus 20:1-7 Holy Is Your Name

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. Exodus 20:7

One afternoon I was having a discussion with a friend I considered my spiritual mentor about misusing God's name. "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God," says the third commandment (Ex. 20:7). We may think this only refers to attaching God's name to a swear word or using His name flippantly or irreverently. But my mentor rarely missed an opportunity to teach me about real faith. He challenged me to think about other ways we profane God's name.

When I reject the advice of others and say, "God told me to go this way," I misuse His name if all I am doing is seeking approval for my own desires.

When I use Scripture out of context to try to support an idea I want to be true, I am using God's name in vain.

When I teach, write, or speak from Scripture carelessly, I misuse His name.

Author John Piper offers this reflection on what it means to take God's name in vain: "The idea is . . . 'don't empty the name.' . . . Don't empty God of His weight and glory." We misuse His name, Piper says, when we "speak of God in a way that empties Him of His significance."

My friend challenged me to honor God's name and to pay closer attention to using His Word carefully and accurately. Anything less dishonors Him.

Heavenly Father, help me to glorify Your name and to honor You always in what I say and do.

Share this prayer from our Facebook page with your friends: facebook.com/ourdailybread

God's name: handle with care.

INSIGHT:

The Ten Commandments are divided into two sections—vertical and horizontal. The first section (Ex. 20:1-11) deals with the response of the people to God (vertical). These laws have to do with God's exclusive right to worship, an admonition against idols, honoring God's name, and setting aside the Sabbath for worship. The remaining commands (Exodus 20:12-17) deal with how we relate to one another (horizontal). This includes honoring parents, life, and marriage; respecting the property of others; being truth-speakers; and not coveting what isn't ours. This two-fold set of instructions mirrors the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37-40), which calls us to love God with all our being and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Both vertical and horizontal elements are again in view in this commandment.

Exodus 20:1-17b

Long Life

AN old man who lived to be one hundred attributed his longevity to booze, black cigars, beautiful women—and never going to church. "That kind of impious longevity may be the exception, not the rule," says Dr. George W. Comstock of Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health.

In a study of the relation of the social and economic factors to disease, Comstock and his colleagues made an incidental but fascinating discovery. Regular churchgoing and the clean living that often goes with it seem to help people avoid "a whole bagful of dire ailments and disasters." Comstock concludes, "Nice guys do seem to finish last."

The Bible also has something to say about how to have a long life. It admonishes children to honor their parents so that they may live long on the earth" (Ephesians 6:2, 3). Harold W. Hoehner, in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, says, "This states a general principle that obedience fosters self-discipline, which in turn brings stability and longevity in one's life."

Of course, there are exceptions. Some very disciplined Christians die young, and some wicked people live long. But the general principle applies: Living right not only pleases God, it can also add years to your life.—R W De Haan

Exodus 20:3a

Only Room For One

BRITISH statesman W. E. Gladstone (1809–98) visited Christ Church College and spoke optimistically about the betterment of English society during his lifetime. His outlook was so positive that a student challenged him:

"Sir, are there no adverse signs?"

Gladstone reflected,

"Yes, there is one thing that frightens me—the fear that God seems to be dying out of the minds of men."

Obedying the first commandment would prevent this from happening. Yet people attempt to make gods out of such things as money, possessions, pleasure, knowledge, and people, and in so doing forget the true God. But no created thing can ever fill the place in our hearts that God intends for Himself.

A child was asked,

"How many gods are there?"

"Only one," he replied.

"How do you know?"

"Because," he said, "God fills heaven and earth, so there's room for only one."

Why does God command us to love and worship Him alone? Because in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28), and from Him we receive eternal life (Colossians 1:13–18). He has every right to say, "No other gods!" because He alone is the living and true God who created us and redeemed us. —D J De Haan

Lord, just as there is room for only one God in the universe, there is room for only one in my heart. Take away every desire I have that threatens to crowd You out.

Exodus 20:4

UNSEEN MAJESTY

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image." -- Exodus 20:4

The Encyclopedia Britannica describes Marcus Terentius Varro (116-27 BC) as "Rome's greatest scholar." He wrote more than 600 books on many subjects. Among his writings is this statement: "They who first introduced images of the gods removed fear and added error."

This profound statement helps us understand why Moses reminded Israel at Sinai, "You saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire" (Dt. 4:15). It also underscores the reason behind God's command prohibiting any physical representations of Him.

We cannot love and serve the Lord in an acceptable manner unless we have an accurate understanding of His character. Any physical portrayal, however, whether with pictures, icons, or statues, distorts our perception of His true character and lessens a healthy respect for His awesome holiness and power.

If Rome's greatest secular scholar, guided only by the light of nature and reason, could see the dangers of misrepresenting deity, how much more should we who have special revelation carefully attend to every word God has spoken.

Let's ask the Lord to instill in us a healthy respect of Him and help us grow in our knowledge of His character. -- Dennis J. De Haan

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,

In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,

Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,

Almighty, victorious -- Thy great name we praise. -- Smith

God made us in His image; don't try to make Him in yours

Exodus 20:8-11 A Slower Pace

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work. —

When writer Bruce Feiler was diagnosed with bone cancer in his thigh, he couldn't walk without some help for over a year. Learning to get around on crutches caused him to appreciate a slower pace of life. Feiler said, "The idea of slowing down became the number one lesson I learned from my experience."

After God's people were liberated from Egypt, He gave them a commandment that would cause them to slow down and view Him and the world "in pause." The fourth commandment introduced a dramatic contrast to the Israelites' slavery under Pharaoh when they had no break in their daily work routine.

The commandment insisted that God's people set aside one day a week to remember several important things: God's work in creation (Gen. 2:2), their liberation from Egyptian bondage (Deut. 5:12-15), their relationship with God (6:4-6), and their need for personal refreshment (Exod. 31:12-18). This was not to be a day of laziness, but one where God's people acknowledged, worshiped, and rested in Him.

We too are called to slow down, to be refreshed physically, mentally, and emotionally, and to behold God in His good creation.

Lord, I need spiritual and physical rest. Help me

to deliberately take the time to spend with You.

Please remove any obstacle that keeps me from

having a more balanced rhythm to my life.

Living for God begins with resting in Him.

Exodus 20:1-7 Commandment 3—Respect God's Name

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. —Exodus 20:7

The third commandment was taken so seriously by Israel that at one time the scribes wouldn't even write the name Yahweh (Jehovah) until they had first taken a bath and changed their clothes. Then after they had written it, they would take another bath and change their clothes again.

Their focus on the word itself, however, often overlooked the broader implications of the commandment. J. I. Packer says, "What is forbidden is any use or involvement of God's name that is empty, frivolous, or insincere." This includes any kind of irreverence, because it fails to take seriously God's character and reputation which is represented by His name. Nor are we to use the name God or Jesus Christ as profanity, because this expresses neither praise, worship, nor faith.

The commandment also relates to breaking a promise when God's name is used to back one's word. But even when no reference is made to God, every promise we make to another is done in God's presence and is therefore as binding as if we had invoked His name.

How the third commandment condemns us all! But thank God for the name Jesus, which means Savior. He provides the forgiveness and help we need to keep the third commandment and become men and women known for being true to their word.

- In what ways do I hear people misusing God's name?
- How am I guilty of breaking this command?

If you care about God, handle His name with care.

Exodus 20:16 Commandment 9—Tell The Truth

Read: Zechariah 8:14-17

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. —Exodus 20:16

How prone we are to lying! With a stroke of exaggeration here, an omitted detail there, or a misleading silence we distort the truth. Yet truth is the foundation and superstructure of all relationships. Remove the girders of truth, and society crumbles in on itself. This moral absolute is so self-evident that even criminals punish their own who lie to them.

The ninth commandment forbids purposeful deceit against our neighbor and underscores the sacredness of truth in all our dealings. The two Hebrew words used for "false" in Exodus 20:16 and in Deuteronomy 5:20 mean "untrue" and "insincere." Any expression of insincerity and untruthfulness, therefore, is bearing false witness against our neighbor.

This commandment also exposes two underlying motives that God hates—malice and pride. When we lie, it is usually to cast a person in a bad light or to place ourselves in a good light. The first springs from malice, the second from pride.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14:6). The closer we are to Him, the more truthful we will become with ourselves and with others. The question is, “Are we followers of Him who is the truth?”

Lord, cleanse my heart of all deceit

And teach me what is true;

Help me to have integrity

In all I say and do. —Sper

Nothing weakens the truth more than stretching it.

Exodus 20:12 Commandment 5—Honor Your Parents

Read: Ephesians 6:1-4

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land. —Exodus 20:12

It was a sad, unsigned letter from an elderly mother. “I have an only son,” she wrote, “who does all sorts of things for other people but hates to do anything for me. He rarely visits me although I live only 8 minutes away. He seldom even phones.”

God puts a high priority on family relationships throughout life—so says the fifth commandment. On the surface it seems directed exclusively to children, but parents must set the example. Children learn to honor, respect, and obey their parents when they see Mom and Dad honoring one another, when they feel respected, affirmed, and loved by their parents, and when they observe their obedience to God. This commandment to children actually touches us all.

How many of us have been as thoughtful of our parents as we could have been? And who of us as parents have been to our children all that we should have been? Although we’ve broken this commandment, our guilt has been removed by Jesus’ death on the cross. He gives the courage to ask forgiveness of our children and our parents. And if they are not living, we can show the sincerity of our repentance by strengthening our other family relationships.

We honor our Father when we honor our parents.

Children who honor their parents

Are doing what’s good in God’s sight;

Parents who love and admonish

Are teaching to do what is right. —Sper

Honoring our parents is learned by example.

Exodus 20:8-11 “Lie Down”

He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul. —Psalm 23:2-3

Our golden retriever can get so overly excited that he will go into a seizure. To prevent that from happening, we try to calm him. We stroke him, speak to him in a soothing voice, and tell him to lie down. But when he hears “lie down,” he avoids eye contact with us and starts complaining. Finally, with a dramatic sigh of resignation, he gives in and plops to the floor.

Sometimes we too need to be reminded to lie down. In Psalm 23, we learn that our Good Shepherd makes us “lie down in green pastures” and leads us “beside the still waters.” He knows that we need the calm and rest that these provide, even when we don’t realize it ourselves.

Our bodies are designed to have regular rest. God Himself rested on the seventh day after His work of creation (Gen. 2:2-3; Ex. 20:9-11). Jesus knew there was a time to minister to the crowds and a time to rest. He instructed His disciples to “come aside . . . and rest a while” (Mark 6:31). When we rest, we refocus and are refreshed. When we are filling every hour with activity—even with worthwhile things—God often gets our attention by making us “lie down.”

Rest is a gift—a good gift from our Creator who knows exactly what we need. Praise Him that He sometimes makes us “lie down in

green pastures.”

