

September 2020

# Faith in the Wilderness

Readings, Reflections, Prayers  
From the Book of Exodus

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## Labour Day Monday, September 7: Exodus 1

Sometimes life's good. Sometimes it's hard. We often don't appreciate how good it is until things go wrong.

Through July and August we read the Book of Genesis. Some of the highlights included the stories of Creation, Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. This month we'll be picking up the story of the Israelites in Egypt a few hundred years after Joseph, in Exodus. Times have changed. The Jewish people are no longer welcome guests in Egypt; they have been made slaves. And they yearn for deliverance.

Have you ever been in a difficult situation? Have you ever felt trapped in a circumstance beyond your control? Have you ever wondered where is God when life hurts? How do you trust God for care **within** that pain? Or how do you pray for God's deliverance to bring you **out of** that stress?

The Book of Exodus helps us reflect on many of the major themes that run through the Bible including:

1. Redemption – The "exodus" – which literally means the "going out" – of God's people from slavery to freedom is a foretaste of the ultimate redemption that will come through Jesus. Jesus saves us from the slavery of sin and leads us to freedom in the Kingdom of God.
2. Sacrifice – In Exodus, people will be saved "by the blood of a lamb" at Passover (Exodus 12); Jesus, the ultimate "Lamb of God" will save us by His blood, shed for us.
3. God – Exodus highlights God's power, His sovereignty, His love, and His call to be faithful to Him and to Him alone. These are themes that run throughout Scripture and certainly describe Jesus.
4. Ethical teaching – God gives practical guidelines for how to live God-pleasing, faithful lives (perhaps long overdue after all the shenanigans and dysfunction in Genesis). The Ten Commandments, for instance, are recorded in Exodus 20.
5. Worship – Worship in the Old Testament was focussed around the Tabernacle and later the Temple – where God physically dwelt among His people. God was present among His people. Jesus is the very presence of God among His people – replacing the Temple. Now, in fact, we – the church, people filled with His Spirit – are the new Temple (1 Peter 2).

Try to keep these themes in mind as we go through Exodus. In the meantime, we have a long way to go ... Exodus 1 sets the scene of the Israelites' dire circumstances. And yet, despite their suffering, God is providing for and blessing them.

If I were an Israelite back then, I would see no hope. I would wonder, "Where is God?" And yet, **within** those horrible circumstances, it is clear God is still with His people. He will provide a **way out** of their awful situation. In time. In the meantime, just like us, they struggle to keep the faith when times are tough.

Unfortunately, as we are discovering with Covid-19, God does not always work according to our agenda and our timetable. But just because things happen more slowly than we'd like, it doesn't mean that God is not with us. Pray, in confidence that God is with you, **within** whatever you are going through. And pray, in confidence, that ultimately, God will get you **through**, out the other side.

*Christ, as a light illumine and guide me.  
Christ, as a shield overshadow me.  
Christ under me; Christ over me;  
Christ beside me on my left, on my right.  
This day be within and without me, lowly and meek, yet all-powerful.  
Be in the heart of each to whom I speak;  
and the mouth of each who speaks to me.  
This day be within and without me, lowly and meek, yet all-powerful.  
Christ as a light; Christ as a shield;  
Christ beside me on my left and on my right.  
Amen*

## Tuesday, September 8: Exodus 2:1-10

In Luke 2, an angel says to a few shepherds – the lowest of low in Jewish society - "*Don't be afraid! I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior has been born today ...*" That baby's – Jesus' – parents, a poor carpenter, and his wife, Mary, are next to the lowest of the low. They flee for their lives immediately after Jesus is born (ironically, to Egypt).

In Exodus 2, the one who will become the saviour of the Jewish people, Moses, is born to a slave couple – the lowest of the low. Immediately after he is born, he has to flee for his life. Coincidence? Or parallel?

In 2:2, Moses is described as "special," "fine," "goodly," or "beautiful" (what newborn isn't?). The Hebrew word is the same word used in the refrain in Genesis 1: "*God saw that it was **good**...*" Just as, in the beginning, all of creation is "good" – perfect and as-it-should-be – Moses is "good" – perfect and as-he-should-be. It is like God is promising a new beginning through Moses' birth.

To escape from evil, Moses is cast out in a boat of sorts. Can you imagine his mother's emotions? It must have been gut wrenching. In echoes of the story of Noah and the ark, Moses is saved from destruction by God's providence on the waters. Moses' little ark carries him to safety over the waves.

Give credit to Pharaoh's daughter for her compassion. Her care and concern for Moses is reminiscent of the care and concern Egyptian leaders like Potiphar and an earlier Pharaoh showed to Joseph and Jacob. Throughout Genesis and Exodus, we may be surprised that people who worship other gods can be more caring, compassionate, and godly than God's chosen people (like Cain, Jacob, and Joseph's brothers).

Again, through God's providence, Moses' mother ends up being his nurse. She is paid to look after her own son. She will teach him the history, culture, language, and faith of his ancestors. Who would have imagined this scenario? God truly does work in mysterious ways.

For us, this text is a clear reminder of the care, providence, and power of God. When life seems hopeless, God can provide a way for us. In Isaiah 43:19, God says, "*For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.*" (Watch [God Will Make a Way](#) by Don Moen, based on Isaiah 43:19). Be encouraged.

This passage also reminds us to be gracious and compassionate to the needs of others. It is humbling when people who do not know our God are more loving than some of us who follow Jesus. May God make us aware of the needs around us ... and willing to be people who reach out in mercy, with practical help.

*I praise the wounds and the blood of the Lamb that heals the weaknesses of my body.  
I praise the wounds and the blood of the Lamb that heals the weaknesses of my soul.  
I praise the wounds and the blood of the Lamb that heals the weaknesses of my spirit.  
I praise the blood of the Lamb that covers all my sins so they can no longer be seen.  
I praise the blood of the Lamb that cleanses me  
from all my sins and makes me as white as snow.  
I praise the blood of the Lamb that has power to free me  
from all my bondages and chains of sin.  
I praise the blood of the Lamb that is stronger  
than my own sin-infested blood and remoulds me into the image of God.  
I praise the blood of the Lamb that is victorious over all powers  
that seek to oppress me, over every power of the enemy.  
I praise the blood of the Lamb that protects me from all the devious attacks of the enemy.  
I praise the blood of the Lamb that prepares me for the wedding feast of the Lamb.  
I praise the blood of the Lamb that makes all things new.  
Hallelujah!  
Amen*

## Wednesday, September 9: Exodus 2:11-25

Soviet dissident and Gulag (labour camp) survivor, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn writes, *"If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being .... During the life of any heart this line keeps changing place; sometimes it is squeezed one way by exuberant evil and sometimes it shifts to allow space for good to flourish. One and the same human being is, at various ages, under various circumstances, a totally different human being. At times he is close to being a devil, at times to sainthood."*

This certainly describes Moses. We are repulsed at his impulsive murder of the Egyptian. But, in general, Moses is a good person. However, when he tries to be a peacemaker, he is rejected.

