



Free to Be His

A weekly time of discussion and prayer
around the book of Exodus

Tentative Schedule

September 4:	Exodus 12:31-42	<i>Freed by His Mighty Hand</i> (Galatians 4:6-7)
September 11:	Exodus 13:17-22	<i>Free to Be Led</i> (John 14:16-18)
September 18:	Exodus 14:1-20	<i>Free in His Love</i> (Romans 8:37-39)
September 25:	Exodus 14:21-15:3	<i>Free in His Victory</i> (Colossians 2:16-17)
October 2:	Exodus 15:22-27	<i>Free to Receive His Goodness</i> (John 7:37-39)
October 9:	Exodus 16:1-20	<i>Free to Trust for Today</i> (Matthew 6:31-34)
October 16:	<i>No study. Please join us at Come to the Fire in Holland, Michigan.</i>	
October 23:	Exodus 19:1-9, 16-22	<i>Free to See Holiness</i> (1Peter 2:9-10)
October 30:	Exodus 20:1-21	<i>Free to Walk in His Ways</i> (James 1:23-25)
November 6:	Exodus 24:1-18	<i>Free to Meet with Him</i> (Hebrews 10:19-22)
November 13:	Exodus 25:1-22	<i>Free to Be a Carrier of His Presence</i> (John 14:23)
November 20:	Exodus 32:1-26	<i>Free to Choose Him</i> (Hebrews 12 :28-29)
November 27:	<i>Thanksgiving – no study</i>	
December 4:	Exodus 34:29-35, 35:1-10, 36:2-7	<i>Free in His Abundant Grace</i> (Hebrews 4:15-16)
December 11:	<i>Testimonies and fellowship</i>	

Before you begin..

We are excited that you have chosen to delve into Exodus. We hope that you will hear Jesus speaking whether you are studying alone or in a small group. Each study will take you into a passage of Luke verse by verse so you will need a Bible such as NASV, NIV, NKJ, NLT, or NRSV to understand it. Paraphrases such as the Message or the Amplified Bible will be difficult to use with the style of this book. If you are using this resource in a group, you will find it helpful to work through each chapter **before** you meet together. Pray as you read it alone and write down your thoughts on the questions, encouragements and challenges. This will help in your discussions and will mean that you not only study the Word but receive it personally. If you are using this resource in a group it is very important to read the word aloud, both for the whole passage and for individual verses in the questions.

There will be sections of Exodus that are not covered in the questions and you will find it helpful to read those too.

This resource has been designed so that you can use it with or without the talks, but if you are not using the talks it will be important to go through the introductions before you read the passage for that session.

Receiving the word as a group also includes prayer. It is good to pray at the start, asking the Holy Spirit to speak the word to your hearts and help you to understand and receive it. If you are in a group, here is a way of praying that encourages response to the word as well as supporting each other in our needs.

As you move into sharing and prayer time you may need to split a larger group into small groups of 3 or 4. This gives an opportunity for people to share openly and the time to pray individually for each one. You can respond to Scripture and share your prayer requests by asking each other these three questions:

1. How can I/we pray for you today?
2. What is Jesus saying to you from His Word?
3. How is He asking you to apply it with the help of the Holy Spirit?

After you have asked these questions, have one person pray for the one who has shared. Then ask the questions to the next woman in the group.

Introduction

We often hear talk about freedom in the news, from the mouths of deep thinkers and those with a yearning for something more than they're living in. But besides discussions of war or political liberty, what does it mean to be free, really free, in our hearts and minds?

Here are some quotes showing some popular notions of freedom:

"Freedom is what you do with what's been done to you." -Jean Paul Sartre

"Is freedom anything else but the right to live as we wish? Nothing else." -Epictetus

"Freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have the courage to defend it." -Pericles

"Freedom is a personal and lonely battle; and one faces down the fears of today so that those of tomorrow might be engaged." -Alice Walker

It seems we see freedom as being all about *me*, doing what I want, dependent on my feelings from day to day. It's something I have to fight for or a state of mind.

Is that the kind of freedom that God wants for us? We often don't believe that without him to save us, we are slaves – not free to receive his love or listen to his words of life that would lead us out of death. If our faith is just a lifestyle choice and church is something we like doing as a hobby, then anyone can choose it or reject it with no consequence. This kind of thinking keeps us from grasping our need to be rescued and blocks the power of the cross to transform our lives. You only have to look at the brokenness, cruelty, addictions, destructive behaviors, self-loathing, and abusive relationships around you to see that there are far deeper powers at work. Our desperate need is for a mighty Savior.

The word says without Christ, we were trapped in darkness, believing the lie that there is nothing more to life than pleasing ourselves, or the lie that if we try hard maybe we can win God's approval. But Jesus' power to save us into life and light means we do more than scrape through: we are freed to be his own beloved people. As we look at the dramatic story of Exodus and some New Testament verses they will give us a radically different understanding of freedom. I hope spending time in His word will lead you into deeper trust, greater thankfulness and joy, and a new determination to live in the hands of the God who sets you free.

Week 1

Freed by His Mighty Hand

The Israelites had been oppressed as slaves in Egypt for 430 years. God heard their cry and saw their oppression. Moses, who was saved from the terrible national genocide of Israelite baby boys, is brought up in the royal palace. When he learns who he is, he is appalled to watch the oppressive treatment of his own people. In trying to defend an Israelite, he kills a slave master. On the run as a fugitive in Midian, the years pass by until God meets Moses on a mountain, in a fire, and calls him to be a leader for God's people. In the amazing conversation between the very human Moses and God's holy messenger in Exodus 3, Moses says he does not know who God is. So God reveals his own name: *I Am*. Moses says he cannot speak, and he should send someone else because no one will believe that God sent him. To each of these arguments, God speaks truth. He tells Moses he himself will go with him and gives him miraculous signs to show the people and pharaoh that God, the Lord, has sent him.

In all of this, it is clear that God will be the deliverer, not Moses. It is only God who can bring freedom for his people from the oppressors. God even graciously tells Moses, right from the start, how it will happen and promises his certain, total victory – down to the last detail.

¹⁹ But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand forces him. ²⁰ So I will raise my hand and strike the Egyptians, performing all kinds of miracles among them. Then at last he will let you go. ²¹ And I will cause the Egyptians to look favorably on you. They will give you gifts when you go so you will not leave empty-handed. ²² Every Israelite woman will ask for articles of silver and gold and fine clothing from her Egyptian neighbors and from the foreign women in their houses. You will dress your sons and daughters with these, stripping the Egyptians of their wealth.” (Exodus 3:19-22 NLT)

It is clear that this God has the power to do anything in order to set his people free. Moses agrees and goes to Pharaoh with the message from God: “Let my people go.” After the first plague, Pharaoh is angry and makes the work of the Israelite slaves harder. They are discouraged and cry out against Moses. As He takes it before the Lord, here is what God says in response:

⁵ Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. ⁶ Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. ⁷ I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. ⁸ And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.’” (Exodus 6:5-8)

He is saying, “I will free you and bring you out so that you can be my own people. You can know me and worship me, and I will lead you. I will give to you all that I promised.”