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your

care for our well-being in every area

of our lives. Help us to be rested

and refreshed in You.

If we don't come apart and rest awhile, we may just plain come apart! —Havner

INSIGHT: The Ten Commandments, or Decalogue (Greek, meaning “ten words”), are 10 laws given by God as guidelines for daily living. The first four commandments (Ex. 20:1-11) place the worship of God as primary for His people. The first commandment (Exodus 20:3) calls us to worship God alone. He is the only one we are to serve. The second (Exodus 20:4-5) urges us to worship God appropriately and correctly, for God doesn't tolerate idolatry of any kind. The third commandment (Exodus 20:7) directs us to worship God sincerely and reverently. Our actions and attitudes must not dishonor Him. The fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) lays out the frequency, regularity, and consistency of our worship. We are to set aside one day each week for worship.

Exodus 20:7

Word Watch

Good grammar matters to me. As a writer and former English teacher, I'm bothered when I hear the wrong word used by people I think should know better. For instance, using "I" instead of "me" or "who" instead of "whom." There's a proper way to use the language, and it makes me cringe when the standard is violated.

There's another kind of incorrect word usage that is far worse. It happens when Christians utter words that fall short of the standard God expects. Whenever we use words that are considered crude, profane, or obscene, we violate God's clear standards.

Anytime we speak any form of God's name irreverently or in a way that doesn't honor Him, we displease Him (Exodus 20:7). If we joke about sinful practices, we are speaking in a way we shouldn't (Ep 5:12). Or if we participate in coarse talk (Ep 5:4), we bring dishonor to the name of Christ.

James said, "Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. . . . These things ought not to be so" (James 3:10). Such speech is hypocritical.

Controlling our tongue is difficult because it is an "unruly evil" (Jas 3:8). For the glory of God, and with respect for His standards, let's watch our words. —Dave Branon

A wise old owl sat on an oak;

The more he saw, the less he spoke;

The less he spoke, the more he heard—

Why aren't we like that wise old bird? —Richards

Every time you speak, your mind is on parade

Exodus 20:1-17 Honoring Your Parents

Honor your father and mother. —Ephesians 6:2

My dad recently turned 90 years old and his physical capabilities are fading. He can still move around with his walker, but he needs someone to cook his meals and help him with other tasks.

My older brother Steve and his wife Judy lived close to him, so they decided to move in with Dad to care for him. Wanting to help in some way, my wife and I flew across the country to help out a bit by watching Dad while my brother and his wife had some time away together. We enjoyed our time with my father and were glad to ease Steve and Judy's load—even if it was only for a few days.

The Bible says to “honor your father and mother” (Eph. 6:2). One New Testament commentary says that to honor someone is to “treat him with the deference, respect, reverence, kindness, courtesy, and obedience which his station in life . . . demands.”

For young children, this means obeying parents. For teenagers, it indicates showing respect for Mom and Dad even if you think you know more than they do. For young adults, this means including your parents in your life. And for those in middle-age and beyond, it

means making sure that parents are cared for as they move into old age or their health declines.

How can you honor your parents this week?

Don't miss the opportunity

To honor and obey

The parents God has given you—

For they'll be gone someday. —Sper

Honoring our parents has no age limit.

Exodus 20:13 In Defense Of Life

You shall not murder. —Exodus 20:13

The Jews clearly understood that God's commandment not to kill refers to murder—the malicious taking of human life. It doesn't forbid governments to use the death penalty or to wage war. This commandment deals solely with private morality.

Exodus 20:13 is based on the divine truth that human life is sacred and that we must protect and preserve it. Every human being bears God's image. Even an embryo is marked with a unique identity from the moment of conception. Life is God's most precious gift, and only He has the right to take it. Abortion, euthanasia, and physician-assisted suicide must all be viewed in the light of God's right to our life.

Jesus brought this commandment to everyone's doorstep when He said that to be angry at someone without cause makes us guilty of murder (Matthew 5:21-22). And John wrote, "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). This makes us all murderers in desperate need of God's forgiveness and mercy.

Thank You, Lord, for Your love and forgiveness. Help us by Your Holy Spirit to love others as You have loved us, and in so doing to value life, protect life, and enrich life as a gift from You.

Points To Ponder

What did John mean when he said that if we hate

someone we are murderers? (1 John 3:15).

How does this truth help us to forgive those who hurt us?

Anger is just one letter short of danger.

The Go-Between Exodus 20:18-26

The people stood afar off, but Moses drew near . . . where God was. —Exodus 20:21

Imagine standing at the bottom of a mountain, elbow-to-elbow with everyone in your community. Thunder and lightning flash; you hear an earsplitting trumpet blast. Amid flames, God descends on the mountaintop. The summit is enveloped in smoke; the entire mountain begins to shake, and so do you (Ex. 19:16-20).

When the Israelites had this terrifying experience near Mount Sinai, they begged Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (20:19). The Israelites were asking Moses to mediate between them and the Almighty. "So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was" (v.21). After meeting with God, Moses brought God's messages back down the mountain to the people below.

Today, we worship the same God who displayed His staggering greatness on Mount Sinai. Because God is perfectly holy and we are desperately sinful, we cannot relate to Him. Left to ourselves we too would (and should) shake in terror. But Jesus made it possible for us to know God when He took our sins on Himself, died, and rose again (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Even now, Jesus is the go-between for us to a holy and perfect God (Rom. 8:34; 1 Tim. 2:5).

Dear Jesus, thank You for laying down Your life so that I could know God. I worship You as the only one who bridges the gap between God and me.

Jesus bridges the gap between God and us.

INSIGHT: On Mount Sinai, God manifested His presence loudly and visibly through thunder, lightning, the sound of a trumpet, and a smoking mountain (v. 18). Moses explained that this display of power and majesty was to demonstrate God's incomparable holiness. His power and glory were displayed so that the Israelites would revere and worship Him (v. 20).

Exodus 20:16

Creeping Deception

IF television commercials are telling the truth, glamorous movie stars and athletes use products that everyone ought to buy. But, as **Time** magazine reports (and most viewers suspect), many celebrities don't use the products they endorse.

And what about autobiographies? According to the same article, they are not always written by the individuals whose names they bear but by writers who aren't mentioned.

This dishonesty, **Time** suggests, is a symptom of the deception that is creeping into our society. What will civilized life become as people increasingly ignore God's commands against lying? (Exodus 20:16; Leviticus 19:11; Ephesians 4:25).

Jesus had strong words for those who stood in the way of the truth. He said they were children of their father the Devil (John 8:44), and they were incapable of speaking the truth because they refused to hear it (John 8:43, 44, 45, 46, 47).

God's Word urges us to tell the truth (Proverbs 12:17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22). Only as we obey can we hope to prevent our society from being consumed by suspicion and mistrust.

We are to be truth-tellers like Jesus, of whom Scripture says, "Nor was deceit found in His mouth" (1Peter 2:22). He has the right to expect honesty from us because He has been honest with us.—Vernon C Grounds

EXODUS 21

EXODUS 22

Exodus 22:21-27

Have A Heart

People who lack feeling for others are like cold fronts on the weather map in winter—you'd rather see them going than coming. An example is the homeowner who treats the paperboy like the neighborhood pest. He acts as if the youngster were behind the bad news that lands on his porch day after day. I'm not saying that sometimes there isn't cause for frustration. There may be legitimate reasons for dissatisfaction with his service. But being unkind to those who are weaker or in a lower socio-economic position is never right.

God made this very clear to ancient Israel when He told them to treat those of lesser social rank as they themselves would want to be treated. He reminded His chosen people that because they had once been strangers in a foreign land, they should know how it feels to work under those who show no sympathy (Exodus 22:21).

Christians have the same responsibility to the poor and downtrodden as Israel had. We may argue that if we don't look out for ourselves no one else will. But God has told us to love our neighbors. He also reminds us that if we forget what it's like to be on the bottom we are no longer fit to be on top. —Mart De Haan

If you once bore a heavy load

That drove you to despair,

You'll have a heart for those who bend

Beneath their load of care. —D. De Haan

When Jesus changes your heart, He gives you a heart for others.

Exodus 22:22-27 Hear Their Cry

You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry. —Exodus 22:22-23

CNN recently reported that there are approximately 40 million widows in India. Fifteen thousand of them live on the streets of the

northern city of Vrindavan. Unfortunately, many of their families do not hear their cries. A 70-year-old widow says, "My son tells me: 'You have grown old. Now who is going to feed you? Go away.'?" She cries, "What do I do? My pain has no limit."

When God gave His people instructions in the desert, He told them they had a responsibility to care for widows and fatherless children in the land (Ex. 22:22-23). They were to leave some of the harvest in the field for them, and every third year they took up a special tithe for the needy. God expected His people to hear the cries of the powerless, defend their rights, and care for them.

The Israelites were commanded to care for others as a remembrance of their experience in Egypt. When they were in trouble and cried out to God, He heard their cries and helped them. So their memory of oppression and release was intended to mold their values, attitudes, and actions toward the powerless in the land (Deut. 24:18-22).

Let us imitate our Father by hearing the cries of the needy in our world.

To love your neighbor as yourself

Is not an easy task,

But God will show His love through you

If only you will ask. —Sper

The closer you are to God, the more you'll have a heart for others.

EXODUS 23

Exodus 23:1-9

Doing Justice

In the decades since the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the US national holiday established to commemorate his birth has also become a day to remember the cause in which he gave his life.

During the '50s and '60s, Dr. King led a nonviolent struggle against racial discrimination and issued a plea for the civil rights of African-Americans. His goal was justice and equality based on human dignity, not skin color.

From Old Testament days until now, God has commanded His people to exercise justice in their dealings with others. "You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice" (Exodus 23:2).

"He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for doing their religious duties while neglecting "justice and the love of God" (Luke 11:42).

To treat people with fairness and integrity is part of our responsibility as Christians. Standing publicly for what is right is required of us as well.

May we honor God by living out truth in action in our world today. —David C. McCasland

Justice is the clarion call for Christians-

We cannot step aside from what God said;

He has told us how to treat our neighbor,

And we must follow in the path He's led. -Hess

God's standard of justice leaves no room for prejudice

Exodus 23:1-13 A Wonderful Pair

What is desired in a man is kindness, and a poor man is better than a liar. —Proverbs 19:22

An honest and kind man drove the streets of San Francisco for more than an hour to find the woman who had left her purse with \$1,792 in cash on the back seat of his cab. I like what he said when some of his fellow drivers ridiculed him for not pocketing the money. He responded, "I am a card-carrying member of the Christian faith, and what good is it to go to church if you don't practice what you preach?"