Moses, the saviour-to-be of the people, goes into the wilderness for forty years. It's a foretaste of the Israelites' 40-year wanderings in the wilderness. It also foreshadows Jesus' 40-day time in the wilderness.

While in the wilderness, Moses becomes the saviour and shepherd to the daughters of Reuel, anticipating his greater calling, in the future, as deliverer and shepherd of the Israelite nation. Jesus, of course, is the ultimate Saviour of the whole world and our perfect Good Shepherd.

Moses marries Zipporah, daughter of Reuel, a "priest of Midian." Interestingly, she is not Jewish. Her father is not Jewish. But it seems Moses brings his faith with him, for God is certainly very real to him and his new family. The calling of Abraham and his descendants (the Israelites) had always been to *"be a blessing to others ... All the families on earth will be blessed through you"* (Genesis 12:2-3). The good news of God's love was never just a treasure for the Jewish nation. It was to be shared with others. Joseph shared his mercy and care when he was vice-regent of Egypt. Moses is passing on the blessing, too.

The good news of God's love is still for ALL people. Who can we share God's love with?

While Moses is in exile in Midian, the Israelites continue to suffer (2:23-25). Is God aware of their hardship? Absolutely. Why hasn't He acted by now? We have no idea. In this case, we can suspect God is working in Moses, preparing him for what is to come. Ultimately, God acts in His own time and in His own way.

We need to know that God hears our prayers. He knows our circumstances. That's good news. Why doesn't he act – now? We have no idea. Every Christian I know goes through "dry times" when we feel distant from God, we're frustrated, we feel alone, our prayers seem to go unanswered ...

*"Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me"* (Psalm 23:4). We need to know God has NOT left us. He is still with us. He is still working in our lives. Hang in there. Keep the faith. Be encouraged. He is with you. Always.

*Teach us, dear Lord, to number our days;  
that we may apply our hearts to seeking Your wisdom.  
Please teach us and satisfy us early with Your mercy,  
that we may rejoice and be glad all of our days.  
May the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us  
and establish the work of our hands, dear Lord.  
May nothing disturb us, nothing frighten us –  
all these evil things pass away, but God never changes!  
Lord help us to have the patience to endure all things that we might attain all things;  
Possess us so completely that we seek to possess nothing other than You –  
for You alone meet all our needs.  
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen*

## Thursday, September 10: Exodus 3:1-14

We may have a plan for our lives. But then life happens. And the plan goes out the window ... We are forced, by the circumstances of life, to adjust on the fly. I felt that way in mid-March when life seemed to change almost overnight in response to the Covid-19 epidemic. With almost no warning, we had to stop in-person services and figure out how to do church – small groups, worship, pastoral care, etc. – exclusively online and on the telephone. Shopping suddenly became an “adventure” (remember when there was no toilet paper to be found anywhere?). Travel was impossible. Everything changed.

For Moses, sudden change happened, first, when his mother set him adrift and he was adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter. Inconceivably, he was raised as a prince of Egypt. Moses will be called to lead a nation: he has been educated as a prince. Second, radical change happened when he killed the Egyptian and fled to the wilderness. He will have to lead his people through the desert: he is learning wilderness survival strategies. Bernard Ramm comments. *“Moses received his B.A. in political administration in the household of Pharaoh and his M.A. in desert survival in Midian. He was now educated for the great mission of his life.”*

In Midian, Moses is going along, minding his own business, happily tending sheep in the middle of nowhere.

The third major change in Moses’ life plan happens on the slopes of Mount Horeb (also called Mount Sinai). What else will happen on Mount Sinai? God provides food in the wilderness; a spring of water, the water of life, gushes from a rock; and the Ten Commandments are given. This is a VERY significant place in Exodus.

Notice God calls Moses by name. This is not just some generic – *“Oh, a person happens to be passing by, maybe I’ll talk to whoever it is.”* This is a specific call of a specific person. God knows each of us by name. He loves each of us personally. He has a unique place and purpose for each of us in His Kingdom.

God knows you by name. He loves you. He has a place for you.

Notice God reveals His name to Moses. Far from the Promised Land of Canaan/Israel, far from the present location of the Israelites in Egypt, God is still God. God’s “name” is (transliterated from Hebrew) “YHWH” – the verb “I am.” God simply IS - everything. For all time. Everywhere. We often add the Hebrew vowels to form the word “Yahweh.” It is considered so holy that, to this day, when Jewish people read the word “YHWH” in the text they will not say it out loud, substituting the word “Lord.” In most English Bibles, when you see the phrase “the LORD” in capital letters, that is actually God’s proper name, YHWH, in Hebrew.

No matter where we may be – even in the middle of the desert – God is always with us: *“I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me”* (Psalm 139:7-10).

God is with you, even if you feel like you are in the wilderness. He may surprise us now and then – revealing Himself in ways we cannot imagine. Be open to His presence. Be encouraged.

*Father, I abandon myself into Your hands.  
Do with me what You will.  
Whatever You do, I will thank You.  
I am ready for all, I accept all.  
Let only Your will be done in me, as in all Your creatures,  
and I’ll ask nothing else, my Lord.  
Into Your hands I commend my spirit;  
I give it to You with all the love of my heart, for I love You, Lord.  
I give myself, I surrender myself into Your hands  
with a trust beyond all measure, because You are my Father.  
Amen*

## Friday, September 11: Exodus 3:7-22

You know you SHOULD speak to that stranger. You know you SHOULD have that difficult conversation. You know you SHOULD apologize ... But you don't want to. It seems overwhelming.

And yet when – if – you do actually listen to the nudges God is giving you, it all turns out better than you anticipated. Funny how that works, isn't it?

God isn't nudging Moses. He is bluntly telling Moses what to do. And His promise is that, as Moses obeys God faithfully, God will be with him in all he says and does. With God's presence, it will all turn out well.

Who is this God? He is the great "I AM" (in Hebrew, YHWH or Yahweh). God reveals Himself, personally, in power and glory, to Moses. As we were reminded yesterday, this name is so holy that to this day Jewish people will NEVER speak it aloud; they will substitute the words "the Lord." The word YHWH is used hundreds of times in the Old Testament. In most English translations it is translated "the LORD" (in capital letters). "The LORD" is actually YHWH – "I AM" – God speaking His personal name.