God shows his supreme power as the Lord over every god the Egyptians worshipped and over every aspect of creation in each plague he sends on the Egyptians. Everything the Egyptians had made their strength and pride – the river Nile and the fertile land, abundant crops, and vast herds of animals – is stripped away at God’s command. Pharaoh continues to remain hard hearted, and despite claiming to recognize that it is God’s hand at work and begging Moses to pray for the plagues to stop, he will not let God’s people go. Finally, God shows himself to be the Lord over life and death itself in the plague of the firstborns. The firstborn were precious and honored in that culture and seen as rightfully belonging to the gods in return for their favor. There is nothing God will not do to win freedom for his beloved people, and his passionate love and power to save lead to this tenth traumatic plague. God speaks through Moses to carefully prepare His people for the coming victory and freedom. But unlike the other plagues, they have to do something to keep this destruction away from their homes. They must trust that God is speaking, make the sacrifice of a perfect lamb, eat it, and cover their doorways with the blood so that it is clear that they belong to the Lord and therefore death will not destroy them. So, after watching the firstborn sons die, the cry of the Egyptians is now heard in the land just as the Israelites had cried out under their oppressors. The Egyptians beg God’s people to leave their land.

The truth we read in the New Testament is about what God did for us to save us out of slavery and into freedom. The ransom for our freedom has been paid, and we are no longer chained. We have been freed at great cost. Just as freedom and life for the Israelites came out of the death of the firstborns, so our freedom was bought when God gave His first and only son. When Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose again from the grave, he defeated our slave masters of sin, death, and Satan himself. The New Testament speaks again and again of Jesus as our Passover. He is the perfect lamb, who was sacrificed on the cross at the same time as the festival of Passover, and he is the Son whose death breaks the oppression of slavery for us. God promises us that if we choose to live under the blood of Jesus, accepting that we need him to cover us and trusting that He can wash our hearts clean, then He can lead us out of death and into eternal life as His own beloved people. Jesus offers you freedom for you past, your present, your future, and all eternity. And so scripture tells us.

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:36)

What does the freedom Jesus gives look like in your life? We get confused and often live as though freedom is all about to *me*. We think it is the right to do what I want when I want, a temporary feeling which changes from day to day. We act as if freedom means nothing will ever be hard or as though we are responsible to fight for ourselves. The freedom God offers through His intervention in our world and the promises of his word is far bigger any of that.

As we walk with the newly freed Israelites and look at their experiences, I hope we will see some truths which will help us to receive the freedom that Jesus has won for us and to live in it, as His own beloved people. We begin with a passage that describes the night when, after 430 years in slavery, the people of God walked free.

Read Exodus 12:30-42

1. As Pharaoh, king of all Egypt loses his own son and the cry is heard all over the country, how does verse 31-33 describe the Egyptian's final words to Moses and God's people?
2. Read verses 35 and 36 again. How do these verses give you a picture of God's complete control over of the enemies of his people and His power to bring abundance, even out of oppression?
3. How do these two pictures of what happened encourage you to trust God as the one who is a mighty Savior and know that He wants us his people to do more than survive?
4. Look again at verse 42. What did God tell his people to do year after year? How does this challenge or encourage you to intentionally remember and celebrate all that Jesus has done for us at Christmas and Easter?

⁴ But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. ⁵ God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. ⁶ And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, 'Abba, Father.' ⁷ Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir. (Galatians 4:4-7 NLT)

5. Read the verses above. What do verse 5 and verse 7 say we were before God sent Jesus, our Redeemer, and what did God free us to become?
6. Read Galatians 4:6 again. What does the Holy Spirit do in our hearts so that we can be free to live in the intimacy with the Father that Jesus has won for us?

As you begin this study, in what ways do you need to receive the truth of God the deliverer and redeemer and your need for real freedom, to live as his own beloved daughter?

Week 2

Free to Be Led

Picture the scene: after the intense drama of Passover night, the people of God are finally free. The mighty Lord has conquered, and the Egyptians can oppress them no longer. An estimated two million people begin to leave Egypt. They do more than survive, walking away with their livestock and herds who were not destroyed in the plagues like those of their enemy. They have the unbaked bread God had carefully instructed them to make. They carry all the gold, silver, and fine cloth that the Lord had caused the Egyptians to give them, just as he had promised to Moses before it ever came to be. Like a victorious army with their plunder, they march away from their enemies into the night. But what next? They are on their own in the dark, in a place they have never been allowed to go before. Is that it? Are they supposed to get on with it on their own? How will they survive or know where to go?

We have many more episodes to go yet, but let's just pause here for a moment. We saw that God sent his own Son to be our Passover Lamb. He asks us to accept our need for the cross to forgive us and save us. He asks us to believe his heart for us and choose to live under the blood that will free us from death. Jesus has paid the ransom cost to set us free, and if we receive his promise of forgiveness he will save us completely. But as Christians we often stop there. We live as though the Exodus story ended when the Israelites crossed the border out of Egypt. We do not totally grasp that God has given his all so that we can be free to be his adopted sons and daughters, carefully chosen and dearly loved as his own. We cannot see what his freedom means for today. We ask deep down in our hearts, "Does he even see me? Does he know how I feel today? Does he see what I am going through? Does the power of the cross have anything to do the struggles in my heart today?" Then we compare ourselves to others: "Why does she seem to live a deep, fulfilled life, but I can't seem to get it right?" We live as though it's up to us to work out freedom for ourselves, fight for it, work out what it means for us day to day.

We are still living as though we are independent, self-sufficient, struggling slaves, servants or orphans. Often we don't cry out to God as abba, daddy because we have not yet understood how He cares for us, knows our needs and carries us in every experience from day to day. Thank the Lord, this is not what he desires for us. This denies the truth of what He has won for us. He wants to be your Father and He wants to heal your heart so that you can live out of a spirit of Sonship, not those thought patterns that cause you to live as a survivor, fending for yourself, as though no one is there to care for you.

The God who freed the Israelites did not leave them at the border crossing. He went with them because his purpose all along was to make them his very own people and be their God for that day and every day to come. Jesus says he has not saved you then left you like a great hero who rescues a child out of a raging fire then dumps her on the ground outside the house alone, to fend for herself. As you read the word, look for God's heart for you. Look for his power and love for you. He is not just the hero God who did mighty acts of salvation in the past. He is the one who saved you so that he can stay with you today, love you today, defend you, and lead you because he has given Himself to you.

Read Exodus 13:17-22

1. Look again at verses 17 and 18. Why did God not guide the people along the shortest route or on the road?
2. What do these verses show you about God's parent-like relationship with His people and how he worked for them?
3. How does this picture of God knowing what was ahead and what was best for them show you why you can trust God's good, eternal way, even if it's not what you expected and not the easiest way?
4. Look at verses 21 – 22. How did God show them where to go and let them see that He was with them? After all they had been through and the unknown future they faced, what do you think it meant to them to see Him even in the dark?

¹⁶ *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you.* ¹⁷ *He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you.*

¹⁸ *No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you.* (John 14:16-18)

5. Read the verses above. Look at John 14 verse 18. In what ways do we sometimes think and live as though Jesus has abandoned us or we have to look after ourselves like orphans?
6. What do you feel about Jesus' promise to be with you, be in you, and lead you in truth, and in what ways do you need to receive his promise of the Holy Spirit in a deeper way?
7. If you live in the truth that God has saved you from slavery to be his own, not an orphan but led by a loving Father, how will it help you to trust him like the Israelites in the dark desert, even when you can't see or understand?