In Exodus 23, the principles of honesty and kindness were brought together for the Israelites in the laws God gave them. They were to be honest enough to return a straying animal to its owner, even if that person were an enemy (Exodus 23:4). They were to be kind enough to a foe to help him get a stubborn donkey to its feet (Exodus 23:5). They were to be so concerned about making sure that a poor person got fair treatment that they would help him, even when it was a costly thing to do (Exodus 23:6-9). Landowners were to let their farm lie idle every seventh year and allow the poor to glean freely from it (Exodus 23:10-11).

Honest people can be cruel. Kind people may be soft and not concerned enough about righteousness. But when you put honesty and kindness together, you have a wonderful pair that honors God and blesses others.

When others view our lives today,

Our honesty is on display;

Lord, help us point the way to You

By doing what is kind and true. —Branon

Tact is the ability to make a point without making an enemy.

Exodus 23:12 What Does It Take?

Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest. —Exodus 23:12

Today's technology allows some people to work 24/7. We can bring our work home or take it on vacation. Work is ever-present with us—except when the electricity goes off.

An ice storm last winter covered several states in a thick glasslike glaze. Trees and branches fell, blocking roads and keeping people home. Power lines fell, leaving people in cold darkness, unable to accomplish anything that required electricity.

Whenever something like this interrupts my life, I realize how important my own work is to me. Without it, I feel unimportant, unproductive, and useless. But God doesn't want work to be that important to us, and we shouldn't need a power outage to get us to stop. In the Old Testament, God had a plan for getting His people to stop and pay attention to Him. It was called Sabbath. On the seventh day of the week, they were to stop their work (Ex. 23:12).

Although New Testament believers aren't required to keep this law, rest is still important. Practicing a day of rest can keep us from the faulty belief that our work is more important than God's.

What does it take to make you stop and pay attention to God?

He gives me work that I may seek His rest,

He gives me strength to meet the hardest test;

And as I walk in providential grace,

I find that joy goes with me, at God's pace. —Gustafson

If we do not come apart and rest awhile, we may just plain come apart. —Havner

Exodus 23:8 Bribery

Take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning. —Exodus 23:8

While traveling in a foreign country, my husband noticed that the paved roads had deep indentations. When he asked about them, our driver explained that they were caused by the tires of trucks carrying illegal, overweight loads. When stopped by police, the drivers paid bribes to avoid being fined. The truckers and police officers came out ahead financially, but other drivers and taxpayers were left with an unfair financial burden and the inconvenience of poor roads.

Not all bribery is overt; some is more subtle. And not all bribes are financial. Flattery is a type of bribe that uses words as currency. If we give people preferential treatment for saying something nice about us, it's similar to taking a bribe. To God, any kind of partiality is an injustice. He even made justice a condition of remaining in the Promised Land. The Israelites were not to pervert justice or show partiality (Deut. 16:19-20).

Bribery deprives others of justice, which is an offense against the character of God, who is "God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe" (10:17).

Thankfully, the Lord treats all of us alike, and He wants us to treat each other the same way.

It matters not what race or gender,

Rich or poor or great or small,

The God who made us is not partial;

He sent Christ to die for all. —D. De Haan

Bribery displays partiality; love displays justice.

Exodus 23:16

Not A Killjoy

Contrary to what many believe, God is not a killjoy who frowns on His people having fun. The Old Testament Feast of Tabernacles is one evidence of this. The week-long festival came 5 days after the annual Day of Atonement, a day of fasting when Israelites expressed sorrow for their sins (Leviticus 23:26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32).

The tabernacles were booth-like structures reminding Israel of the temporary dwellings they had in the wilderness. Also known as "The Feast of Ingathering" (Exodus 23:16), it pictured God's blessing on their harvest, as well as the final rest and harvest planned for them in the future.

Everyone who was able joined in a week of worship, rejoicing, and celebration (Deuteronomy 16:13,14). Imagine children greeting playmates they hadn't seen for a year, feasts with plenty of food for all, bonfires under the starry sky, families feasting, and the nation celebrating forgiveness and freedom together.

God used the feasts to teach His people the close connection between the spiritual and physical aspects of life. Times of prosperity and blessing were to be marked by rejoicing before the Lord. Though God takes sin seriously, He is also the One who abundantly pardons and provides for every need. He is not a killjoy! —Herbert Vander Lugt

God takes delight when we rejoice

In all that He has done;

And when we see the love of Christ

Our joy has just begun. —D. De Haan

God wants to paint your life with joy.

Exodus 23:20-33

Don't Get Stung!

About 25 feet up in the maple tree behind my house hung a gray, cone-shaped object about 10 inches long. I decided to get closer to find out what it was.

Armed with a long fishing pole and standing on top of a barrel, I steered the end of the pole into the opening at the bottom of the object. And then it happened! Like a streak of lightning, down they came, first one, then another! I sprawled on the ground. Soon both eyes were swollen shut and I had large bumps on my forehead. I had been attacked by white-faced hornets. That was the last time I bothered them!

So it is with sin. The way to keep from being stung is to stay far from it.

As Israel prepared to enter the Promised Land, the Lord said He would send "hornets" to drive out their enemies (Exodus 23:28). But God also warned Israel not to turn from Him (Exodus 23:33). As the people soon found out, disobedience would bring down the Lord's stinging judgment on them instead of on their enemies (Ex 32:7, 8, 9, 10).

So don't try to see how close you can get to sin without getting into trouble—rather, see how far you can stay away. Listen to the warnings of God's Word, and don't forget the pain of past mistakes. Learn from them. If you do, you'll avoid being stung again! —M. R. De Haan

Today avoid sin's tempting lures

And evil thoughts subdue,

Or worldly things may take control

And someday master you! —Bosch

When you flee temptation, be sure you don't leave a forwarding address.

Exodus 23:20-33a

Little By Little!

When I was a little girl, my mother gave me her prized "reader" to help me learn, just as it had helped her years earlier. I loved one particular story, never dreaming how much it would affect me years later.

It was about a little boy with a small shovel. He was trying to clear a pathway through deep, new-fallen snow in front of his house. A man paused to observe the child's enormous task. "Little boy," he inquired, "how can someone as small as you expect to finish a task as big as this?" The boy looked up and replied confidently, "Little by little, that's how!" And he continued shoveling.

God awakened in me the seed of that story at a time when I was recovering from a breakdown. I remember how my "adult" self taunted the weak "child" within me: "How can someone as inadequate as you expect to surmount so great a mountain as this?" That little boy's reply became my reply: "Little by little, that's how!" And I did overcome—by depending on God. But it was one small victory after another.

The obstacles facing Israel as they considered claiming the land God had promised them must have seemed insurmountable. But He didn't ask them to do it all at once.

"Little by little" is the strategy for victory.—Joanie Yoder

He does not lead me year by year,

Nor even day by day;

But step by step my path unfolds—

My Lord directs my way. —Ryberg

Trust God to move your mountain, but keep on climbing.

EXODUS 24

Exodus 24:1-8 Seeing God

He who has seen Me has seen the Father. —John 14:9

Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). Yet the apostle Paul spoke of God as One "whom no man has seen or can see" (1 Timothy 6:15-16). I have often thought about this seeming contradiction. How can we reconcile our Lord's statement with the words of Paul?

I believe we must first recognize that God in His essential being is pure Spirit (John 4:24), and therefore is invisibly present everywhere in His vast creation (Psalm 139:7-12). But we read in the Bible that on various occasions God appeared to people in a visible way (Genesis 18:1-3). He created a burning bush from which to challenge Moses (Exodus 3:2). And in today's Scripture reading, the glory of His presence was revealed, and "there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone" (Exodus 24:9-10). God can appear in any form He desires, even while He Himself remains invisibly present throughout the universe.

One day in heaven the unseen, infinite God will graciously make Himself visible to us. But even then we'll be unable to look upon His full glory. Instead, we will see Jesus and live in His light (Revelation 21:23). But seeing Him will be seeing God, for He is God. What a blessed prospect! —HVL

No mortal can see God and live,

His brilliance would destroy all sight,

But Jesus' glory we shall see

For He as God is truth and light. —D. De Haan

To see God, look to Jesus.

EXODUS 25

Exodus 25-27

House Of Symbols

Our neighbor was startled when two young men walked into her home uninvited. She screamed, and they ran out. Yet no one would accuse her of failing to be hospitable. If you enter someone's house, you come in on that person's terms.

We sometimes forget that the same principle applies to our entering into the presence of God. This was made clear in the Old Testament "house of symbols" known as the tabernacle (Exodus 25–27). Its construction and the arrangement of the objects within it teach us that we come into God's presence only on His conditions.

Consider, for example, the bronze altar of sacrifice (Ex 27:1-8). Bronze in Scripture stands for divine judgment of sin. The slaughtering of sheep and goats on the altar symbolized the results of sin. An unmerciful death for innocent animals pointed forward to a coming substitute, the sinless "Lamb of God." When Jesus died on the cross of Calvary, His sacrifice was more than adequate to atone for the sin of all people (John 1:29). The only way to approach God is on His terms. We must receive the forgiveness He offers to us through Christ.

Have you accepted Jesus, the Lamb of God, as your Savior from sin? —Mart De Haan

Saved by the blood of the Crucified One!

Now ransomed from sin and a new work begun,

Sing praise to the Father and praise to the Son—

Saved by the blood of the Crucified One! —Henderson

Christ will receive you if you will believe Him.

Exodus 25:31-40 The Right Light

He put the lampstand in the tabernacle of meeting, across from the table, on the south side of the tabernacle. —Exodus 40:24

Eating in the dark is no fun. Low light in a restaurant is one thing; eating in a room with no light at all is another. The same is true in our walk with God. Unless we take advantage of the light He gives, we will miss seeing what He is doing for us.

We have an Old Testament picture of this—the tabernacle. As the priest entered a room called the Holy Place, he could see only by the light of a golden lampstand (Exodus 25:31-40). Like everything else in the room, it had been carefully fashioned according to the pattern God gave Moses (v.40).

The lampstand is a picture of spiritual light. The gold speaks of value. The oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit. The six branches coming out from the center shaft portray unity in plurality. The symbol of the almond blossom is linked to God's anointed priesthood (Numbers 17:1-8). When all this is combined with a New Testament reference that uses a golden lampstand to represent the church (Revelation 1:20), we have the complete picture. God gives light through the Spirit, who works through His congregation of anointed people (1 Peter 2:9).

Yes, the Holy Spirit provides us with the light we need. Are we daily spending time in prayer and reading God's Word so that we can take advantage of it?

Holy Ghost, with light divine,

Shine upon this heart of mine;

Chase the shades of night away,

Turn my darkness into day. —Reed

The light of God's holiness convicts the sinner and guides the saint.