We lose something of the personal-ness and intimacy of our relationship with God when we miss this. For instance, the opening verses of Psalm 139 begin with this VERY personal phrase: "*O LORD/YHWH/I AM, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD/YHWH/I AM. You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head*" (139:1-5).

Psalm 23 begins, "*The LORD/YHWH/I AM is my shepherd; I have all that I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name.*"

Whatever obstacles you face in life, none can be more challenging than going to the most powerful person in the world (in Moses' day, Pharaoh) and demanding freedom on behalf of thousands of people. Imagine coming before the President of the United States and demanding full equality for undocumented migrants? Or coming before the President of China and demanding freedom for the people of Hong Kong?

Whatever good thing God is nudging you to do, know that God – YHWH – I AM – is with you. He is your good shepherd. He leads you, renews you, gives you rest, and guides you ...

*This day is Your gift to me;  
I take it, Lord, from Your hand and thank You for the wonder of it.  
God, be with me in this Your day, every day and every way,  
with me and for me in this Your day.  
All that I am, Lord, I place into Your hands.  
All that I do, Lord, I place into Your hands.  
Everything I work for, I place into Your hands.  
Everything I hope for, I place into Your hands.  
The troubles that weary me, I place into Your hands.  
The thoughts that disturb me, I place into Your hands.  
I place into Your hands, Lord, the choices that I face.  
Guard me from choosing the perilous way which ends in heart-pain and secret tears.  
You Lord, are rich in counsel:  
show me the way that is plain and safe.  
May I feel Your presence at the heart of my desire, and so know it for Your desire for me.  
Walking in Your way I shall have success, because my purpose is from you,  
and it is Your power which does the good that shall endure.  
Amen.*

## Saturday, September 12: Exodus 4:1-17

We worry about all the “What ifs.” What if this were to happen? What if that were to happen? How about this: what if ... we just stopped worrying about the what ifs? What if ... we just got on with it?

Moses struggles with the “What ifs.” I can’t say I blame him. God is asking a tall order of Moses: to go and confront the most powerful person in the known world. To ask Pharaoh to let his army of slaves have a holiday. That’s pretty intimidating.

Some of Moses’ reticence may be humility, but more of it seems to be outright fear. And more than a little stubbornness. It’s a good thing I never get worried or stubborn ... Hmmm.

Notice, however, God doesn’t send Moses alone. We sometimes see Moses as a Lone Ranger figure, heroically facing Pharaoh all on his own. But he is to go with the elders of Israel (3:18). He is to go with his articulate brother, Aaron. Most importantly, Moses is to go with God, YHWH, Himself, signs of whose power and presence will be the staff/snake, a leprous hand, and water that turns to blood.

Moses tries pretty much every excuse in the book. Finally he pleads incompetence: he is a poor public speaker. God comes “angry” with Moses (literally, “*his anger burned against Moses*”). God is not pleased. God – reluctantly we gather – condescends to make Aaron the spokesperson of the expedition.

We sometimes think doubt is the opposite of faith. Our doubts and questions don’t have to move us to unbelief, they can encourage us to seek for deeper answers. We can be pushed to grow deeper in our faith as we struggle through things. For me, for instance, some of the intellectual challenges I faced in (way too many) years of public university, motivated me to seek more satisfying, deeper answers to tough questions. Public university never undermined my faith, in fact it helped it grow by leaps and bounds.

I’m convinced that **fear** is actually the opposite of faith. Fear is what happens when we look at challenges and panic. We don’t really trust God, so we can only trust in ourselves. We pull back. We withdraw. We retreat. Some of the Christians I know who are afraid of hard questions end up withdrawing from the places they’re needed most – like public universities.

What is God saying to us through this passage? What are my fears? What is God saying to me?

*You turn tables, Lord, and prejudice tumbles defenceless to the ground.  
You turn tables, and discrimination trembles and flutters skyward.  
You turn tables, and your indignation sweeps through sullied corridors to cleanse and restore.  
There are places, Lord, where our anger breeds and our hearts fill with fury.  
There are times when we are intent on conflict.  
There are moments when peace plays no part in our brokering.  
There are people with whom we are quick to anger, whom we are slow to forgive.  
That day in the temple, Lord, and those other days when the sick crowded you,  
when the religious taunted you, when the disciples failed to understand you,  
it was fury which turned your head, but love which burned in your heart;  
it was outrage which drove you, but justice which moved you;  
it was wrath you showed, but compassion you shared.  
Turn the tables on us, Lord, so that our resentment may scatter and shatter at your feet.  
Destroy those selfish displays of pettiness we lay out for all to see.  
Restore our sense of righteous indignation that our anger may be not a weapon  
but a way of bringing truth to a tainted world.  
And turn to us once more, Lord, your hands still raw and bloody from your work of justice on the cross,  
that we might recognise forgiveness and be more ready to offer it.  
Amen.*

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## Sunday, September 13: Exodus 4:18-5:23

Just when you thought things couldn't get any worse ... they do. Has that ever happened to you?

I'm writing this back in mid-July, and I can't even begin to imagine what the local, provincial, and global situation will be like on September 13. At the moment, as I read the news, I can't imagine things being any worse than they are now. And yet I wonder ... Things change so quickly.

When we began reading Exodus 1, it seemed like the people of Israel were in the toughest circumstances imaginable. It couldn't get any worse. Could it? Yes, apparently, it could. Things can change quickly.

Moses, Aaron, and the elders do what they were told to do. They confront Pharaoh. How does that go?

What does Moses do? *"Then Moses went back to the Lord and protested, 'Why have you brought all this trouble on your own people, Lord? Why did you send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh as your spokesman, he has been even more brutal to your people. And you have done nothing to rescue them!'"* (5:22-23). That's pretty blunt language to use with God. I would be a bit afraid of a lightning bolt or two from heaven. But I totally understand why Moses would feel that way.

When we are going through tough times, we can be totally honest with God. Many of the Psalms, for instance, are laments: the author cries out in despair to God (*"My, God, my God, why have you forsaken men ..."* (Psalm 22:1)). The book of Job is one long lament, when Job – suffering more than any of us can imagine – bares his heart and soul to God. The good news is God can handle our laments, as well. We cannot shock Him. He will not zap us with lightning. He welcomes our honesty.

Our prayers and laments don't tell God anything He doesn't already know. He knows how we feel and what we are going through. They are good therapy for us. They allow us to share our heart, aches, pain, and suffering with God. And we can begin to move on a bit as we confront our own raw emotions.

As we shall see, God has not abandoned the Israelites and Moses. He will deliver them. But it will take time. And patience. Allowing God time – and being patient – is SOOOO hard for us in 2020.