Week 3

Free in His love

So God's people are led by his own presence that they can see for themselves. He will not leave them alone; he will give himself to be their leader as they face the unknown. But the pressure is on. God carefully tells Moses of the terrifying threat coming behind them and shows him what to do. They are out of Egypt and free from their oppression, but now the past seems to be coming after them – their enemy, realizing they are never coming back, chases them into the desert. We can only imagine the threatening rumble of 600 chariots coming after them.

Jesus, our Passover, has done everything needed to set us free, forgive us, and save us. Yet sometimes we are faced with our past: maybe through events or people, or maybe just in our own thoughts. Satan, our enemy, does not want to give up on us, and he pursues us with our past. We hear his whispers: "You think God could really forgive someone with a heart like yours?" Or "You think God really wants someone like you to be his child?" Or "You are not free. Jesus can't change you. Look at yourself." Or "You were so broken and wounded you'll never really be free, however much you think God loves you." Or "God loves other people and fills them with His Spirit, but not someone with a past like you." Or "There's no difference between your life now and then. Jesus is not with you." Some of us even hear the lie, "You were doing ok back then, you don't need Jesus to forgive you or free you." When these lies come at us from behind, we sometimes don't notice who it is speaking to us. The enemy is running scared, terrified that you will live in the saving power of Jesus. Satan, the Father of lies, is desperate to keep you from the power of the cross and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in your life. He will try anything to try to convince you that you belong in darkness and the Kingdom of Light is not good for you.

When the enemy of their past comes into view, watch how God's people react. They panic, they cry out to God, they complain bitterly to Moses, and they are certain they will be destroyed. They forget God's power over creation, His power over the gods of the Egyptians, His power over life and death itself, and they even say it would have been better to stay in the place of bondage. You wonder how God felt to hear their hopeless words. The Lord gives Moses clear words to remind them that God is the mighty rescuer. They do not need to fight for themselves: their job is to stand and watch, to be silent and still.

So when faced with the lies, we need to recognize the enemy coming after us. However, as we do that, we must not think we have to stand against the Father of lies ourselves, or that we can somehow think ourselves into real freedom. It's not about you; it's all about Jesus. We need to pray and ask Him to come into our past. Then we need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us gradually hand each memory and experience to Jesus, for Him to carefully take to the cross. Jesus is waiting to come in and give you healing and freedom for your past. The more time we spend reading the truth of God's word, praying and worshipping with others, the less chance there is for the lies to take hold in our minds. Our hearts echo with our past experiences and the voices we have heard around us. When we allow Jesus to speak truth to us, we are choosing the echo in the deep caverns of our hearts.

It is only the Lord who has power to save you, and Jesus is the one who longs to fight for you, shielding you in his love. As you read this passage, listen for God's passionate desire and ultimate authority to fight for his own beloved. Know he has not changed, and this is his desire for you today.

Read Exodus 14:1 - 20

1. Look again at verses 1-4. How do God's word to Moses about all that is to come give you the sense that God is totally in control of the situation?
2. Read Exodus 14 verse 10-12. As God's people see more than 600 chariots, horses and Egyptian troops approaching how do they feel and how do they speak to Moses?
3. In what ways do sometimes we feel the past coming after us in a way that seems to threaten our faith or our peace? Give examples
4. Read verses 13 and 14 again. What does the Lord say to the people through Moses?
5. Read verse 14. How do God's words in this verse speak to us if we are afraid the enemy will take us away from life and freedom in Jesus, or if we think we can fight against the enemy ourselves?
6. God explains to Moses how he will win glory for Himself, crushing the Egyptians. Read verses 19 and 20 again. Why does God move His angel and the pillar of His presence from the front to the back of His people? What does this do for his people and against the enemy?

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37-39 NIV)

7. The Egyptians could not come between the people and their God. Read the verses above. How does Romans 8, verse 37 describe the truth that the Lord stands between us and our enemy and that we cannot fight for ourselves?

8. Look at the list in Romans 8 verses 38 and 39. It covers everything in this world, in the spiritual world, now, in the future and for eternity. Which of these words particularly speak to you today about how you need to trust that nothing can ever come between you and the love Jesus has for you?

Week 4

Free in His Victory

We cannot imagine what the people of God were facing as they stood in the dark with their enemy coming behind them and the Red Sea looming in front of them. God has moved his own presence so that he stands between them and their enemies, and he gives light to his own people while the enemy struggles in thick darkness. Remember this picture of how Jesus fights for you, standing between you and the enemies of sin, death, and the evil one. You do not need to fight, but to stand in his light and pray, putting your hope in nothing but him. The Lord knows his people need to see him and that seeing their enemy would be terrifying. He had told them how the Egyptians would relentlessly chase them and how he had hardened Pharaoh's heart. There is nothing left to chance – our God knows every detail. Yet, as they stood on the edge of the Sea, with only God's presence for their light, it must have felt overwhelming. Moses and the people have to believe all that they have seen of God up to now, trust that he will stay with them today, and believe his promises that they will always be his own for the future. Is their God really the Lord over all creation, life and death, and every spiritual power that the Egyptians have worshipped? Will he do what He says he will? Will he stand between them and the enemy? Will the Egyptians be conquered? Are they safe in his love?

As we've read God's word, we have seen the truth of how Jesus paid the debt we owed and paid the price to set us free on the cross. We have seen his power over life and death. We have heard Him call us to be his own dearly loved children, and we have heard him promise to live with us and in us by the Holy Spirit. Some of us don't understand how much we need him. Others struggle to accept that he wants all of that for us. Now we stand in his light, looking into the future. How are we going to respond? Will we trust that we need Jesus to fight for us? Will we give him control over our past, present, and future? Will we choose to live in sure hope of his total victory, his power to keep us and hold us for eternity in his love?

Just as Moses raised his hand in faith over the waters and the people had to take that first step into the bottom of the sea, so we have to choose to receive all that Jesus has won for us by walking with him. It does not mean believing everything will be easy, that we will have the world's success, or that nothing will ever be hard. No, trusting Jesus to guard us and fight for us means putting our lives in his hands, listening to him more than self, one prayer at a time, one choice at a time, whatever happens, because he holds us in his victory for eternity. When we pray expecting that he will be Lord over every power, allowing him to rule in every part of our hearts and lives, keeping in step with his Spirit, and resting in his strong and loving embrace, then we live in the light of the cross and resurrection. If we only have eyes for what we want out of life today and don't close our eyes to pray for what matters in eternity, then we have missed the truth of what Jesus has won for us.

As those who have the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to live in us, we have a helicopter view of the victory of Jesus for all time. That is the defeat over the enemy that we can live in day by day, step by step, just as the Israelites walked on through the open sea in the reality of his power to save them. As you read this extraordinary account of the mighty God crushing his enemy and saving his own, remember the empty tomb and pray that Jesus will draw you to trust him, laying everything before Him as the Lord of all.

Read Exodus Chap14:20 - Chap 15:3

1. Look at verses 21 and 22. What do you think it felt like for the Israelites to take their first steps at night, out into the sea, in the light from God's presence?
2. Read verses 24- 25 again. How did the Lord stop the Egyptians and what did they recognize was happening in their response?
3. Read verses 28,29 and 30 again. The people stand safely on the shore looking at their defeated enemies. How do these verses show you a God who keeps his promise and wins total victory?
4. Read 14:31 and 15:1. How do God's people respond to the sight of their slain enemies and what God has done for them?
5. Read chap 15 verses 2 and 3. How do these verses inspire you to pray today in response to all Jesus has won for you?