Exodus 25:1-9 A Little Piece Of Heaven

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? —1 Corinthians 3:16

A couple of weeks ago my wife met a woman who needed a ride. She sensed that this could be from God, so she agreed to take her to her destination. During the ride, the woman revealed to my wife that she was a believer but she struggled with drug addiction. My wife listened to and talked with this hurting woman. As she gave her hope for a better tomorrow, I believe that the woman experienced in some small way a little piece of heaven on earth.

When God instructed Moses to build the tabernacle according to His specifications, it was so that God's people would sense His presence. I like to think of it as a little piece of heaven on earth. The temple was a physical example of God's presence on earth also (1 Kings 5–8). The purpose of these holy places was for God to dwell among His people. This was God's plan when Jesus, the perfect temple, "tabernacled" among us (John 1:14).

When Jesus ascended to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell His followers (John 14:16-17), so that we would be God's tabernacles and temples in the world (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). As God's representatives of His presence, let's find ways to bring the peace and hope of heaven to others on earth.

For Further Thought

Ask God to use you in the lives of others and to show you some ways to apply this devotional at work, in your home, and in your neighborhood.

A Christian who is willing to do little things for others can do great things for the Lord.

Exodus 25-27a

Inner Beauty

The tabernacle in the wilderness was a tent where the glory of God dwelt. The structure was made of badger skins and was plain on the outside. But inside it was exquisitely beautiful (Exodus 25–27).

We can compare the tabernacle with Jesus' human form. John said, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The word dwelt means He "pitched His tent with us," the same word that ancient Greek versions of the Old Testament used for the tabernacle.

Jesus looked like an ordinary man: He had "no beauty that we should desire Him" (Isaiah 53:2). No one gave Him a second look. Yet John "beheld His glory," the glory of God Himself. Occasionally, the tent flap was lifted and he caught a glimpse of Jesus' inner beauty and majesty.

We are tabernacles too, made of skin, made to contain God's Spirit. Most of us are very plain, not like the made-up actors we see in the movies or the air-brushed models we view in the ads. But God is even now—at this moment—in the process of making us radiantly beautiful within.

We may be very plain and ordinary on the outside—but as we allow God's Spirit to work within us, the beauty of God's indwelling presence will shine from our faces.

So, is the world seeing Jesus in you? —David H. Roper

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,

All His wonderful passion and purity;

O Thou Spirit divine, all my nature refine

Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me. —Orsborn

A righteous heart is the fountain of beauty.

Exodus 25:10-22

THE INTRIGUE OF THE ARK

"(God) has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts.-- 2 Corinthians 1:22

There has always been an element of mystery and intrigue surrounding the ark of the covenant. This carefully crafted box was built

by the Israelites to be placed in the tabernacle during their wandering years in the wilderness. Inside it were the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, Aaron's staff that had budded, and a golden jar of manna (Heb. 9:4). Atop the ark, on what was called the mercy seat, were two golden cherubim. The ark was situated inside the Most Holy Place, where once a year the high priest would stand in the very presence of God.

We don't know what eventually happened to the ark and its contents, but it is intriguing to hear various reports claiming that it could still be in existence.

As interesting as those unproven reports are, the real intrigue of the ark is its symbolism of God's presence. The people of Israel could experience God's presence vicariously through the high priest. That must have been a heart pounding encounter! Yet we have it better. When we accept Jesus Christ as Savior, we have the very presence of God in our heart -- through the Holy Spirit (2Cor. 1:21, 22).

Yes, the ark is surrounded by intrigue, but it doesn't compare with God's presence in our lives.-- J. David Branon

Almighty, matchless, glorious God,

Inhabiting eternity,

I bow to you and give You praise,

In awe that You can live in me.-- Sper

To know God's presence is to know God's power.

Exodus 25:14-15

Showing Respect

In Myanmar (Burma), children are taught to give objects to their parents and elders with both hands. I live in nearby Singapore, and I know that in Asia it isn't polite to use only one hand to give a business card to someone. And it's extremely rude to toss it across the table to the recipient. To show respect, I should use both hands to give my business card to a person.

In 1 Chronicles 13, we see how important it is to show respect to God. David had good intentions when he decided to bring the ark back to Jerusalem. During the process, however, Uzzah touched the ark in an attempt to prevent it from falling off the cart. God struck him dead. David was stunned and upset by God's anger. Why did the Lord respond so severely?

David came to realize that what he wanted to do for God had to be done with respect for Him and His specific instructions. God had commanded that the ark be carried by the sons of Kohath on poles, not on a cart, nor was anyone to touch it (Ex 25:14, 15; Nu 3:30, 31; 4:15).

What David learned is something we too must take to heart. Showing respect for God means learning what He wants us to do and then obeying Him completely. To please the Lord, we must do His work His way. —Albert Lee

O help me, Lord, to show respect,

To always honor You;

And may I bring You highest praise

In everything I do. —Sper

We respect God when we obey God.

EXODUS 26

Exodus 26:1-11 Perfect Fit

[Christ], in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. —Ephesians 2:21

Too long. Too short. Too big. Too small. Too tight. Too loose. These words describe most of the clothes I try on. Finding the perfect fit seems impossible.

Finding a church that is a "perfect fit" poses similar problems. Every church has something that's not quite right. Our gifts aren't recognized. Our talents aren't appreciated. Our sense of humor is misunderstood. Certain attitudes, beliefs, people, or programs

make us uncomfortable. We feel as if we don't fit. We struggle to find our place.

We know, however, that God wants us to fit together with one another. The apostle Paul said we are being "built together to become a dwelling in which God lives" (Eph. 2:22 NIV).

The believers in the church today, like the tabernacle in the days of Moses (Ex. 26) and the temple in the days of Solomon (1 Kings 6:1-14), are the dwelling place of God on earth. God wants us to fit together—for there to be no divisions in His church. This means that we, the building blocks, are to be "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10).

No church will be a perfect fit, but we can all work at fitting together more perfectly.

For Further Study

Check out the online resource *The Church We Need*

for help in learning to get along with brothers and

sisters in Christ. See www.discoveryseries.org/q0904

Christ's love creates unity in the midst of diversity.

EXODUS 27

EXODUS 28

EXODUS 29

EXODUS 30

Exodus 30:7-8

Psalms, Incense, Praise

READ: Psalm 150

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. —Psalm 150:6

The well-known English preacher Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) wrote something that would be good to remember at the start of each day: "Let your thoughts be psalms, your prayers incense, and your breath praise." Let's look at each of these phrases.

Let your thoughts be psalms. The 150 psalms have a variety of themes, including praise, God's character, and expressions of dependence on the Lord. Throughout the day we can turn our thoughts into psalms by meditating on God's holiness, His worthiness of our worship, and how much we need Him.

Let your prayers be incense. In the tabernacle of the Jews, incense was burned continually to offer a sweet savor to the Lord (Exodus 30:7, 8). Our prayers are like incense to God (Psalm 141:2), bringing to His nostrils the pleasing scent of our adoration and need for Him.

Let your breath be praise. The book of Psalms concludes with the words, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!" (Psalm 150:6). Talking about God and offering Him words of praise should be as natural to us as breathing.

Keep the Lord in your thoughts, prayers, and speech today. —David C. Egner

Worship, praise, and adoration

All belong to Jesus' name;

Freely give your heart's devotion,

Constantly His love proclaim. —Anon.

A heart filled with praise brings pleasure to God.

Exodus 30:17-21 Spiritual Cleansing

Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. —James 4:8

Plutonium, a naturally radioactive element, is one of the deadliest substances known to man. Its radiation can make normal cells cancerous. For that reason, it was headline news a number of years ago when two scientists from the University of California announced they had found a substance that could remove plutonium from living tissue.

Today, man is rightly concerned about the importance of decontamination. But long ago, God showed mankind the more critical need for spiritual cleansing. This is seen in that wonderful “house of symbols” known as the tabernacle. Between the bronze altar of sacrifice and the “tabernacle of meeting” was a bronze washbasin where the priest of God cleansed his hands and his feet before going into the holy place (Ex. 30:17-21). Bronze symbolizes judgment. Germs were not the issue—sin was. God was teaching His people that after He had provided a sacrifice at the altar, a continual self-judging and cleansing from personal defilement was necessary.

This principle still applies today. Only the cleansed person can move into the “holy place” of worship, fellowship, and service. Since believers are priests (Rev. 1:6), we must be careful to wash our hands and our hearts daily.

Search me, O God, and know my heart today;

Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray.

See if there be some wicked way in me;

Cleanse me from every sin and set me free. —Orr

The road to worship begins at the cross.

Exodus 30:34-36 Broken Things

You shall beat some of it very fine, and put some of it before the Testimony in the tabernacle of meeting. —Exodus 30:36

You may feel as if you are being broken today—in body, in spirit, or in material things. If so, consider that it may be God's way of bringing forth something good.

Think about the Lord's instructions for worship in the Old Testament tabernacle. Some of the ingredients of the holy anointing oil had to be crushed before they were used, because until they were crushed their fragrance could not be released.

The crushing of the incense is a picture of what happened to Christ. Just as the incense had to be crushed before it could give forth its fragrance, so also Christ had to be “broken” before He could be our Savior. Jesus called Himself the “grain of wheat” in John 12:24. If He had not been “ground to flour,” He could not have become the Bread of Life.

Do you realize that only the death of Christ can save you? Only as His body was pierced and His blood allowed to flow out could He atone for your sin. Without the shedding of blood, there is no salvation (Heb. 9:22).

Have you been to Jesus for cleansing? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? If you have been, then you can be sure that in your own times of brokenness, God can bring forth a fragrance that glorifies Him.

Should Thy mercy send me sorrow, toil, and woe,

Or should pain attend me on my path below,

Grant that I may never fail Thy hand to see,

Grant that I may ever cast my care on Thee. —Montgomery

Sometimes God breaks us so He can remake us.

EXODUS 31

Exodus 31:1-11

A Place Just For You

A bricklayer whose brother was a famous violinist was talking with the head of the construction company where he worked. “It must be great to have a brother who is known around the world,” said the executive. He quickly added, “Of course, we must accept the fact that talent isn't equally distributed—even in the same family.”

"That's right," replied the bricklayer. "Why, my brother doesn't know the first thing about bricklaying. It's a good thing he can afford to pay others to build a house for him."

This story reminds us that we've each been given unique abilities by God. If our motive is to glorify God and benefit others, we have no reason to be ashamed of what we do for a living. Exodus 31 tells us that God gave certain people special skills to work in gold, in silver, in cutting jewels, and in all kinds of workmanship to help build the tabernacle.