In Psalm 46 we read, *"God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge! .... Be still and know that I am God!"* (1-3, 10). Be still. And know that He is God. He is with you. Even in these tough times.

*Deliver me, Lord, from every evil and grant me peace this day.  
In Your mercy, Lord, keep me free from sin,  
and protect me from all anxiety  
as I wait in joyful hope for the coming of my Savior, Jesus Christ.  
Let Your kingdom come, Lord, in me.  
I pray the protection of Christ to clothe me,  
Christ to enfold me,  
to surround me and guard me this day and every day,  
surrounding me and my companions, enfolding me and every friend.  
I pray for the gift of friendship and faithfulness;  
that I would be freed from selfishness.  
Please teach me how I can deepen and strengthen the faith of others.  
Lord, give me the desire to love goodness,  
to passionately love righteousness;  
teach me moderation in all things;  
teach me to love wisdom, and to greatly love Your law.  
Amen*



## Monday, September 14: Exodus 6:1-13, 6:28-7:7 (omitting the genealogy 6:14-27)

David faced Goliath. How did that turn out? Really well, actually. But it was stressful at the time.

In Psalm 30:1-3, David writes, *"I will exalt you, Lord, for you rescued me. You refused to let my enemies triumph over me. O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you restored my health. You brought me up from the grave, O Lord. You kept me from falling into the pit of death."* This was David's experience time, and time again whether he faced Goliath or other overwhelming challenges in life. And so he pauses, saying, *"Sing to the Lord, all you godly ones! Praise his holy name"* (Psalm 30:4).

When we face Goliaths in our lives – whatever overwhelming challenges or situations those may be (Covid-19?) – like David, we are invited to cry out to God and find our strength in Him.

As Moses is facing Pharaoh, God invites Moses to turn to Him – YHWH, I AM – with his whole heart, too.

What do we learn about God from 6:1-8?

- God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (6:3): our God is the same One who has proved Himself faithful in the past; He has a track record.
- He is "God Almighty" (6:3), Hebrew "El Shaddai" – the one who was capable of giving childless Abraham and Sarah a son in their old age (Genesis 17:1).
- He is God of the covenant (6:4) who will always keep His word. He is trustworthy.
- He feels our pain and suffering (6:5). He knows our struggles and hurt.
- He sets us free (6:6). Ultimately He will redeem us.
- He loves us intimately as His beloved, His family (6:7). We are His precious sons and daughters.
- He will lead us home (6:8).

C.S. Lewis once quipped that, *"Jesus Christ did not say, 'Go into all the world and tell the world that it is quite right.'" The reality is that we live in a world of Pharaohs and Goliaths. There is a lot of evil in the world. Our challenge is to be those who testify that the world is NOT quite right ... BUT, we also testify that **it can be put right** through the power and presence of God, the God revealed to us in Jesus.*

*"God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine," Lewis goes on. "A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there." Only God can give us the "fuel" we need to face life's challenges. What is the Spirit saying to you?*

*Thanks to You, O ever-gentle Christ,  
for raising me from the black and darkness of the night into the kindly light of this day.  
You pour Your life into me,  
giving me speech, sense, desire,  
giving me thought and action.  
You mark the way before me.  
As I remember saints who have journeyed before me, Lord,  
teach me the way of their simplicity:  
strength with humility,  
at peace in the love and fear of God.  
May I also go wherever I am led.  
On Your path, O my God, and not my own, be all my journeying.  
Rule this heart of mine that it be only Yours.  
Amen.*

## Tuesday, September 15: Exodus 7:8-10:29 (read 7:8-24)

Some passages in the Bible are favourites because they are so positive and uplifting. For instance, we love Psalm 23:1-3: *"The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name."* We love John 3:16: *"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."*

Then there are passages like Exodus 7-10, a description of plague after plague that hit Egypt. Unless we're a sadist, we probably don't love these passages. After the initial stick/snake throwing incident, the text lists a series of plagues God brings upon the Egyptians. I've just suggested just reading the first one to get a taste of these chapters (of course, if you want all the gritty details, read them all). There is a

- Plague of blood (7:14-24)
- Plague of frogs (8:1-15)
- Plague of gnats (8:16-19)
- Plague of flies (8:20-32)
- Plague on livestock (9:1-7)
- Plague of boils (9:8-12)
- Plague of hail (9:13-35)
- Plague of locusts (10:1-20)
- Plague of darkness (10:21-29)

Like all the plagues, turning the Nile to blood creates a major crisis. Egypt's greatness as a civilization – and its health and prosperity – was bound up with the river. The Nile was actually personified and worshipped as a god in ancient Egypt. An attack on the Nile was an attack on Egypt's economy, identity, the health of its people, its food supply, and its gods.

A recurring theme in these passages is that Pharaoh's heart is hardened. Sometimes it appears he hardened his heart, other times the text says, *"God hardened Pharaoh's heart."* This does not necessarily mean God **directly** causes Pharaoh's stubbornness. Rather that the circumstances God is orchestrating – the plagues – are causing Pharaoh to dig in his heels. Pharaoh always makes his own decisions. But he is doing so in response to God's actions. Pharaoh can always choose the right thing. He just never does.

I don't want to be like Pharaoh, not choosing the right path. But, honestly, do I ever "harden my heart" to God? When God nudges me to call someone, do I make excuses? When I know I should pray, do I find myself too busy? When I am aware of a racist attitude or another less-than-godly emotion, do I avoid dealing with it? When I see a need that I could respond to, do I ignore it? What is God saying to me?

*Great God of wisdom, great God of mercy,  
give me of your fullness and of your guidance at the turning of each path.  
Christ's cross would I carry, my own struggle forget.  
Christ's death would I ponder, my own death remember.  
Christ's agony would I embrace, my love to God make warmer.  
The love of Christ would I feel, my own love waken.  
Great God of shielding, great God of surrounding,  
give me of Your holiness and of Your peace.  
Give me Your surrounding and Your peace through all my life.  
Peace between me and my God.  
Peace between me and my neighbour.  
Rule this heart of mine that it be only Yours.  
God's path would I travel, my own path refuse.  
May I tread the path to the gates glory.  
Amen.*

## Wednesday, September 16: Exodus 11

Can God protect us in tough times? Can anyone wrench us out of His hands?

Consider the Israelites in this story. There will be a plague on the first born. This is what it's going to take for Pharaoh to relent and finally let the Israelites go. Had Pharaoh not been so stubborn, perhaps it might not have come to this. This is national tragedy. Imagine the death and destruction. But it was a particular tragedy for Pharaoh as his firstborn son, his heir, the Prince-of-Wales of Egypt so to speak, is cut down in the flower of his youth, too. The future of Pharaoh's dynasty is thrown into chaos.