Read aloud Colossians 2:14-15

He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross. (NLT)

6. In Colossians 2:14, What did Jesus do with the record of our sin that stood against us and kept us in slavery?
7. Read Colossians 2:15 again. How does this verse encourage you to see how Jesus defeated and humiliated every spiritual power at the cross?

What are the things that hold you back from believing that the victory of Jesus to forgive you and make you God's own, is really for you, today and for eternity? In other words, where do you struggle to Jesus? What would make you fear the enemy?

Week 5

Free to Receive His Goodness

As the people of God take their last steps onto dry land, the Lord of all creation is able to thrust the waves back over his enemies. There is no struggle in this. God has led them by their hardness of heart right into their own destruction. It is hard to imagine the scene as the stunned Israelites, safe and free, now stare their defeated enemy in the face. They lay dead on the shore, washed up by the waves. What could they do but stand in awe of the Mighty God who has saved them completely. They feared the Lord in a new way as they saw his power laid out before them on the beach. Then they stop right there and worship Him. Two million of God's own, saved by his hand, bowing before him in praise, filled with exclamations about what he has done, who he is, and all he will do to keep his promises for the future.

Who is like you among the gods, O Lord— glorious in holiness, awesome in splendor, performing great wonders? ...You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain— the place, O Lord, reserved for your own dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, that your hands have established. The Lord will reign forever and ever! (Exodus 15:11, 17-18 NLT)

They believe that they will be with him forever and he is the awesome God who reigns. It is one of the greatest worship responses in scripture. Many psalms echo the praise in this song, and the truth that this God who brought his people out of slavery into freedom is to be trusted.

The New Testament asks us again and again to look at God's love for us in Christ's death and his victory in resurrection and see that this God is able to save, passionately longs for us to be his own and reigns as Lord of all forever. What can we do but bow down and lay our all before him? What can we do but trust him? Taking time for praise with God's people and choosing to fix our eyes on the reality of what he has done, who he is, and what he will do is crucial if we are to be free as his own people. Worshipping the God who was and is and is to come leads us to trust him with our past, present, future, and all eternity. There we are remembering and proclaiming the reality that this world is not all there is, there is a heavenly Kingdom and we are children of God the King.

When we do not worship and praise in response to the God we see in scripture, our eyes are dragged down from the truths of eternity to the ordinariness of everyday life, and we forget who God is and who we are to him. Life becomes all about working it out, surviving, fighting for myself and my family, pleasing myself and trying to be successful and happy the world's way. This is far beneath the life and hope that Jesus has won for us.

So what happens next? The people of God go from that place of celebrating his victory and praising him out into the harsh desert. His presence is with them in the pillar of cloud and fire, and he will not leave his own beloved. But it is tough. How can they find enough water for around 2 million people and all their animals? Watching the Israelites in the desert, we see ourselves, moving through the day to day challenges of living in this broken world. Because of what Jesus has done for us, we are free to listen,

free to receive, free to walk in his care, free to live his way. But the toughness of our day to day environment is still there. The Israelites move from the scene of celebration and worship, out into the dry wilderness of struggle. Watch the response of their God who is able and willing to transform, provide, and give them himself. Listen to this account of what happens when the harsh realities of everyday life are graced by the presence of our God.

Read Exodus 15:22-27

1. Look again at verses 23 to 24. After 3 days with nothing to drink, what did the Israelites find at Marah, and how did they react?
2. Look at verses 25. As Moses cries out to the Lord, how does he answer? What happens to the water?
3. How does this picture of transformation speak to you about what God could do in your heart, even in bitter feelings or experiences?
4. Read verse 26 again. As God tests their faithfulness, what does he promise here about who he will be for them if they are willing to listen and to live as his own people ?
5. After God offers this wholeness with in him, how does he show them his goodness and abundant provision in verse 27? How does this picture touch you today?

Read aloud John 7:37-39

John 7 :37 Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. (NIV)

6. We can be thirsty in our desires and our spirit. What do we do or where do go to try to satisfy our thirst and feel good instead of going to Jesus? Give examples.
7. Look at verse 38 again. Jesus does not just offer us just any water, but abundant, flowing, sweet, safe, clean, living water, as the Israelites experienced. What does this picture of flowing, life-giving water tell you about the good, eternal work of Holy Spirit in you?

Week 6

Free to Trust for Today

God's people have seen him turn the bitter water to sweet and offered himself to them as "The Lord who heals you." The freedom Jesus offers us includes turning bitter to sweet. It may be resentment and anger in our own hearts or it may be a terrible experience forced on us. He does not deny that it was ever bad, and we may remain in the same situation, but he does offer his transforming love to change our hearts and bring his goodness and his own presence into the worst experiences. Freedom for us may not look like a luxurious beach vacation, but Jesus promises to meet us in those dry wilderness places which offer no sweetness in themselves. He offers to bring forgiveness where there was only anger and resentment, peace where there was only trauma, rest where there was only stress, and love where there was only rejection. He is "the Lord, who heals you" from every wound left by sin, shame, grief, hurts, struggles and disappointments. However, like the Israelites, we do have a part to play. Whatever happens, however tough the situations, he asks us to listen carefully and do as he says. His ways are life-giving, and when we step away from them, we step away from the fullness of life he offers. When sudden crises or day-to-day struggles pull us down, we can turn to other people and complain like the Israelites, or we can look up to the Lord and cry out to him. When we cry to him rather than just crying out, he can meet us right there. The healing may be slow, but if you will be his own and live in his ways, the Healer will give you his own healing presence for eternity.

If we are his own, we will do more than survive. He gives us his Spirit to live in us as a river that never runs dry. We can receive life from Jesus daily. Every thirst or desire that would overwhelm us and control us needs to be handed over to Jesus. Then his spirit will sustain us, satisfy us, and overflow in abundant life, however difficult our circumstances. The promise of abundant life that Jesus offers is for anyone who will come to him. We need to be careful that we are coming to him, not relying on others, ourselves, or other comforts, distractions and lies that promise to make us fulfilled. Many of us accept Jesus but feel we are incomplete or unfulfilled without ... something. But no career, possessions, relationship, romance, food, entertainment, alcohol, or experience can take the place of the Holy Spirit to satisfy your thirst and give you the real, eternal life of the life-giver himself.

We left the Israelites camping in an oasis of seventy palm trees and twelve springs. We can only imagine the relief and joy of that shade and continuous drinking water in middle of a barren, hot desert. But they could not stay there; it was time to move on towards the ultimate promise of the land God was preparing for them. The presence of the Lord leads them into the Wilderness of Sin (not our word for sin). It is not a very inviting place. I think we would all rather enjoy the shady Palm trees and the springs of clean water, but the Lord had more for his people. He was leading them out of a refugee existence towards their home in his land. Whenever we have to move on in our lives because of circumstances or something going on in our hearts, we have to learn to trust God in that new place. Different seasons, new people, health struggles, financial changes, family situations, changes in relationships, altered roles, are all new places where we need the Lord to teach us how to live in Him here, today. He will not leave

us or stop showing us how to depend on him every day in every need. Jesus is preparing us for an eternal home with him, so every experience, however hard it seems at the time, can be a place of growing, seeing Him more clearly, and being changed into the people of his Kingdom. Watch the Israelites as they wrestle to put their hope in the God who wants them to trust him alone.