If you are a construction worker, a teacher, a trash hauler, a plumber, a doctor, a carpenter, a writer, a mechanic, a scientist, an assembly-line worker, a secretary, or any other kind of worker whose occupation contributes to the welfare of others, you have a God-honoring job. In His sight it is an opportunity to serve Him in the place He has provided—just for you. —Dennis J. De Haan

Our daily work is used by God

To help us care for daily needs;

And work that's done as to the Lord

Gives witness to our words and deeds. —D. De Haan

No one else can do the work God has for you

Exodus 31:1-11 Reflecting God's Glory

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Psalm 19:1

The 12th-century Chinese artist Li Tang painted landscapes animated with people, birds, and water buffalo. Because of his genius with fine line sketches on silk, Li Tang is considered a master of Chinese landscape art. For centuries, artists from around the world have depicted what they see in God's art gallery of creation: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). The Bible tells us that our creativity as human beings comes from being made in the image of the Master Creator (Gen. 1:27).

God chose artists who worked with wood, gold, silver, bronze, and gems to create the furnishings, utensils, altars, and garments that were to be used when the ancient Israelites worshiped Him in the tabernacle (Ex. 31:1-11). These artistic renderings of spiritual realities prompted and guided the priests and the people in their worship of the Lord who had called them to be His people.

Through many types of artistic expression, we reflect the beauty of creation and honor the Creator and Redeemer of this marvelous world.

Lord of the universe, You are the Creator and have given us creative abilities. May we honor You through them.

We were created to bring God the glory.

INSIGHT: Not only did God give Moses the exact blueprint for the tabernacle (Ex. 25–30), He also provided all the craftsmen needed to build it (Ex 31:1-11). Bezalal (Ex 31:2) and Aholiab (Ex 31:6) were probably the leaders of these craftsmen (Ex 31:3-6) and are mentioned again in Exodus 35:31-35. Bezalal is said to be filled with "the Spirit of God" (Ex 31:3; 35:31). God divinely empowered these men to do things that were clearly beyond normal human ability. God said, "I have put wisdom in the hearts of all the gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you" (31:6). Likewise, God has given every believer special abilities and skills to build up the church for His glory (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 4:11-15; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Sim Kay Tee

Exodus 31:1-11 Icebergs

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly. —Psalm 1:1

To improve efficiency, a company hired a consultant, who called a meeting of all shop personnel. Stressing the need to listen to experts, he said, "Imagine you're on the Titanic, and it's sinking. You climb into a lifeboat. Which direction would you row?"

Then he asked, "What if you had the ship's navigator with you? Now which way would you go? You'd row the way the navigator told you to, right?"

There were murmurs of agreement until one fellow in the back piped up, "Well, I don't know. He's already hit one iceberg!"

The book of Proverbs urges us to get advice from the wise (Pr 1:2-7). Wisdom in the Bible is the "skill for living." The Hebrew word translated "wisdom" is the same word that's translated "skill" in reference to the detailed work of Bezalel and Aholiab in constructing the tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-11). God gave them and others skill for artwork, building, weaving, and carving.

Today, wise men and women have a valuable skill—"the skill for living." Don't take your lead from others until you take a look at their lives. If they have crashed into a lot of icebergs, they may cause your life to sink as well.

The "blessed" person delights in God's Word, "not in the counsel of the ungodly" (Psalm 1:1-2). —HWR

When you're in need of wisdom,

Be careful to whom you go;

Make certain they are godly,

And that God's Word they know. —Fitzhugh

Take your direction from those who follow God's Word.

Exodus 31:1-5 The Craftsman's Touch

We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. —Ephesians 2:10

I recently saw a documentary about the making of a Steinway piano. It traced the meticulous care that goes into crafting this fine instrument. From the cutting of trees until the piano appears on a showroom floor, it goes through countless delicate adjustments by skilled craftsmen. When the year-long process is complete, accomplished musicians play the piano and often comment on how the same rich sounds could never be produced by a computerized assembly line. The secret to the final product is the craftsman's touch.

When the tabernacle was built, we see that God also valued the craftsman's touch. He chose the craftsman Bezalel and said of him: "I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood" (Ex. 31:3-5).

Today God dwells in the hearts of believers. Yet the call to craftsmanship has not ended. Now each individual believer is God's "workmanship" (Eph. 2:10). The Master Craftsman is the Holy Spirit, who chips away at flaws in our character to make each of us like Jesus (Rom. 8:28-29). And as we yield to His workmanship, we will find that the secret to the final product is the Craftsman's touch.

The Spirit is the Craftsman

Who makes us like the Son;

He'll mold and shape our being

Until His work is done. —Sper

The Father gave us the Spirit to make us like His Son.

Exodus 31:12-18 Commandment 4—Take A Day To Rest

The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. —Mark 2:27

An important part of the fourth commandment is God's instruction to work (Ex. 20:9), a point often missed. Legitimate work glorifies God and has eternal significance (Eph. 6:5-8) if done in balance with appropriate rest. That's the underlying truth of this commandment.

Effective and God-honoring labor is impossible without rest. That's why God ordained a rhythm of work and rest based on His actions during the 7 days of creation (Ex. 31:17). When we tamper with this pattern, we get in trouble. During the French Revolution when the 7-day week was lengthened to a 10-day week, even the horses got sick. Without renewal, the body breaks down.

But there's a deeper spiritual significance to observing a day of rest. While we must avoid all legalistic attitudes and practices regarding it (Rom. 14:5-6), we need a regular time to reflect on our relationship with God—a rest not merely for physical renewal but for spiritual renewal. We must ponder what Christ has done for us on the cross and experience the rest that comes by trusting completely in His finished work (Heb. 3-4).

Do we need to take a new look at this old commandment about God's rest day?

When we take time for fun and play,

For rest along life's busy way,

And when we pause to kneel and pray—

We'll be renewed from day to day. —DJD

Our rest day gives meaning to the rest of the week.

Exodus 31:12-18 The Most Important Days

On the first day of the week . . . they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. —Luke 24:1-2

This is the time of year when I go on “the hunt”—not for after-holiday deals on decorations but for the perfect calendar. I start looking in December, but I don't get serious about my search until January. My requirements are simple: I want a week-at-a-glance, book-type calendar that will lie open on the counter near the telephone. It must also begin each week with Sunday, not Monday. It's this last criterion that complicates my search. More and more calendars start the week with Monday, the day God considers second.

This trend, like others in our culture, gives the least prominence to what God considers most important. He chose to give special significance to 2 days of the week, the first and the last. He rested on the seventh day after creating the world (Genesis 2:1-3), and on the first day Christ rose from the dead after redeeming the world (Luke 24:1-7). Under the Old Covenant, the last day was reserved for rest. Today, under the New Covenant, believers celebrate the first day of the week in remembrance of Christ's resurrection.

Although the calendar I use is not crucial to my faith, it does help me remember that my life begins and ends not with the work I do for myself but with the work God does for me as I worship and rest.

Thinking It Over

Do I make time in my schedule for worship and rest?

How can worship transform my thinking and living?

How can rest help me to see God and life more clearly?

Time spent with the Lord is time well spent.

EXODUS 32

Exodus 32:15-29

Blaming God

It's bad enough to blame our parents, peers, or circumstances for our sins, but it's much worse to blame God. I read about a person on a weight-loss program who bought some donuts. When asked why, he implied that it was God's fault, because He had opened up a parking place right in front of the bakery just as he was driving by.

In Exodus 32, we read how the high priest, Aaron, supervised the making of a golden image for worship. This resulted in the death of 3,000 Israelites and brought a terrible plague on the nation. Instead of repenting immediately and taking responsibility as the leader, Aaron first blamed the people, saying they had put such pressure on him that he had no choice. Then he went even further and lied. He said that all he did was throw the gold into the melting pot, and the image of a calf mysteriously appeared (Exodus 32:24).

Moses rejected Aaron's excuse. He confronted his brother with his sin and then prayed for him (Deuteronomy 9:20). We can be sure that the Israelites who acknowledged their guilt were forgiven. But God judged the sin, and many died.

When you do wrong, take the blame. Don't look for scapegoats. Most important, don't blame God. —Herbert Vander Lugt

My sin, O Lord, defies Your Word,

It shames Your holy name;

I will not make excuse for wrong—

Christ's blood is all I claim. —D. De Haan

A good test of character: When you do wrong, do you accept the blame?

Exodus 32:21-35 Stray Hearts

These people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! —Exodus 32:31

Last fall, an expressway in my city was shut down for several hours because a cattle truck had overturned. The cattle had escaped and were roaming across the highway. Seeing this news story about stray cattle made me think of something I had recently studied in Exodus 32 about the people of God who strayed from Him.

In the divided kingdom of ancient Israel, King Jeroboam erected two golden calves for the people to worship (1 Kings 12:25-32). But the idea of worshipping hunks of gold had not originated with him. Even after escaping brutal slavery and having seen the Lord's power and glory mightily displayed, the Israelites had quickly allowed their hearts to stray from Him (Ex. 32). While Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the law from the Lord, his brother Aaron helped God's people stray by constructing an idol in the shape of a golden calf. The writer of Hebrews reminds us of God's anger over this idolatry and those who "go astray in their heart" (Heb. 3:10).

God knows that our hearts have a tendency to stray. His Word makes it clear that He is the Lord and that we are to worship "no other gods" (Ex. 20:2-6).

"The Lord is the great God, and the great King above all gods" (Ps. 95:3). He is the one true God!

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,

Prone to leave the God I love;

Here's my heart, O take and seal it,

Seal it for Thy courts above. —Robinson

As long as you want anything very much, especially more than you want God, it is an idol. —A. B. Simpson

Exodus 32:1 Fast Freeze

Read: Deuteronomy 9:9-16

Go down quickly from here, for your people whom you brought out of Egypt have . . . quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. —Deuteronomy 9:12

Thanks to Internet technology, I can watch ice building up on Lake Michigan from my warm office 30 miles away. The changing angle of the sun's rays in winter chills the earth. Frigid temperatures turn surging water into rock-hard ice in a surprisingly short time. Witnessing this rapid transition reminds me of how quickly our hearts can turn cool toward God.

That happened to the ancient Israelites. After God miraculously rescued them from slavery, they became impatient when Moses climbed Mt. Sinai to meet God and didn't return according to their timetable. So they got together and created their own god (Exodus 32:1). The Lord told Moses to hurry back down the mountain because the people had so quickly turned away (Deuteronomy 9:12).

When situations don't unfold according to our timetable, we might assume that God has lost interest in us. When we no longer feel close to Him, our hearts may grow cold. But God is always with us. As the psalmist wrote, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?" (Psalm 139:7).

Even when God seems distant, He's not. His presence fills heaven and earth (vv.8-10). There's never a reason to let our hearts freeze over.

Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove,

With all Thy quickening powers;

Kindle a flame of sacred love

In these cold hearts of ours. —Watts

The question is not where is God, but where isn't He?

Exodus 32:1 Look Back

We have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end. —Hebrews 3:14

What was wrong with the ancient Israelites? Why did they have such trouble trusting God? In Hebrews 3, we're reminded that they

heard God's promise yet refused to believe. I think I know why—we have the same problem today.