But what about the Jewish people? Will they suffer, too? No. God saves them. This event will be commemorated, forever and ever, by the Jewish people as the Passover. The judgement of God will "pass over" the Israelite households, while striking down their oppressors. God will keep His people safe. The Haggadah, the Jewish liturgy for Passover, includes these words:

*"The L-rd took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and with a great manifestation, and with signs and wonders."*

*"The L-rd took us out of Egypt," not through an angel, not through a seraph and not through a messenger. The Holy One, blessed be He, did it in His glory by Himself! Thus it is said: "In that night I will pass through the land of Egypt, and I will smite every first-born in the land of Egypt, from man to beast, and I will carry out judgments against all the gods of Egypt, I the L-rd."*

*"I will pass through the land of Egypt," I and not an angel;*

*"And I will smite every first-born in the land of Egypt," I and not a seraph;*

*"And I will carry out judgments against all the gods of Egypt," I and not a messenger;*

*"I the L-rd," it is I, and none other!*

For us, it is good to know that our lives are safe in God's hands. *"My sheep listen to my voice,"* says Jesus. *"I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand"* (John 10:29). We may go through tough times. We may suffer. But nothing can separate us from His love. God will always keep us safe in His hands.

*"Be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age,"* Jesus promises (Matthew 28:20). God says to us, *"I – the Lord – am with you."* How is that an encouragement to you, today?

*I call all heaven to witness today that I have put on Christ.  
I choose no other Lord than the Maker of heaven and earth.  
This day I walk with Him and He will walk with me. I will walk in the Light.  
I fasten close to me this day that same Jesus who came to us  
as flesh and blood and was Himself baptized in the Jordan River.  
He died upon a cross to rescue me, broke free from death, its conqueror.  
He left us, to return the more certainly.  
All these truths and their power I fasten close to me this day.  
I will walk in the Light.  
Resisting my own selfishness and sin, refusing to live as a slave to riches,  
pleasure our reputation, rejecting Satan and all his lies,  
I call on heaven to witness today that I have put on Christ.  
I will walk in the Light.  
Amen*

## Thursday, September 17: Exodus 12:1-28

Why do we celebrate communion/the Lord's Supper? Because on the night when Jesus was betrayed, just before His crucifixion, He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, *"This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."* In the same way, He took the cup of wine after supper, saying, *"This cup is the new covenant between God and his people – an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it."* (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

When we read about Jesus' last supper with His disciples in the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), they are clear this happens at the annual Passover celebration meal. Jesus is taking the symbolic elements of the annual Passover supper and recasting them in terms of Himself, His life, and His death.

At the Passover meal, Jewish people eat unleavened bread. The symbolism of breaking bread-without-yeast emphasizes the speed with which they would leave slavery in Egypt into freedom – they wouldn't have time to let bread rise. Jesus body given for us on the cross – symbolized by bread – reminds us that God has saved us from slavery into freedom, too. In Jesus, God is doing far more than just bringing a people group out of one country to another. Through Jesus, God is saving ALL people, everywhere, from slavery to sin and giving us freedom as His beloved children. He is undoing the curse of sin, brought on by Adam and Eve's disobedience, and setting us free to relate to God as openly as they did before the Fall.

*"I am the bread of life,"* says Jesus. *"Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again ... This is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day. For it is my Father's will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day"* (John 6:35-40).

At the Passover meal, Jewish people also drink red wine. Wine reminds them they were saved from slavery by the blood of a pure unblemished lamb sprinkled on the upright and crossbeam of their doors. Jesus' blood, shed for us, sprinkled on the upright and the crossbeam of the cross, saves us from slavery to sin. God's wrath – the rightful punishment for sin – passes over us thanks to the blood of the perfect Lamb of God. John the Baptist testifies, *"Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29).

*"For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again,"* Paul says. How does this Passover reading in Exodus help you appreciate communion more deeply?

*Lord, help me now to unclutter my life, to organize myself in the direction of simplicity.*

*Lord, teach me to listen to my heart;*

*teach me to welcome change, instead of fearing it.*

*Lord, I give you the stirrings inside me,*

*I give you my discontent, I give you my restlessness, I give you my doubt,*

*I give you my despair, I give you all the longings I hold inside.*

*Help me to listen to these signs of change, of growth;*

*to listen seriously and follow where they lead*

*through the breathtaking empty space of an open door.*

*Lord, help me now to listen to you,*

*and to walk the paths where your Spirit leads me.*

*Amen.*

## Friday, September 18: Exodus 12:29-42

We've all been under a lot of emotional stress since mid-March when Covid-19 radically changed our lives. Imagine if the disease were suddenly gone – eradicated – destroyed. Wouldn't it feel amazing? Liberating? Exciting? There would be parties everywhere. People would be hugging, kissing, and carrying on. And that great celebration would be only after a few months of inconvenience. And we would just be going back to

the world as we knew it a few months ago.

Think about all the emotional stress Moses, Aaron, and the Israelites have been under for the past weeks, months, years, decades, centuries of slavery, suffering, and hopelessness. Their experience was a million times worse than what we're going through. And now – finally – it's coming to an end. They're walking toward freedom. I cannot begin to imagine how elated – scared – excited – apprehensive – joyful – terrified – they must be feeling. It must have been overwhelming.

God was leading them into a whole new world these people – and generations before them – had never experienced. Whole generations has been born, lived, and died in slavery. Other than a few (like Moses) none had know a moment's freedom. None had had any hope. Now everything is changing and they are journeying into a new adventure. It would be thrilling – and a bit terrifying – at the same time.

Some of us grew up not knowing anything about Jesus, God, or the good news. We tried to find meaning, purpose, and joy in life, but it was elusive. Nothing seemed to really scratch the spiritual itch in our souls. We longed for something more than the "stuff" life could offer. We may have even come to a point of existential despair in which life seemed meaningless, pointless, and purposeless. It's like we're trapped and there's nowhere to turn and no way out. Like the Israelites in Egypt, we have no hope and no future.

But when we meet Jesus – really meet Jesus – everything changes. We discover we are God's beloved children: we are His precious daughters and sons. We discover He has created us with gifts, talents, experiences, and abilities that we can use in His kingdom: our lives have purpose. We discover OTHER people are also God's beloved children; we treat them with new dignity and respect. We discover this world is God's glorious creation: we value and care for it with a new passion. A bit like the Israelites, we discover a whole new worldview: it's thrilling – and a bit terrifying – at the same time.