Read Exodus 16:1-26

1. How do the Israelites react to their hunger in verses 2-3? What is shocking about these words?
2. Read verses 9-10. How does God graciously give himself to all the people in this scene?
3. Look at verses and 12 respond to their need and their attitude towards him? How does this touch you today?
4. As they gather bread and meat daily, there is just enough for each one. Read verses 19 and 20. What happened when they tried to store up food, and how was God using this to teach them about the way they could depend on him for their needs?
5. In what areas do we struggle to believe that God can meet our needs or try to control things for ourselves instead of letting him lead us? Give examples.

Jesus said: ³¹ "So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?'" ³² These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. ³³ Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. ³⁴ So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries.
(Matthew 6:31-34 NLT)

6. Read the verses above aloud. What is the good news about our Father in verse 32 that can free us from living in worry?
7. Look at verse 33. How does Jesus say we can choose to live completely differently, and what will be your new, eternal focus instead of your own needs?
8. In what ways is God asking you to trust Him one day at a time as a good Father who knows every kind of need, rather than living in worry or trying to take control?

Week 7

Free to See Holiness

The people of God learned that God hears our moans and in His grace He wants to teach us to trust Him in a new way. They did not know that He would go on providing every day, for 40 years while they were in the desert. They only had the evidence of what He provided today. His desire was that they trust Him one day at a time, believing He is with them and he is good and He is Lord over all today. Jesus taught about how we can live in that relationship, believing that the day of freedom is today. We do not need to live bound by our worry for tomorrow as though we have no one who knows our needs, no one who can fight for us, no one who can meet us in the deepest places of our hearts. Jesus says we have a loving Father who knows. So we can trust Him for tomorrow and live in the Freedom He has won for us today. We are free to seek His kingdom, to set our hearts on His ways and His rule. We are free to look outwards towards the needs of others, to live for what counts into eternity instead of being controlled by every need for ourselves today. Jesus says we are able to be free from worry, not because there is nothing to worry about and everything will be nice tomorrow, but because Your good Father has your tomorrows in His mighty and careful hands . Jesus has freed you for the future so now you can give the things that matter and the things that last for forever, first place in your heart and mind today.

The Israelites received from His hand and their part was to gather enough for each person, each day. We still have to live in the real world where there are things we must do to for our needs, but like the Israelites, we can listen to the Father, let Him tell us what to do and when to do it instead of storing up, trying to control for the next day, the next year or the next need. This is a God who knows our hearts and did not only give them good food, but revealed His glory to them, gave them Himself. This is the God who knows we struggle to trust Him and shows us Himself through His word and by His Holy Spirit living in us so that we do not need to be anxious or live in total self-sufficiency for the next day, or month or year because He says "I am with you and I am good and I am Lord."

Our world is still filled with struggles and trouble, as Jesus recognized. Learning to trust God one day at a time did not come easy for the Israelites. Life draining thirst causes them to look back with longing to slavery in Egypt. God brings them water once again but next comes a battle with the Amalekites. Aaron helps Moses keep His arms raised to the Lord, the army is crushed and God gives them a promise that he will fight for them in the future. They worship the Lord and call the altar "The Lord is my Banner", the victory flag over us that says that we are His own . After all this the people are bringing feuds and complaints between them, so much that Moses has to organize a line all day long to hear them. God tenderly uses Moses' father in law to help him organize leaders who will hear them so that Moses can get on with the important task of listening to God and bringing His words to the people. These chapters give us a picture of the ordinariness of our daily tasks and challenges, but each one is done knowing God is with them, providing what they need, fighting for them, leading them with the pillar of cloud and fire. He doesn't leave, not for a second. When we belong to Jesus, nothing we go through and no tasks we undertake are tackled on our own. The Holy Spirit is with us and if we pray, giving each day, each

decision, each task, each need to Jesus then He comes in and we will know we are not alone, ever. The Lord will be the banner lifted high over all that we do and all we face.

Remember how God commanded Pharaoh to let His people go so that they could worship Him on the mountain? He kept His promises and after two months in the desert, the people of God are led by His presence to the mountain, near enough to hear His heart for them and see their Holy and awesome God in power. The promise of commitment between God and His people that began with Abraham is now fully revealed. The Lord passionately expresses His part in the covenant, the binding love agreement He is making with them and asks for their response. As you read, ask the Holy one to open your heart to see Him, then come to the mountain and gaze on the real, living God.

Read Exodus 19: verses 1-9, verses 16-22

1. Read verse 4 again. What does God say and how do you hear His tender heart in for his people in His words and the image of an eagle?
2. In verse 5 and 6 how does God express the truth that if they accept, though He owns the whole world, they will be chosen, precious and sent to show His holiness to the nations? How do His words strike you today?
3. Read verse 8. As the words of God's covenant commitment of love are taken to the people, what do they promise for their part?
4. Read verses 16. How does God show his awesome presence and how do the people respond?
5. When the God who is totally other, not of this world, utterly clean and Holy comes, it is not safe for ordinary people to go near, as we see in verses 18-25. By His grace through Jesus He has saved us to know Him personally but He has not changed. In what ways so we struggle to have a sense of awe and reverent fear of our Holy God, and how do we sometimes make Him into a smaller, easier image?

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

6. Read the verses above. If you have accepted Jesus, these amazing words are spoken to you. How does verse 10 describe what God has done through Jesus to make you His own special, chosen one? How does this make you feel?

7. Look at verse 9. If royal priests represent God to the people and plead for the people before God then what does that mean for the way you worship, pray and live to show his holiness to the people around you?

8. How can we live in praise to him and share him in the places where He has put us as a people called out of darkness into light ? Give examples

Week 8

Free to Walk in His Ways

The mighty God who shows himself at the mountain is awesome and so pure that to bring any impurity near him is dangerous. However unfamiliar we find these images of thunder and smoke and deathly consequences, this is the truth of God's greatness, holiness, and glory – that in our own weakness we are utterly unworthy and unable to come near. It is only he who can draw us and cleanse us to come close to Him. God has called his people to be his own treasured possession, and out of all that he owns they are his beloved, his special chosen ones. He calls them a Kingdom of priests to stand between him and the world, leading them to worship him and ministering his presence to the world around them. Then he calls them a Holy Nation. If they are his own, and he is totally different from the world, totally pure and clean, then they are to reflect his character and be set apart as holy. That does not mean they should hide away in a religious ghetto and never associate with any other people again. This is not what he has called them to. Rather they are to imitate him, learn and receive from him, and listen to him, not copy the other cultures around them. Only then they can be a blessing and a light to show other nations the heart of God. As he speaks these words to the people, it is almost as though he is promising to be theirs, and then asks them, "Will you be mine?" The people answer "We will," and the covenant, like an eternal marriage, is agreed.