God provided for the people on their desert march. They would be satisfied and happy for a while, but then a new crisis would arise. They would stare ahead at their wall of trouble, become frightened, and lose faith.

Before Moses went up the mountain to get instructions from God, the Israelites had recently defeated the Amalekites. Things were going fine. But when Moses stayed on the mountain too long, the people panicked.

Instead of looking back and recalling that God could be trusted, they looked ahead and saw nothing but the possibility of a leaderless future. So they sought to create “gods that shall go before us” (Exodus 32:1). Their trust was blocked by a fear of the future when it could've been solidified with a simple look back at God's deliverance.

Likewise, our obstacles appear huge. We need to look back and reassure ourselves by recalling what God has already done on our behalf. That backward look can give us forward confidence.

I have learned to love my Savior,

And I trust Him more each day;

For no matter what the trial,

He will always be my stay. —Hess

Fear hinders faith, but trust kindles confidence.

Exodus 32:1-14 Commandment 2—Refuse Idolatry

You shall not make for yourself a carved image. —Exodus 20:4

Years ago, Life magazine carried on its cover an artist's rendering of God as an old man with long white hair and stern facial features.

Charles Hodge said, “Idolatry consists not only in the worship of false gods, but also in the worship of the true God by images.”

Any visual portrayal of deity can be dangerous. No created thing can convey God's true and complete character. That's why God commanded Israel not to make any image or likeness of anything in heaven or on earth as an object of worship. Such images dishonor God because they distort His glory, and this can lead to sin.

Theologian J. I. Packer suggests that the people of Israel intended to worship Jehovah when Aaron made the golden calf. He says they were using the bull-image as a reminder of God's great might in delivering them from Egypt. But strength is just one aspect of His character. The calf showed nothing of His holiness. Thus the people turned the “feast to the Lord” into a wild, sensual party (Ex. 32:5-8).

To worship an image or picture of any Person of the Trinity is idolatry and veils God's glory. It leads us astray. “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:24).

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,

Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;

All praise we would render—O help us to see

'Tis only the splendor of light hideth Thee! —Smith

God made us in His image, but we cannot make Him in ours.

Exodus 32:1-20 Blurred Vision

We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God. —1 Corinthians 2:12

Although I'm closer to 80 than 70, I still want to think of myself as “a modern man.” So I keep up with the news, read current books, and use up-to-date sources when I research a subject. But more important, I want to be thoroughly biblical and Christian in all my thoughts and actions. Because of this, some people who don't like my convictions see me as being narrow-minded.

One temptation we face as believers is to adapt our views to our culture so that we will not be seen as out of touch with the modern world. When we give in to this tendency, however, we find ourselves compromising what we know is right. We find ways to justify

immoral behavior that society finds acceptable. We may say that we still believe in the Bible, but we reinterpret its clear meaning on moral and spiritual issues and try to make it say what we want it to say.

Exodus 32 describes how the Israelites allowed their sinful desires to blur their spiritual vision. They wanted to be like their pagan neighbors, so they made an idol and had a sensual worship service. This angered both Moses and the Lord, and resulted in severe judgment.

If we don't take God's Word seriously, our spiritual vision becomes blurred and we will disobey Him.

If I would win the plaudits of the world,

Then I must lose the presence of my Lord;

I cannot please the godless by my works

And still enjoy the blessings of His Word. —Smith

Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold.

EXODUS 33

Exodus 33:1-11

We Just Have To Talk

Lisa and Sheryl have been friends since grade school. Even though their paths have taken them in different directions since those schoolgirl days in New Jersey, they have maintained their close friendship.

Sheryl is married, settled in the Midwest, and the mother of young children. Lisa is single and involved in mission work, most recently in Russia. "Every now and then we just have to talk," says Sheryl. So they pick up the phone to catch up on what's been happening and to share their hearts.

In Exodus 33:11, we read that "the Lord spoke to Moses . . . as a man speaks to his friend." Moses enjoyed something far better than an occasional long-distance talk with the Lord. He had frequent, face-to-face conversations with Him. During those intimate talks, the Lord gave Moses instructions for leading the people of Israel.

Because of what Jesus Christ has done for us, and because the Holy Spirit now lives within all followers of Christ, we too can enjoy a special friendship and closeness with God. He speaks to us through His Word and by His Spirit, and we have the privilege of talking to Him in prayer.

If you are like me, as you go through your day you'll find yourself saying to God, "We just have to talk." —David C. Egner

The kindest Friend I've ever had

Is One I cannot see,

Yet One in whom I can confide,

Who loves and blesses me. —Shuler

Prayer is meant to be an intimate conversation with God—our best friend.

Exodus 33:18-34:8 God's Description Of Himself

The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious. —Exodus 34:6

The prayers of young children show us what they think of God. Here are two I read recently:

"Dear God, what does it mean that You are a 'jealous' God? I thought You had everything."

"I didn't think orange went with purple until I saw the sunset You made on Tuesday. That was cool."

These children are right to think of God as the owner and creator of everything, the One who can paint beautiful sunsets. But how does God describe Himself?

Moses needed an answer to that question when he was about to lead the Israelites into the wilderness. He wanted to be assured of God's presence and leading, so he asked Him to reveal Himself (Exodus 33:13,18). In response, God came down in a cloud and

said: “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, . . . by no means clearing the guilty” (Ex 34:5-7). He is good. He is also just.

We too can know this God. He won’t come down in a cloud, but He has revealed Himself to us in His Word—the Bible. We can ask Him to make Himself real to us as we read and study it. We’ll learn that He is even more than the owner and creator of everything.

Sing praise to God who reigns above,

The God of all creation,

The God of power, the God of love,

The God of our salvation. —Schütz

In a world of superlatives, God is the greatest.

Exodus 33:12-17 Anywhere With Jesus

Do not fear or be dismayed; . . . for the LORD is with you. —2 Chronicles 20:17

When our son Brian was small, I took him with me to pick up our babysitter. As I approached the house, I noticed that her dog, usually penned in the backyard, was lying on the front porch. At first glance, the dog looked benign. But to my alarm he sprang to his feet and attacked Brian, who leaped for my leg, shinnied up to my waist, and somehow ended up wrapped around my neck and shoulders.

I, on the other hand, was left to fend off the dog. We danced for a while—the dog trying to get in a bite and I a kick—until, to my relief, the owner came around the house and called off the beast. All of us—dog, boy, and I—escaped unscathed.

Later, as we were walking to the car, Brian looked up to me and said, “Dad, I’ll go anywhere with you.” His confidence was misplaced; I can fail him. But I often think of his words when I grapple with fear.

As Moses faced uncertain circumstances, he implored God, “Show me now Your way, . . . that I may find grace in Your sight” (Ex. 33:13). The Lord replied, “My Presence will go with you” (Ex 33:14).

Whenever we enter frightening circumstances or face furious assaults, we can say with confidence, “Lord, I’ll go anywhere with You.”

Anywhere with Jesus I am not alone,

Other friends may fail me—He is still my own;

Though His hand may lead me over dreary ways,

Anywhere with Jesus is a house of praise. —Pounds

You need not fear where you’re going when God is going with you.

Exodus 33:1-11 A Refresher Course On God’s Majesty

You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live. —Exodus 33:20

My book *Disappointment With God* explores three questions many Christians ask: Is God hidden? Is God silent? Is God unfair? It struck me that those questions did not trouble the Hebrews in the Sinai wilderness. They saw evidence of God every day, heard Him speak, and lived under a contract signed in His own hand. Out of this relationship emerged a great gift from the Jews to the world: monotheism—the belief in one sovereign, holy God.

Today many treat God like a cosmic good buddy. We could use a refresher course from the Old Testament on God’s majesty.

Pastor Gordon MacDonald writes, “The most costly sins I have committed came at a time when I briefly suspended my reverence for God. . . . I quietly (and insanely) concluded that God didn’t care and most likely wouldn’t intervene were I to risk the violation of one of His commandments.”

MacDonald says his own love for God has moved away from a sentimental model, which never satisfied him, to something closer to a father/son model. He is learning to reverence, obey, and thank God; to express appropriate sorrow for sin; to pursue a quietness in which he might hear God whisper. He seeks a relationship with God appropriate to the profound difference between the two parties.

As God's children, we may "come boldly to the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16). But let us ever be mindful of our Father's inestimable majesty.

To worship is to recognize the supreme worth of God.

Exodus 33:11b

"Good Buddy"

The congregation listened intently as the pastor began to pray: "Dear heavenly Father . . ." Suddenly he was interrupted by a voice saying, "Hey there, good buddy!"

Everyone began to laugh when they realized the voice was coming from the organ. It was picking up the conversation of a truck driver on his CB radio! Not much was accomplished in the service that day, because the congregation continued to chuckle about the voice that made them think God was responding to their pastor and calling him His "good buddy."

Moses knew what it was like to be a friend of God—a relationship that went beyond buddies. The Lord often talked with Moses "face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11). The patriarch Abraham was also called God's friend (2Chronicles 20:7).

But can you and I be a friend of God? In our Bible reading for today, Jesus, the supreme example of loving friendship, called His disciples friends (John 15:13,15). He put it simply: "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you" (Jn 15:14).

And what does He command? That we love Him with all our heart and love others as ourselves (Mark 12:30, 31). That's how we can be God's friend. —Anne Cetas

Friendship with Jesus,

Fellowship divine,

Oh, what blessed, sweet communion,

Jesus is a friend of mine. —Ludgate

The dearest friend on earth is but a mere shadow compared to Jesus. —Chambers

Exodus 33:7-17

Knowing God Personally

Most Christians would prefer to see God perform mighty miracles rather than to have fellowship with Him and learn His ways.

Today's text says that God made known His mighty acts to the people of Israel, but to Moses He "made known His ways." Exodus 33 records a great crisis in which Moses humbly prayed, "If I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way" (Ex 33:13). He wanted to know God and His plans for His people more than to see another mighty miracle. No wonder the Lord conversed with him "as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex 33:11).

Commenting on the difference between ways and acts, F. B. Meyer wrote, "Ways, or plans, are only made known to the inner circle of the saints; the ordinary congregation learns only His acts."

A talented friend of mine, Jennifer, learned this difference after spending several years in a wheelchair. One day she tearfully prayed, "Lord, I could have done so much for You, if only I could have been healthy." God's response was inaudible but clear: "Many people work for Me, but very few are willing to be My friend."

If you desire to know God personally more than you long to see His mighty miracles, you'll be satisfied. —Joanie Yoder

Once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord;

Once it was the feeling, now it is His Word;

Once His gift I wanted, now the Giver own;

Once I sought for healing, now Himself alone. -Simpson

Knowing God is not only seeing His works but also learning His ways.

Exodus 33:12-23

Awesome!