Some of us have always known God. We are so used to being able to pray, talk with God, know His presence, and feel His peace that we cannot imagine life without Him. That's an amazing blessing. We have hopefully never known the abject desolation of atheism or agnosticism. We cannot relate, spiritually, to the Israelites enslaved in Egypt. Unfortunately, for us, though, it may be harder to appreciate the freedom that Jesus gives us. Not knowing the slavery, we don't have the dramatic transition to freedom.

The Bible often talks about being "free through/in Christ" (Romans 3:24; Galatians 3:22, 5:1; Hebrews 9:15). Think about the difference between being trapped/enslaved and freedom. What does being "free in Christ" mean to you? How can we live wisely as "free" people?

*Lord, your Spirit brooded over the face of the deep,  
and out of the chaos brought forth life and beauty.  
All we have to bring you is our brokenness and chaos.  
In me, O Lord, let there be life.*

*Jesus, you are the living water, pouring yourself out for us, like a flood, quenching our thirst with your love.*

*O let all who thirst, let them come to the water.  
And let all who have nothing, let them come to the Lord:  
without money, without price.  
And let all who seek, let them come to the water.  
And let all who have nothing, let them come to the Lord:  
And let all who toil, let them come to the water.  
And let all who are weary, let them come to the Lord:  
all who labor, without rest.*

*And let all the poor, let them come to the water.  
Bring the ones who are laden, bring them all to the Lord:  
bring the children without might.*

*Easy the load and light: come to the Lord.*

*Amen*

## Saturday, September 19: Exodus 13

After Jesus was born, we read, "Then it was time for their purification offering, as required by the law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. The law of the Lord says, "If a woman's first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the Lord." So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord – either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:22-24). Joseph and Mary are following the commands in Exodus 13. By the time of Jesus, however, some families were too poor to afford a lamb, so they were permitted to buy and bring birds instead. The fact that Joseph is too poor to afford a lamb says much about how humble the home was into which Jesus was born.

What is the symbolism of this ritual? Good question. "In the future, your children will ask you, 'What does all this mean?' Then you will tell them, 'With the power of his mighty hand, the Lord brought us out of Egypt, the place of our slavery. Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, so the Lord killed all the firstborn males throughout the land of Egypt, both people and animals. That is why I now sacrifice all the firstborn males to the Lord—except that the firstborn sons are always bought back.' This ceremony will be like a mark branded on your hand or your forehead. It is a reminder that the power of the Lord's mighty hand brought us out of Egypt" (Exodus 13:14-16).

It's interesting that Jesus' dedication, then, recalls the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the promised Land. Ultimately, Jesus will save US from slavery to sin and give US real freedom – the freedom of forgiveness and a new life, new identity, and a new relationship with God.

At Jesus' dedication, an old man, Simeon, prophesies, "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!" (Luke 2:29-32).

Jesus is the "light of the world" (John 8:12) Light – Jesus – helps us see things as they really are: we see truth and error, fact and fiction, right and wrong. Light – Jesus – also helps us find our way in the darkness. Like the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, light – Jesus – shows us the way forward. And the light (and pillar of cloud/fire) – Jesus – comforts us and encourages us when times seem darkest.

Jesus turns that around and says to us, "**You** are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). We have been blessed to be a blessing: to help others see things as they really are and find their way to Jesus. We may not feel very light-like. We need to remember, it's not OUR light we're shining. What shines as light in our lives is the Holy Spirit – God's presence in us.

How have you known God's help, love, care, and faithfulness? We are mirrors reflecting God's light: the light that shines through us is God's love, God's grace, and God's hope. Lord, shine in me.

*God, we can sometimes feel you have treated us harshly, that life has dealt us an unfair deal.  
We wonder how we will cope with bereavement and loss, painful endings and uncertain futures,  
wounds, inflicted by self or others, burdens we bear and heavy loads we carry.  
So how do we face the dark night of the soul?  
The harsh reality of another day?  
The darkness of the sun going down on a relationship, a job, a life?  
God, your Son and servants in the past have been anxious too, have lived with danger, doubt and darkness.  
Their example reminds us that courage does not mean an absence of fear,  
rather the ability to live with it.  
Help us, God, to utilise the resources around us and within us to get us through.  
To lean on friends and family when we need to, to accept help and company,  
to tell how it is, to them, to you, and to realise that to do this is not to fail.  
For in our weakness you are our strength.  
Amen.*

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## Sunday, September 20: Exodus 14

In the *Lord of the Rings* movie, *The Two Towers*, a major battle for stronghold of Helm's Deep is about to begin. Théoden, King of Rohan, the besieged defenders, watches the advance of the enemy – "And so it begins," he says to his lieutenant.

"And so it begins." After all the promises, all the signs and wonders, and all the preparations, the Exodus – the coming out – of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt begins. And they are trapped between Pharaoh and the sea. They are besieged. Waiting for the advancing enemy.

At the end of Exodus 13 we read, "The Lord went ahead of them. He guided them during the day with a pillar of cloud, and he provided light at night with a pillar of fire. This allowed them to travel by day or by night. And the Lord did not remove the pillar of cloud or pillar of fire from its place in front of the people" (13:21-22). In a very tangible, visible, real way, God is present with His people. He is with them.

When faced with a vast army, how did the Israelites respond (14:10-12)? Do you blame them? I don't!

How did Moses react? "Don't be afraid. Just stand still and watch the Lord rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today will never be seen again. The Lord himself will fight for you. Just stay calm" (14:13-14). That sounds great. But would I have been able to do it? I'm not so sure ...

In my life I have never had to stare down the most powerful army the world (up to that time) had ever seen. But we all have faced difficult circumstances. Like you, I have faced challenges that seemed overwhelming. How do I handle that? Novelist Madeleine L'Engle writes of these times: "I will have nothing to do with a God who cares only occasionally. I need a God who is with us always, everywhere, in the deepest depths as well as the highest heights. It is when things go wrong, when good things do not happen, when our prayers seem to have been lost, that God is most present. We do not need the sheltering wings when things go smoothly. We are closest to God in the darkness, stumbling along blindly."

How does God respond in Exodus 14? What does He do?

"Faith," says Oswald Sanders, "is deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time." That can be difficult. But we choose to keep the faith because we ultimately trust that God always does know best – even if we cannot begin to understand what He is up to (that's why He is God and we aren't!). How can God encourage you, today?