The passage in 2 Peter says that if you have believed in Jesus, God speaks the same words of love, commitment, and calling over you. He calls you his own. He does not just tolerate you, he treasures you and delights in you. He does not ask you to be dull, lonely, religious, judgmental, silent, or to hide yourself away from anyone who is not a believer, as some misunderstandings of holiness would make you think. Instead, he has given you the Holy Spirit to put his own character in your heart, so that you have a new, clean heart to love him extravagantly. To be set apart as holy means to love the world and the people around you selflessly, with his love. If you allow the Spirit to rule in you, he will lead you into dynamic opportunities to offer his truth and his life to whoever he puts in your life. As a royal priesthood, you are called to spend time crying out to Jesus for the people who don't know him, to minister God's presence to others, and to carry them to him in prayer. You have been called out of darkness into his light, so you need to speak of that in your words and actions, giving the honor to him wherever you go. Knowing we are his and receiving him in all his holiness leads us to radical living that echoes the sound of his heartbeat to the world. Jesus does not ask you to be all of that alone as one person, but rather together with those who belong to him as a Kingdom, a people.

So then, as God's beloved, treasured people how do we walk in his goodness and reflect his character to the world? If we are a holy nation, chosen to receive life from holy God rather than being controlled by our own desires and the patterns of living from everyone else around us, then what does his holiness look like? The law we have in the ten commandments lays out the ways of God that bring life and wholeness in his love when we belong to him. But why do we need to look at it today? Some would say we are saved by grace now and freed from the Law. Yes, we have been freed from the condemnation of

being unable to keep the God's law in our own strength. But by the forgiveness of the cross and the power of the Holy Spirit to give us new hearts, we have been freed to choose God and walk in his ways of goodness. Jesus has paid the price and redeemed us so we are no longer slaves to self, evil, and every desire that drags us away from God, life, and light into brokenness, darkness, and alienation from our Creator. If we are willing to give our whole hearts to Jesus, he lives in us by his spirit. We are not chained captives, but free to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength in his power. Jesus said that he had not come to do away with the law, but to fulfill it. (Matthew 5:17- 21)Therefore, as we receive all of him, we can allow him to lead us in these ways that begin with the heart and that lead to life: now and forever. It is not that these laws are the way to earn his love, but rather because he has first loved us, we get to love him by walking in these safe, straight ways. Look for his passionate love for us and his heart of faithfulness, honor, truth, and wholeness reflected in these words. God begins by reminding us that he is the one who has freed us to be his very own.

Read Exodus 20:1-21

1. If we understand that God has made a love commitment to us like a perfect marriage, how does it help us to grasp the first commandment in verse 3 and 4?
2. Read verses 5-6. The God who is jealous for our affection speaks serious words about the consequences of bowing down to other things and letting them have rule in our lives. How does the number of generations mentioned in verse 5 compare to the number of generations who will receive God's love in verse 6?
3. In revealing his name to the people, God was drawing them into intimacy with him. Read verse 7. Why is being careful not to cheapen or bring dishonor to his name through our words or actions, important for our relationship with him?
4. How does the pattern of the having a Sabbath day for the Lord (in verse 10) help us to put God first in our lives and worship him only?
5. Look at verses 12-16. How does loving God with all our hearts transform all our relationships with others?
6. How do these commands in verses 12- 16 reflect God's own character in how we treat other people?

7. Read verse 17. How does setting our hearts on wanting be like others or desiring what we do not have, lead us to bow down to them, and keep us from fully belonging to God or receiving his love for us?
8. In what ways do we compare our lives to others as women and set our hearts on what we desire? Give examples of thoughts and behavior.

²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. (James 1:23-25 NIV)

9. Read aloud the verses above. What picture does this passage from James describe to show how we can miss the freedom God's perfect law brings. How does this verse challenge you today?

Week 9

Free to Meet with Him

As God sets out the specifics of living in radical love and worship, the Israelites respond to the Ten Commandments and the dramatic signs of God's mighty holiness by begging Moses to speak instead of God. They are terrified that they will die. Moses responds by showing how we are to relate to this Holy Lord. He says in chapter 20 verse 20 that we do not need to be afraid. Instead, the truth of who God is and his awesome glory can lead us to a reverent fear and respect so that we desire to please him. Taking time to look intently into the Word at who he is and His power to see into our attitudes and actions, can alert us to all that is not pleasing in the depths of our hearts. It can keep us from claiming the reign in our lives that belongs to him as King. When we don't take time to do this, we only see the culture around us and lose sight of how great, awesome, and perfect God is. It's like looking in a dirty, broken mirror. Then we see a distorted picture of who we are and become satisfied with our own selfish ways, losing any kind of reverence for this Holy God.

The chapters that follow carefully describe what a holy nation looks like. God repeats the promise to fight for his people and give them the land. The law he gives them about how to live together only makes sense if they will really have their own land to settle in. God asks that they give him the first of all their crops when they farm the new land, their firstborn animals, and ten percent of everything. In Exodus 23:22, God tells them to listen to the Angel of his presence who will show them his ways and will lead them everywhere they go. He promises, "I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you" (NIV). In 23:32, the Lord makes it clear again that they must live and worship as his own people among other nations, saying "Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods"(NIV).

They are already in covenant with God, committed to loving faithfulness like a bride exclusively set apart for her husband. How could they make binding relationships or put their hope in any other than the God who has given himself to them in perfect love? Throughout the Old Testament, God uses this picture of them as his beloved bride to speak through his messengers and passionately tell them how their unfaithfulness breaks his heart. Jesus speaks in several parables about himself as a bridegroom, the church as his bride, and eternal life as a wedding party. As in a pure marriage, Jesus gives himself completely to us – so we need to give ourselves completely to him. If we give our hearts away, desiring all that our mind says we could have or could be, and follow the lead of our own culture, then we walk away from the one who loves us. Good looks, romance, popularity, success, fitness, homes, possessions, power, or relationships can all pull on our heart for the number one place if we allow them to. We cannot ask for blessing and protection, guidance and eternal life from Jesus and at the same time snatch his crown and try to rule our lives ourselves. If we want Jesus to fight for us, oppose our enemies of death and Satan, and receive the promises of life with him forever, then we need to listen to him in all things, every day. If we want to live in his love, then, with the power of the Holy Spirit in us, we will love him back, choosing to make him the first passion in our heart.

Now God invites Moses to bring some leaders nearer to him and asks them to worship. As we have seen up to now through thunder and smoke and the warnings to the people, there is no way we can come ourselves without his invitation. We are not clean to survive his holy majesty. Yet he seems to be offering a way. This is the ultimate working out of the covenant as the people are set apart as the Lord's own in this worship. There is a sacrifice, blood, and a meal in the presence of the Holy One. This passage casts a Jesus-shaped shadow: on the night he was betrayed to death on a cross, the Gospels say Jesus took the cup celebrating the Passover and said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20 NIV). Ask him to show you that his gracious invitation to come and his cleansing blood of forgiveness are for you.

Read Exodus 24:1-18

1. Look at verse 3 and verse 7. When the covenant is presented to the people, how do they respond? What do they say to the Lord?
2. Moses carefully follows what God has asked him to do in worship. Read verses 4-7. What do you see of his heart for God in these verses?
3. Read verse 8. What does Moses do, and how do his words echo the words Jesus spoke for us in the Last Supper? How does this touch you today?
4. Read verse 10. What do Moses, Aaron, and the seventy elders see in the beautiful vision of the Lord? How does this inspire you?
5. Look at verse 11. What do they do while they are up there? How does this show you another shadow of Jesus' life and God's intimacy with his people?