Just a few miles from New Mexico's Carlsbad Caverns is Lechuguilla Cave. Explorers who have descended into its interior describe a wonderland whose beauty is beyond almost anything they have ever seen.

One geologist noted, "Everything is alien. . . . I've been in caves that are so beautiful that you just have to leave. You just can't take it." That's an interesting dilemma for explorers, isn't it? To be surrounded by beauty that is overwhelming to the eyes.

Their experience gives us a clue to the problem we have with understanding a holy God. He is so arrayed in splendor, so pure in His goodness, and so beautiful in His character that our sin-darkened eyes cannot bear to look on Him. We cannot endure His glory.

This was the experience of two people in the Old Testament. When Moses asked to see God's glory, the Almighty had to shield him from seeing His face (Exodus 33:18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23). And when Isaiah caught a glimpse of God's majesty, he cried out, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" (Isaiah 6:5).

Lord, Your awesome splendor, goodness, and beauty reveal the defects in us. Thank You for being so loving and merciful. And thank You for making us holy and acceptable to You through Christ. —Mart De Haan

Holy, Holy, Holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,

Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see;

Only Thou art holy—there is none beside Thee,

Perfect in power, in love, and purity. —Heber

God's awesome presence is both convicting and comforting

Exodus 33:14

August 10, 2005

Walking Away

READ: Exodus 33:12-23

My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. —Exodus 33:14

After winning a bronze medal in the 2004 Olympics in Athens, wrestler Rulon Gardner took off his shoes, placed them in the center of the mat, and walked away in tears. Through that symbolic act, Gardner announced his retirement from the sport which had defined his life for many years.

Times of walking away come to all of us, and they can be emotionally wrenching. A loved one "walks away" in death. A child moves away from home. We leave a job or a community and it feels as if we've left everything behind. But when we know the Lord, we never have to walk into an unknown future alone.

It's worth pausing to reflect on how much the children of Israel walked away from when Moses led them out of Egypt. They left the heavy burden of slavery, but they also left everything stable and predictable they had ever known. Later, when the Lord told Moses, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (Exodus 33:14), Moses replied, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here" (Exodus 33:15).

During our most difficult times, our stability comes from the presence and peace of God. Because He goes with us, we can walk into the future with confidence. —David C. McCasland

I never walk alone, Christ walks beside me,

He is the dearest Friend I've ever known;

With such a Friend to comfort and to guide me,

I never, no, I never walk alone. —Ackley

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Every loss leaves a space that only God's presence can fill.

EXODUS 34

Exodus 34:29

Seeing God's Glory

I've had the privilege of viewing some glorious sights in my life.

I've seen an awe-inspiring nighttime launch of the space shuttle, the majesty of Mount Fuji in Japan, the sparkling beauty of ocean sealife off the coast of the Philippine Islands, the architectural wonders of New York City, and the gleaming midsummer spectacle of a night baseball game in a major league stadium.

But nothing I've ever seen comes close to what some Old Testament people saw. Moses, the people he led, Ezekiel, and others witnessed the most breathtaking sight of all time. They had a glimpse of the glory of God—a visible manifestation of the Lord's invisible being and character.

Moses experienced it on Mount Sinai, and his face shone (Exodus 34:29). The Israelites saw it in the cloud, before God provided them with quail (Ex 16:10). Ezekiel saw God's glory return to the temple, and he fell to the ground (Ezekiel 43:1, 2, 3, 4, 5).

Someday we who have been redeemed by Jesus will experience that inspiring sight. God's glory will shine in the heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10, 11). And we will see our risen and glorified Savior, the Lord Jesus (1John 3:2).

This hope encourages us as Christians to keep going. For nothing in this world compares to seeing God's glory! —J Dave Branon

The glory of God

In the face of His Son

To us who behold Him

Is heaven begun. —Hess

The world's greatest glory is but a spark compared to the radiance of God's glory.

Exodus 34:1-9 Caricature God

The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty. —Numbers 14:18

Caricature artists set up their easels in public places and draw pictures of people who are willing to pay a modest price for a humorous image of themselves. Their drawings amuse us because they exaggerate one or more of our physical features in a way that is recognizable but funny.

Caricatures of God, on the other hand, are not funny. Exaggerating one of His attributes presents a distorted view that people easily dismiss. Like a caricature, a distorted view of God is not taken seriously. Those who see God portrayed only as an angry and demanding judge are easily lured away by someone who emphasizes mercy. Those who see God as a kindhearted grandfather will reject that image when they need justice. Those who see God as an intellectual idea rather than a living, loving being eventually find other ideas more appealing. Those who see God as a best friend often leave Him behind when they find human friends who are more to their liking.

God declares Himself to be merciful and gracious, but also just in punishing the guilty (Ex. 34:6-7).

As we put our faith into action, we need to avoid portraying God as having only our favorite attributes. We must worship all of God, not just what we like.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—

Oh, Thou blessed Trinity:

One in essence, yet three persons—

Thou, our God, we worship Thee. —D. De Haan

All-powerful, merciful, wise, and just is the God in whom we trust.

Exodus 34:6-7 What Makes God Laugh?

He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision. —Psalm 2:4

I was washing my car one evening as the sun was preparing to kiss the earth goodnight. Glancing up, I impulsively pointed the hose at it as if to extinguish its flames. The absurdity of my action hit me, and I laughed.

Then I thought of God's laughter in Psalm 2. Wicked nations were plotting to overthrow God's anointed, thus ultimately opposing the Almighty Himself. But He sits in the heavens, calm and unthreatened. Man's boldest efforts to oppose such awesome power is ludicrous. The Almighty doesn't even rise from His throne; He just laughs in derision.

But is this a heartless or cruel laughter? No! His same infinite greatness that mocks man's defiance also marks His sympathy for man in his lost condition. He's the same God who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11). And He was the incarnate Savior who wept over Jerusalem when His own people rejected Him (Matthew 23:37-39). He is great in judgment but also in compassion (Exodus 34:6-7).

God's laughter gives us the assurance that Christ will ultimately triumph over evil. Any defiance of Him and His will is futile. Instead of opposing the Son, we should submit to the Lord Jesus and take refuge in Him.

God dwells in light and holiness,

In splendor and in might;

It's godly fear of His great power

That helps us do what's right. -D. De Haan

Mankind's limited potential highlights God's limitless power.

Exodus 34:14 Our Jealous God

Read: 2 Corinthians 11:1-4 | Bible in a Year: Jeremiah 32–33; Hebrews 1

The Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. Exodus 34:14

In 2014 a University of California researcher used a stuffed dog to show that animals are capable of jealousy. Professor Christine Harris asked dog owners to show affection for a stuffed animal in the presence of their pet. She found that three-fourths of the dogs responded with apparent envy. Some tried to get attention with touch or a gentle nudge. Others tried to push between their owner and the toy. A few went so far as to snap at their stuffed rival.

In a dog, jealousy seems heartwarming. In people, it can lead to less admirable results. Yet, as Moses and Paul remind us, there is also another jealousy—one that beautifully reflects the heart of God.

God made us & rescued us to know & enjoy Him forever.

When Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, he said he was "jealous for you with a godly jealousy" (2 Cor. 11:2). He didn't want them to be "led astray from [their] sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (v. 3). Such jealousy reflects the heart of God, who told Moses in the Ten Commandments, "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God" (Ex. 20:5).

God's jealousy is not like our self-centered love. His heart expresses His protective zeal for those who are His by creation and salvation. He made us and rescued us to know and enjoy Him forever. How could we ask for anything more than a God who is so zealous—and jealous—for our happiness?

Father, help me shun anything that distracts me from You, so that I may always find enjoyment in who You are and in Your plan for me.

God loves every one of us as if there were but one of us to love. Augustine

INSIGHT: Paul's relationship with the church at Corinth was a turbulent one. Paul founded the Corinthian church and spent 18 months there (Acts 18:1-18). Then he returned for another 3 months at a later time (20:3). In spite of this significant investment of time and energy, the Corinthian believers appear to have struggled with Paul's authority and position as an apostle, as well as his correction of them. His letters to the church at Corinth are filled with evidence of his disappointment over their testy relationship. Still, Paul's love for them is evidenced by his desire that they not be led astray by false teachers. Bill Crowder

Exodus 34:29-35 Getting Beyond Ourselves

We all, . . . beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed. —2 Corinthians 3:18

I have one of those friends who seems to be better than I am at just about everything. He is smarter; he thinks more deeply; and he knows where to find better books to read. He is even a better golfer. Spending time with him challenges me to become a better, more thoughtful person. His standard of excellence spurs me on to greater things.

That highlights a spiritual principle: It's crucial for us to spend time in God's Word so we can connect with the person of Christ. Reading about the impact of Jesus' unconditional love for us compels me to love without demand. His mercy and His free distribution of grace to the most undeserving make me ashamed of my tendency to withhold forgiveness and seek revenge.

I find myself becoming a more thankful person when I realize that, despite my shameful fallenness, the Lord has clothed me in the beauty of His perfect righteousness. His amazing ways and unsurpassed wisdom motivate and transform me. It's hard to be content with my life as it is when in His presence I am drawn to become more like Him.

The apostle Paul calls us to the joy of beholding Christ. As we do so, we are "being transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Lord, help us to come into Your presence with eyes

and hearts wide open to all that You are and want us

to become. Thank You for revealing Yourself to us

and for the joy of basking in the greatness of Your glory.

Stay close to God and you will never be the same.

INSIGHT: Paul underscores the superiority of the new covenant over the old covenant (2 Cor. 3:7-11) by referring back to Exodus 34:29-35. Moses' face so radiated with God's glory after having communed with God that the Israelites were afraid to come near Moses (Ex. 34:30). Paul says the ministry of the Spirit is much more glorious (2 Cor. 3:8).

Exodus 34:29-30 Making A Face

Read: 2 Corinthians 3:1-18

We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image. —2 Corinthians 3:18

In her book about the history of plastic surgery, Holly Brubach writes: "I myself subscribe to the notion that by the time you're 50, you have the face you deserve. . . . After 5 decades of repetitive scowling or laughter or worry, one's attitude toward life is etched on one's face." That's a vivid reminder that every day we are making a face that tells the world a great deal about us.

Although the Bible doesn't mention cosmetic surgery, it does present the startling concept that if we know Christ and spend time with Him in prayer and in His Word, it can affect our appearance.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai after meeting with God, his face shone so brightly that the children of Israel could not look steadily at him (Exodus 34:29-30; 2 Corinthians 3:7). Paul compared that glory with the even greater glory that is experienced by those who have a personal relationship with Christ. He said that we are being transformed by the Holy Spirit, who lives within us, and we are becoming more like our Lord Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18).