*Hear my voice when I call, O Lord; be merciful to me and answer me.  
My heart says of you, 'Seek His face!' Your face, Lord I will seek.  
Do not hide your face from me; you are my helper and Lord.  
Lord, I have heard your voice calling at a distance.  
Guide my steps to you, Lord, guide my steps to you.  
Lord, I have heard your voice calling at a distance.  
Guard my way to you, Lord, guard my way to you.  
Lord, I have heard your voice calling at a distance.  
Keep my heart for you, Lord, keep my heart for you.  
Softly as the dew-fall of heaven, may the Holy Spirit come upon me to raise me and to aid me,  
to bind my prayer firmly before the throne of the King of life.  
Your will, O God, would I do, my own will bridle;  
Your due, O God, would I give, my own due yield;  
your path, O God, would I travel, my own path refuse.  
All whom I love, into your safekeeping;  
all that I am, into your tender care;  
all that I will be, into your perfect will.  
Amen.*

## **Monday, September 21: Exodus 15:1-21**

Every Tuesday morning Kyle, Mark, Matt, Troy, and I meet for staff meetings (by Zoom these days). Angela “zooms in” once a month, too. The FIRST thing we do, before any of the business, is share prayer requests and pray together. Then we go on to talk about the coming week, the months ahead, and long range plans for the future. Over the years we have prayed about a lot of people and a lot of things. And we have seen some remarkable – amazing – miraculous – answers to prayer.

But we rarely notice the answers, because we are already rushing ahead to the next requests. I’m sure God understands and I know He is mature enough not to be upset. But I think we should keep better track of what we pray for and we should take more notice of God’s answers to our prayers so that we don’t get discouraged ... so we, in fact, are ENCOURAGED that God is really doing amazing things among us.

Were the Israelites’ prayers answered??? You bet they were! In ways they could not possibly have imagined.

What did they do? They took time to praise and celebrate God’s blessings.

In fact, every year to this day Jewish families take time to remember, to praise, and to celebrate God’s deliverance from Egypt. This is the annual Passover celebration.

Take a few moments and think about some of the answers to prayer you have seen in recent months ... What are you thankful for ...?

*O King of Kings, O King of universe, King who will be and who is,  
may You forgive me.*

*Accept my prayer, O King of grace.*

*If I claim to be in the light, but hate my brother or sister, I'm still in the darkness.  
Lower my vengeance, my anger and my hatred, and banish my wicked thoughts from me;  
send down a drop from heaven of Your Holy Spirit to vanquish this heart of rock of mine.*

*Lord, let my memory provide no shelter for grievance against another;  
let my heart provide no harbor for hatred of another.*

*Lord, let my tongue be no accomplice in the judgment of another.*

*Jesus, great Son of God, I call on Your name to shield me in the battle in my life.*

*Jesus, only Son of the Father, who shed Your heart's blood, dearly to buy me:  
protect me, accompany me, be ever near me.*

*In the name of Jesus, let no evil be welcome in my heart or in my house.*

*Jesus, only Son of the Father and High King, Your name is above every name.*

*Amen.*

## **Tuesday, September 22: Exodus 15:22-27**

The more things change the more they stay the same ... Or we might say, the more God answers prayer, the more we still choose to complain ...

The story goes that there once was a woman who woke up one morning, looked in the mirror, and noticed she had only three hairs on her head. “Well,” she said, “I think I’ll braid my hair today.” So she did and she had a wonderful day.

The next day she woke up, looked in the mirror and saw that she had only two hairs on her head. “Hmmm,” she said, “I think I’ll part my hair down the middle today.” So she did and she had a grand day.

The next day she woke up, looked in the mirror and noticed that she had only one hair on her head. “Well,” she said, “today I’m going to wear my hair in a ponytail.” So she did, and she had a fun, fun day.



The next day she woke up, looked in the mirror and noticed that there wasn't a single hair on her head. "YAY!" she exclaimed. "I don't have to fix my hair today!"

Chuck Swindoll writes, "I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. We are in charge of our attitudes."

What is your attitude? A positive attitude is not a destination; it's a way of life. The Israelites have yet to learn that lesson. You would think that, given all God had done for them, they would be getting it, but they are still struggling ... just like I do!

May the Lord help me to have a more faithful attitude, too.

*My eyes, my eyes have seen the King!  
The vision of His beauty has pierced me deep within.  
To whom else can I go?  
My heart, my heart desires Him.  
He's touched something inside of me; I'm now reaching out for Him.  
And I know I must go.  
My God is my Love, my Guard, my Healing One;  
my bright Love is my merciful Lord; my sweet Love is Christ;  
His heart is my delight.  
All my love to You, O King of glory. Amen.*

### **Wednesday, September 23: Exodus 16**

My memory is getting worse and worse (I think ... I can't really remember).

Some of the things I can quickly forget are all the ways God has blessed and provided for me in the past. In the struggles of the moment – social isolation, anxiety, stress – I can forget how God has consistently provided for me over again in the past. So why would I think He has given up on me now?

It's nice to know I'm not alone in my poor memory. God miraculously did sign after sign in Egypt, got Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to go, led them through the midst of the Red Sea – miracle after miracle, wonder after wonder. But now, one short month after leaving the land of Egypt, the whole community of Israel is complaining about Moses and Aaron: "If only the Lord had killed us back in Egypt," they moaned. "There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death" (16:3).

They have VERY rose-coloured glasses. They did not have pots of meat and all the bread they wanted in Egypt. They also forget how bitterly they suffered and complained gathering straw and making brick after brick after brick, feeling the sting of the slave drivers' lashes, and seeing their newborn children killed.

They have forgotten God's miracles, delivering them wondrously and miraculously.

God has a plan all along. He will provide for his people. True, they will get VERY sick of manna and quail, but hey, they have food to eat. It may not be the variety and type they want, but it's food.

In the Lord's Prayer, we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." We'd love a fantastic variety, too – roast beef Monday, steak on Tuesday, ribs on Wednesday, filet mignon on Thursday, lobster on Friday ... God doesn't promise us designer meals. He does promise to provide for our basic needs: manna and quail.

Take time to thank God for how He has provided in the past. Thank Him for His promise to provide for us day by day. Even though He may not always give us all we want, thank Him that He provides for our needs.