¹⁹ *And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus* ²⁰ *By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place.* ²¹ *And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house,* ²² *let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.* (Hebrews 10:19-22 NLT)

6. Read the verses above. This passage uses the language of the temple to show us how we do not just worship in the outer courts, but go right into the Holy Place, into God's very presence. What do Hebrews 10 verses 19 and 20 tell us is the only way in? Why can we go in boldly?

7. Read verses 21 and 22. In what ways do we struggle to accept this verse and stay at a distance from God, not really trusting that Jesus is our sacrifice and the priest who covers us to make us clean?

8. How do the world, our experiences, our thoughts, and the enemy make us feel like like we can't be clean or ready to go to God in prayer?

Week 10

Free to Be a Carrier of His Presence

One of the most important marks of God's own people is worship. The mountain became the place of worship, reflecting the pattern of Heaven itself. The people remained at the bottom of the mountain, the seventy leaders were able to go further up with Moses and Aaron, and only Moses was allowed to enter the cloud, the very glory of God himself. This 3 part pattern is repeated again in the tabernacle and later the temple. Yet we saw in Exodus 24 the God who draws them all to worship, leads them to build an altar, to make a sacrifice. All the people are sprinkled with blood. The leaders get to see a glimpse of God's beauty and majesty, even of what is under his feet. Then they even eat in his presence.

We who live after the death and resurrection of Jesus have been washed clean by his blood and clothed with his purity. We can now go to the top of the mountain, into the Most Holy Place and meet with God himself. This is the sacred privilege of those he has called his own. That includes you. You are free to bow down, free to kneel, free to gaze on his beauty, free to know him intimately. His blood is enough for you if you lay everything down at the cross of Jesus and ask him to forgive. There are no stains in this Holy Place, whatever you feel taints your desire or your readiness to go in. He has seen all your shame and he has washed it all away. He has given you new, beautiful clothes. He wants you to come, and Jesus has done everything to make you pure and ready to meet the Holy King. And if we think it is our right to be there or that there is no need for forgiveness, then look at the cost. Remember the fear of the Israelites, the power of his purity, and know that it is not cheap to get into the Most Holy Place. God gave his very self as the payment for you to enter, so look to the cross and never take this extraordinary honor lightly. We must never be apathetic or content with standing in the crowds outside the palace, simply knowing about him while he has selflessly poured out himself to make it possible for us to come inside to the very throne room and meet the King.

Jesus has freed us to worship him – not just to sing songs on Sunday, but to bow down as a lifestyle, driven by the desire to love him, know him, and honor him in every moment: public and private. This is not about empty ritual but a dynamic lifestyle of laying down self and giving Him the throne. As we bow down before Him with our will and our pride and our reputation, our past, present and future, all for Him, then Jesus has space to break in and He will be lifted up in our relationships, our families, our schools, our work-places and our neighborhoods.

We can meet with him anytime and anywhere we are, however ordinary or seemingly dull. We are his own people, and wherever we are can be a place of his presence – from the mountain top to the bathroom. He always wants to meet you. Just as the leaders ate in his presence, God invites us to bring our desires and longings and be satisfied by his abundance as we receive from him in the intimacy of a friend sharing a meal. Our greatest symbol of that is the taking of bread and wine, feeding on Jesus himself.

Now the God who meets them at the mountain gives them a way of carrying his own glorious presence for them and for the nations to see. The symbol of a sacred chest to represent their God would have been normal and easily understood by the nations around them, but the precise pattern is to reflect something of heaven. The Lord is always planning to stay, always wants them to know him and meet him. Look out for the gold, the objects of their oppression and suffering in Egypt which God gained for them. See his intricate, powerful purpose for this gold – if his people are willing to give it to him.

Read Exodus 25:1-22

1. Read verse 2 again. How does God want the gold and precious things to be given for the tabernacle?
2. Look at verse 8 Why does God want to build it? What is the promise in this verse?
3. In verses 10 to 20, every part of the ark, a chest, is covered or made with gold. What does the richness, beauty, and purity of the gold design tell you about God and our royal worship of him?
4. Look at verse 21. What will be put in the gold chest?
5. How does this picture speak of our day to day listening to the Word as the center of living with God?
6. In verse 22, what does God promise He will do over the cherubim?

Jesus replied, "All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them. (John 14:23 NLT)

7. Read the verse above. What does Jesus promise here to those who love him and listen to him? How does this touch you today?
8. If Jesus is living within you as God promised to dwell with his people in the ark, what does this mean for the places you go and the people you meet? How does this encourage and challenge you?

Week 11

Free to Choose Him

The tabernacle and the Ark were a reflection of the reality of Heaven. God made a way to dwell with his people that they could understand. He was giving them a design for worship that gave him the place to minister himself to them and for them to offer all of themselves to him. In this design, we see the heart of the God who has always wanted to dwell with us, draw us into his presence, and send us to carry him with us to the world that cannot see him. John 1:14 says that when Jesus was born in our world he “tabernacled” or “dwelt” among us. This is the beginning of the new covenant that is sealed in his blood for our forgiveness and completed in the coming of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the mighty Lord of the whole Universe chooses to make his home in our hearts. We don’t have just a “God-shaped hole” that is plugged when we receive Christ as Savior and Lord; rather we become his home. He lives in us and the Holy Spirit gives us a new heart. Like the beautiful, costly, royal ark of his presence, we are remade and carefully crafted by his own hands to be God-shaped all over. Not just plugged in to a new power source or improved slightly, but totally recreated in him.

This is an awesome reality that we must never lose sight of or play down. So 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 tells us, “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price.” Because we live under this high calling, this power and glory, we must be careful what we take into our minds through what we read and watch. What we do with our bodies matters because we are full of his Spirit, who is holy. Anything that distorts God’s good design for sex, causes us to hate what we are and long for another body, or denigrates us and undermines marriage, cannot be welcomed in our minds and bodies to share a home with Jesus who lives in us. We do not have to live down to what our culture and tells us is desirable or OK. Jesus has come to dwell in us and make us completely new, so we must take care of our bodies and honor God with them. As we ask him to teach us this truth, we will understand he wants us to be carriers of his holy presence to everyone we meet.

So what did God ask his people to freely offer as materials for the tabernacle? The treasures of their past – the gold and valuables that came out of their terrible oppression in Egypt. He wants us to lay down all our past, all that we are for Jesus. He does not throw it away. No, he takes it, melts it down in the fire of the Spirit, and uses it as part of the glorious design to make his home with us and craft us as carriers of his presence and holiness. Whatever brokenness or shame we drag with us from the past, he can make us beautiful in him if we are willing to offer our all: our experiences, ambitions, personality, weaknesses, sufferings, disappointments, emotions, and desires. So often we think these things cannot be part of who God wants us to be now, but Jesus asks us to bring it all to him at the cross. That is the place where he longs to make us new, build us into a carrier of his Holy Spirit. Jesus does not just free us from the past to be his – he redeems it all. Real freedom comes when we choose to place it all in Jesus’ hands so he can come in, heal, restore, and remake us as his home.

God reveals the plans for the tabernacle, the holy place of meeting with his people. He carefully lays out the heavenly design for worship and the priests who will lead his people to him. This took time. While God was communicating the way of being his own worshipping people, the people waited 40 long days for Moses to finish speaking with him. While God met Moses at the top of the mountain, the people were fed up of waiting at the bottom. They couldn't see a future without Moses as their leader, and began to give up on God.