While fellowship with Christ won't give us a perfect face, it can replace the cause of frowns and furrowed brows with an inner peace that shows Christ's beauty through us. —DCM

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,

All His wonderful passion and purity;

Oh, Thou Spirit divine, all my nature refine

Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me. —Orsborn

No cosmetic for the face can compare with God's transforming grace.

Exodus 34:27-35

Give Me New England!

JONATHAN Edwards (1703-58) was a brilliant theologian whose sermons had an overwhelming impact on those who heard him preach. One sermon in particular, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," moved hundreds to repentance and salvation. That single message helped to spark the revival known as The Great Awakening (1734-44).

Edwards did not have a commanding voice nor an impressive pulpit manner. He used very few gestures, and he read from a manuscript. Yet God's Spirit moved upon his hearers with conviction and power. John Chapman tells the story of the spiritual preparation involved in Edwards's most famous sermon:

For three days Edwards had not eaten a mouthful of food; for three nights he had not closed his eyes in sleep. Over and over again he was heard to pray, "O Lord, give me New England! Give me New England!" When he arose from his knees and made his way into the pulpit that Sunday, he looked as if he had been gazing straight into the face of God. Even before he began to speak, tremendous conviction fell upon his audience.

Spending time in the presence of God is like being exposed to the sun; it leaves us with a radiant glow.—H D Bosch

Lord, may the proof of my relationship with You be evident on my face. I don't want to fake it with a forced smile; I want the genuine thing—Your glory radiating from the inside out.

EXODUS 35

Exodus 35:30-36:1

Good Workers

During the early years of our marriage, my wife and I attempted to wallpaper our dingy Chicago apartment. We completed the project, but not without a great deal of difficulty. At one point I even had to remove a poorly-hung section of paper and go to the store to buy more. I learned to appreciate someone who could do a job like wallpapering with skill.

I marvel when I see a carpenter make things fit without measuring and remeasuring again and again. I admire the truckdriver who masterfully backs his big rig into a tight space more easily than I do a small trailer on a 16-foot-wide driveway. I take my hat off to the plumber who so easily and good-naturedly installed a water heater in a small, seemingly inaccessible area—especially when I think of all the frustration I experienced when trying to attach a simple water filter.

We read in today's Scripture about the skilled designers and weavers who helped construct the tabernacle. Proverbs 22:29 says that a person who excels in his work "will stand before kings." And Paul wrote, "Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord" (Colossians 3:23).

God is pleased with work done well. He honors good workers, and so should we. —Herbert Vander Lugt

O Lord, I ask for strength to do

The task that You've assigned;

Help me to work with diligence,

Lest Your name be maligned. —Fasick

Work done well will receive God's "Well done!"

Exodus 35:20-29 Free Tomatoes

Everyone whose spirit was willing . . . brought the Lord's offering for the work of the tabernacle. —Exodus 35:21

Packing groceries into the trunk of my car, I glanced at the vehicle next to me. Through the back window, I could see baskets full of bright red tomatoes—shiny, plump, and better looking than any I had seen in the store. When the car's owner appeared seconds later, I said, "What great looking tomatoes!" She replied, "I had a good crop this year. Would you like some?" Surprised by her willingness to share, I gladly accepted. She gave me several free tomatoes to take home—they tasted as good as they looked!

We see an even greater spirit of generosity in the Israelites when they gave to build the tabernacle of the Lord. When asked to provide materials for the sanctuary, "everyone whose spirit was willing . . . brought the Lord's offering for the work of the tabernacle" (Ex. 35:21). The Israelites eagerly donated their gold jewelry, colored thread, fine linen, silver, bronze, gemstones, and spices. Some also gave their time and talents (vv.25-26).

If we follow the Israelites' example and willingly donate our resources, we please and honor God with our attitude and offerings. The Lord, who sees and knows our thoughts and hearts, loves cheerful givers. He Himself is the best example of generosity (John 3:16).

Dear Jesus, You gave everything You had

for my sake. Help me to give with

a willing heart so that my gifts

will truly honor You.

The state of our heart is more important than the size of our gift.

INSIGHT: The tabernacle became Israel's mobile place of worship during their journey from Egypt to the land of promise. Until it was replaced by Solomon's temple in Jerusalem, the tabernacle served not only as a house of worship, but also as the center of Israel's national life.

Exodus 35:30-35 With All My Art

[The Lord] has filled him with the Spirit of God . . . to design artistic works. —Exodus 35:31-32

Why plant flowers? You can't eat them," said my father-in-law after witnessing my spring ritual of filling pots with fragrant and colorful treasures from the garden store. Jay's dad is an engineer—a practical sort of person. He can make anything work, but making it beautiful is not a priority. He values function over form, usefulness over aesthetics.

God created us with different gifts. Engineers who work for the glory of God design machines that make life easier. The Lord also created artists, who make life more pleasant by creating beautiful things for the glory of God and the enjoyment of others.

When we think of art in worship, we usually think of music. But other art forms have long had a role in glorifying God. The calling of Bezalel demonstrates God's regard for fine art (Ex. 35:30-35). God commissioned him to beautify the first official place of worship: the tabernacle. God's purpose for the arts, says Gene Edward Veith, is "to glorify God and to manifest beauty."

When artistic talent is enlivened by the Spirit of God, it becomes an act of worship that then can become a witness to point people to Christ. God has greatly enriched our lives with beauty. And we in turn express our gratitude by displaying His glory in our art.

Father, may our work—whatever it may be—

draw the kind of attention that causes others

to praise and worship You. Amen.

Do all things for the glory of God.

EXODUS 36

Exodus 36:1-7 Beauty In The Church

What does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? —Micah 6:8

When my husband, Jay, and I decided to build a new house, we didn't recruit friends and family who enjoy working with power tools; instead we hired a skilled builder to create something both functional and beautiful.

Beauty in the church building, however, is not always a high priority. Some associate it with impracticality, so anything ornate or decorative is considered wasteful. But that wasn't God's attitude when He established a place of worship for the ancient Israelites. He didn't recruit just anybody to set up an ordinary tent. He appointed skilled craftsmen, Bezalel and Oholiab (Ex. 36:1), to decorate the tabernacle with finely-woven tapestries and intricately designed ornaments (Ex 37:17-20).

I think the beauty was important then because it reminded the people of the worth of God in their worship. During the dry and dusty days of desert wanderings, they needed a reminder of God's majesty.

The beauty created by God's people in worship settings today can serve the same purpose. We offer God our best talents because He is worthy. Beauty also gives us a glimpse of heaven and whets our appetites for what God is preparing for our future.

We're saved by grace through faith alone,

Good works can have no part;

But God rewards each loving deed

That's done with all our heart. —D. De Haan

Good works are not the means of salvation but the result.

EXODUS 37

Exodus 37:1-9 The Sensuous Christian

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above. —James 1:17

The gratification of our senses has gotten a bad reputation, perhaps because we live in a world obsessed with pleasure. But God approves of the proper experience of pleasure through our five senses.

First, God created our senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch—and all that He created is good.

Second, God made sensuousness a part of worship. Consider God's first formal worship setting: the tabernacle. It housed an ornate, gold-covered ark to hold the stone tablets God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai. God approves of beauty. It had an altar of incense where priests burned a blend of fragrant spices made by a perfumer. God approves of pleasant aromas. It had an elaborate table with plates and pitchers. God approves of a tasteful dining experience. Around the tabernacle were curtains made from colorful yarn and finely twisted linen. God approves of beautiful colors and textures. Music was also a component of worship, as we learn from reading 2 Chronicles 29:28. God approves of pleasing sounds.

Yes, God values things that look, sound, smell, taste, and feel good. But He doesn't want us to worship them; He wants our enjoyment and gratitude to prompt us to worship Him, the Creator and giver of all good things.

God gave us five senses

His world to enjoy;

But when we indulge them,

Their good we destroy. —D. De Haan

It makes sense to use our senses to glorify God.

EXODUS 38

Exodus 38:8 Giving Up Our Mirrors

[Bezalel] made the laver of bronze and its base of bronze, from the bronze mirrors of the serving women. —Exodus 38:8

When Moses gathered the children of Israel together to begin work on the tabernacle (Ex. 35–39), he called on Bezalel, a gifted artisan, to help make the furnishings. We're told that certain women were asked to give their precious bronze mirrors to make the bronze basin he was constructing (38:8). They gave them up to help prepare a place where God's presence would reside.

Give up our mirrors? For most of us, that would be hard to do. That's not something we're asked to do, but it makes me think about how too much scrutiny and self-examination can be disconcerting. It can make us think too much about ourselves and not enough about others.

When we can forget about our own faces quickly and remember that God loves us as we are—in all our imperfections—then we can begin to “look out not only for [our] own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4).

Augustine said that we get lost in loving ourselves but found in loving others. Put another way, the secret of happiness is not getting our face right but giving our hearts away, giving our lives away, giving our selves away, in love.

Father, may I think more of others today than I think of myself. May I lose my thoughts about myself in my thoughts of other people and their needs.

A heart that is focused on others will not be consumed with self.

INSIGHT: Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians while he was under house arrest. He was waiting for a verdict that would either set

him free or result in his execution. It was in these circumstances that he wrote about “consolation,” “comfort,” and “fellowship” (v. 1). Paul reminds the Philippians (and us) that these things come from our commitment to Christ. We have consolation in Christ, comfort from His love, and fellowship with the Spirit. All of our love for each other comes from following the example of Christ (vv. 2-5), which Paul explains in verses 6-11.

EXODUS 39

EXODUS 40

Exodus 40:24 The Right Light

Read: 1 John 1:1-7

He put the lampstand in the tabernacle of meeting, across from the table, on the south side of the tabernacle. —Exodus 40:24

Eating in the dark is no fun. Low light in a restaurant is one thing; eating in a room with no light at all is another. The same is true in our walk with God. Unless we take advantage of the light He gives, we will miss seeing what He is doing for us.

We have an Old Testament picture of this—the tabernacle. As the priest entered a room called the Holy Place, he could see only by the light of a golden lampstand (Exodus 25:31-40). Like everything else in the room, it had been carefully fashioned according to the pattern God gave Moses (v.40).

The lampstand is a picture of spiritual light. The gold speaks of value. The oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit. The six branches coming out from the center shaft portray unity in plurality. The symbol of the almond blossom is linked to God's anointed priesthood (Numbers 17:1-8). When all this is combined with a New Testament reference that uses a golden lampstand to represent the church (Revelation 1:20), we have the complete picture. God gives light through the Spirit, who works through His congregation of anointed people (1 Peter 2:9).

Yes, the Holy Spirit provides us with the light we need. Are we daily spending time in prayer and reading God's Word so that we can take advantage of it?

Holy Ghost, with light divine,

Shine upon this heart of mine;

Chase the shades of night away,

Turn my darkness into day. —Reed

The light of God's holiness convicts the sinner and guides the saint.