Read Exodus 32:1-26

What do the people ask Aaron to do for them in verse 1?

What do you think of this response, after all they have experienced and the promises they have made to God to accept his covenant and be his alone?

In verses 2 and 3, what does Aaron lead the people to do with their gold?

As they set up the golden idol, what do they say in verse 4, and how does this deny all their past and the commandments they received?

As the people celebrate in an indulgent party, how does God see, hear their words and respond in verse 8? How does this strike you?

Moses pleads with God to turn away his anger, and he does not destroy the people. Read verse 19. What does Moses do with the stone tablets in his anger? How does this picture of the broken covenant show us what it means for us to turn away from God and set our hearts on other things?

²⁸ *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,* ²⁹ *for our “God is a consuming fire.”* (Hebrews 12:28-29 NIV)

In what ways do we get disappointed or put our hope in other things because we can't see God, or it feels like his Kingdom is being shaken in our lives?

Read the verses above again. How do these words about the unshakable Kingdom and the God who is fire, inspire and challenge you to give your heart only to the Lord?

Week 12

Free in His Abundant Grace

We gasp with horror as God's own dearly loved and treasured people take what was meant to be offered to him for his worship and mold it into an idol. Even worse, they look at the idol and say in Exodus 32:4, "These are the gods who brought you out of Egypt." After the Lord has intimately revealed himself to them, saved them, and committed to them in his covenant of perfect love, how could they? After saying, "We will do everything the Lord tells us," and accepting their side of the covenant, they now bow down to a man-made object in the image of something God has created, a copy of the gods of other nations. How could they stoop so low from the high privilege of being the Lord's own people? The first commandment said they must remember that it was Yahweh who freed them and worship him only. How his heart was wounded at the sound of such painful words of rejection. They have totally forgotten who he is to them and who they are to him. God sees the awful scene: the tablets of stone detailing the covenant are smashed, and God is ready to destroy them and raise up a new people for himself. It is not surprising when they have denied everything he has ever done for them or said to them and turned their hearts away. Aaron, who God chose to assist Moses, seems oblivious to his own part in the crisis. There are serious consequences, and the idol worship leads to death for some and suffering for all. Throughout the history of God's people, they have missed his blessing, messed up his good purposes for them, and suffered under judgment because they worshipped every god they found in the peoples around them.

But what does this dramatic scene tell us about God's heart and our response? How many times have we felt like living for Jesus is too hard, we have waited too long, he does not seem to be speaking any more, we cannot see what he is doing, or we just want to fit in with everyone else? Like the Israelites at the bottom of the mountain, we are quick to look for an easier, more enjoyable way, a faster solution in our struggles, a more visible hope, a way of being in control ourselves. We quickly lose sight of who he is to us and who we are to him and we set our heart on other things and put our trust in ourselves. We take what was designed to be freely given to the Lord only and we hold it all back. It may be that we even look to other spiritual thoughts, rituals, helps and therapies that are not from Jesus. Then slowly but surely we set up our past experiences, thoughts, desires, spiritual ideas, abilities and man-made solutions and say, "This is who I am now; this is what makes me." Then our enemy whispers the echo "Yes that is all you are and all you will ever be." We forget who we are to God and who He is to us and sometimes these identities take the first place in our hearts. And God's heart breaks as he looks on the scene of us giving our hearts away, bowing down to something that is not him, and denying the covenant he has made to us. It can happen very gradually, without us noticing. But it happens, and our God is the same God who says, "Remember all I have done to make you my own, and do not hold anything back from me or give anything else the first place in your heart." The freedom Jesus offers leads us to bow down only to the one who has set us free and put our hope in him for eternity.

Moses now stands in the gap between God and the people who have turned away and pleads for mercy. It gives us a vivid picture of our great calling to pray for all who do not know Him or listen to Him. God continues speak to His people through Moses as the mediator and calls them to repent, saying they will have to have an angel lead them because he cannot bear to be with them himself. All seems lost, but Moses does not give up and continues to meet with God, begging Him to go with them himself for the honor of His name. He meets with the Lord in a special tent outside the camp, and in Exodus 33:11 we read “The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.” This amazing image of the intimacy God allows Moses with Him goes deeper as God promises not to withdraw His presence from the people and reveals more of Himself to His servant. Look for His power and tenderness as our God of grace gives a second chance to His people.

Read Exodus 33:18-23

1. Moses asks God “show me your glory.” Look at verse 19. What does God promise will pass in front of Moses, and what does He reveal of His name in response?
2. Read verse 21 to 23 again. What does God do so that Moses can see Him safely?
3. How does this scene show you God’s mercy, love and glory? How does it show you God’s heart for you?

Read Exodus 35:1-10

4. Moses is called to the top of the mountain where God meets Him again, proclaims His name to Moses again gives the people a new set of stone tablets inscribed with the covenant law. In chapter 35 verse 5 what else does God ask of the people for a second chance to make the tabernacle?
5. How do these second chances to meet God, know Him, receive His commands and choose to bring offerings for worship, show you a picture of His patience, compassion and grace for you today?

Read Exodus 36:2-7

6. Read at verses 5 and verse 7 again. How do these verse describe what happened when the people began freely offering precious things to make a place of worship where God’s presence will dwell?

7. How does this picture of abundance encourage you that whatever you have held onto from your past, present or future, it is never too late for you begin to offer Jesus everything so that He can live and work in you?

¹⁵ This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testing as we do, yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most. (Hebrews 4:15-16 NLT)

8. Read the verses above. Jesus is our perfect high priest who has experienced all that we have and stands before God on our behalf like Moses did. Where does verse 16 tell us we can and need to go constantly in our prayers and what will receive there?

Review

As you end this series, ask Jesus to lead you personally in these questions.

1. How do these scriptures help me to see a true picture of God?
2. How have I seen His heart for me?
3. How does it help me to see my responses to Him?
4. How does it speak of what Jesus has won for me and what it means to live in His freedom?
5. What is the Lord asking me to change in my life and my thinking to receive true freedom from Him? We are free to be His own. Listen to this passage. This is the real, eternal promise to you. This is who you are.

Hebrews 12

¹⁸You have not come to a physical mountain, ^[h]to a place of flaming fire, darkness, gloom, and whirlwind, as the Israelites did at Mount Sinai.....

²²No, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless thousands of angels in a joyful gathering. ²³You have come to the assembly of God's firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God himself, who is the judge over all things. You have come to the spirits of the righteous ones in heaven who have now been made perfect. ²⁴You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel. (NLT)

If you have come to Jesus, you one of God's first born children, your name is written in Heaven, that is your homeland, that is where you belong. You have been sprinkled with the blood of forgiveness. You are one of God's precious, loved, forgiven people preparing for the joy of eternity. That is who you are and that is who Jesus has set you free to be.

It feels like there is so much more that Jesus wants to say to us about freedom and I encourage you to pray

"Jesus show me where I have not received your freedom.

Show me where I have not given you my past,

show me where I am not living as your own in my present;

show me where I have not trusted you for my future

show me where I have not received the truth of what you have won for me in eternity. “

If you ask Him and keep asking, the Holy Spirit will work deeply in your heart, tenderly and skillfully and it will take time. This is a long term work and we need to pray this way in every new challenge and season. But ultimately Jesus is the one who has won our freedom and He is the one who can heal and change our hearts so that we can receive it and live in his love.