*My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning,  
 more than those who watch for the morning.  
 Lord, You have always given bread for the coming day;  
 and though I am poor, today I believe.  
 Lord You have always given strength for the coming day;  
 and though I am weak, today I believe.  
 Lord, You have always given peace for the coming day;  
 and though of anxious heart, today I believe.  
 Lord, You have always kept me safe in trials;  
 and now, tried as I am, today I believe.  
 Lord, You have always marked the road for the coming day;  
 and though it may be hidden, today I believe.  
 Lord, you have always lightened this darkness of mine;  
 and though the night is here, today I believe.  
 Lord, you have always spoken when time was ripe;  
 and though You be silent now, today I believe.  
 I will wait for the Lord.  
 My soul waits, and in His word do I hope.  
 Amen.*

**Thursday, September 24: Exodus 17:1-7**

We sometimes sing a chorus: "[Come, let us worship and bow down.](#) *Let us kneel before the Lord our God, our maker, for he is our God. And we are the people of his pasture ...*" Before you pass judgment on the words, you should know this come straight from Psalm 95:1-7:

*Come, let us sing to the Lord!  
 Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.  
 Let us come to him with thanksgiving.  
 Let us sing psalms of praise to him.  
 For the Lord is a great God, a great King above all gods.  
 He holds in his hands the depths of the earth and the mightiest mountains.  
 The sea belongs to him, for he made it.  
 His hands formed the dry land, too.  
 Come, let us worship and bow down.  
 Let us kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is our God.  
 We are the people he watches over, the flock under his care.*

Isn't that a great song of praise! But the psalm goes on (Psalm 95:7-11):

*If only you would listen to his voice today!  
 The Lord says, "Don't harden your hearts as Israel did at Meribah,  
 as they did at Massah in the wilderness.  
 For there your ancestors tested and tried my patience, even though they saw everything I did.  
 For forty years I was angry with them, and I said,  
 "They are a people whose hearts turn away from me.  
 They refuse to do what I tell them."  
 So in my anger I took an oath:  
 "They will never enter my place of rest."*

In Exodus 17 the Israelites are at Massah and Meribah. They are hard hearted. God had delivered them, provided for them, and answered their prayers time and time again. But still they do not really trust Him.

Thomas Aquinas once mused, "*For those with faith, no explanation is necessary. For those without, no*

*explanation is possible.*" This would seem pretty apt for the people travelling with Moses. Jesus wrestled with the people in His day, too, who saw amazing miracles and yet would not believe ...

*"Why are you afraid? You have so little faith!"* Jesus says to us (Matthew 8:26). Perhaps, like the father of a boy with an evil spirit, we need to call out to God, *"I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!"* (Mark 9:24). When we can actually put our faith in God, those first few verses of Psalm 95 (1-7), make sense. Why do we find it so hard to really trust God? How can we cultivate a deeper faith?

Canadian author, Laurence Peter, wrote, *"Going to church doesn't make you a Christian anymore than going to the garage makes you a car."* Cars are only useful when they are driven. Our faith is really only useful when the rubber hits the road and we take a step out in faith ...

How is God speaking to you, today?

*O Son of God, do a miracle for me and change my heart.  
Your having taken flesh to redeem me  
was more difficult than to transform my wickedness.  
O Son of God, do a miracle for me and change my heart.  
Amen.*

### **Friday, September 25: Exodus 18**

When I was taking courses in education at the University of Alberta, one of the professors cornered me: *"You're a minister, right?"* Not sure where the conversation was going, I hesitantly said, *"Yes ..."* *"Great!"* she said, *"I'm beginning a research project on stress and burnout among teachers and I've discovered that all the research published so far on burnout has been on pastors. You are the expert. Tell me about it ..."*

Normally, pastors are not the first people consulted on cutting-edge academic research. But apparently in the stress and burnout department we're the experts. We are ahead of the curve when it comes to stress and burnout. Hmm. I'm not sure that's a good thing ...

Actually, Moses was even further ahead than the rest of us. He was overwhelmed with all the problems, issues, and grievances among the people. His father-in-law recognized the problem: *"What's going on here? Why are you doing all this, and all by yourself, letting everybody line up before you from morning to night?"* (18:14).

What is Jethro's advice? *"This is no way to go about it. You'll burn out, and the people right along with you. This is way too much for you – you can't do this alone. Now listen to me. Let me tell you how to do this so that God will be in this with you. Be there for the people before God, but let the matters of concern be presented to God. Your job is to teach them the rules and instructions, to show them how to live, what to do. And then you need to keep a sharp eye out for competent men – men who fear God, men of integrity, men who are incorruptible – and appoint them as leaders over groups organized by the thousand, by the hundred, by fifty, and by ten. They'll be responsible for the everyday work of judging among the people. They'll bring the hard cases to you, but in the routine cases they'll be the judges. They will share your load and that will make it easier for you. If you handle the work this way, you'll have the strength to carry out whatever God commands you, and the people in their settings will flourish also."* (18:17-23).

We all have unique gifts, talents, skills, experiences, educations, and abilities. In the New Testament, too, Paul encourages us to each use those blessings God has given us. Then no one burns out. And we all have the opportunity to be useful in God's Kingdom. Then we, in our unique settings, can flourish as well.

What are gifts, talents, skills, experiences, educations, and abilities has God blessed you with? How can you use what God has given you to bless others? Together we can do so much more than we can separately.

Paul uses the metaphor of a body to describe how we can work together: "Our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." ... This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad" (1 Corinthians 12:18-26).

It's Friday. Are you worn out? Are you doing too much? Do you think you find it so much easier to do everything yourself you are doing things you are not really good at, just because ...? Are you resentful that you have to do it "all" – at work/home/church? Do you need to listen to Jethro, too?

*Christ, You are the Truth; You are the Light.  
You are the keeper of the treasure we seek so blindly.  
My soul's desire is to see the face of God and to rest in his house.  
My soul's desire is to study the Scriptures and to learn the ways of God.  
My soul's desire is to be freed from all fear and sadness,  
and to share Christ's risen life.  
My soul's desire is to imitate my King, and to sing His purposes always.  
My soul's desire is to enter the gates of heaven  
and to gaze upon the Light that shines forever.  
Dear Lord, You alone know what my soul truly desires,  
and You alone can satisfy those desires.  
When I am weak, I ask that You send only what I can bear,  
when I am strong, may I shrink from no testing.  
I trust in You, O Lord.  
I say, 'You are my God.  
My times are in Your hand.  
My times are in your hand'  
Amen.*

## **Saturday, September 26: Exodus 19**

God is our buddy. Right? On the one hand, we do know God intimately as our loving, heavenly Father. Jesus assures us we are His children, part of His family. In fact, He uses the Aramaic word for "Daddy" – "Abba" – when He addresses God. It's fantastic that we have such an intimate relationship with God.

On the other hand, God is the God who created the universe (or multiverse depending on your physics). He is the One who exists beyond time and space. He is the holy One. He is the One whom the Israelites discover reveals Himself in thunder and lightning. He is the awesome King of kings and Lord of lords. Some of the Old Testament names for God help us think "bigger" about who God is:

- YHWH (Yahweh) – "I am" .... God's personal name for Himself. "I am who I am" emphasizes that God is before all, is in all, and will be after all!
- YHWH Tzevaot – the LORD of Hosts
- YHWH-Yireh (Adonai-jireh) – The LORD Will Provide
- YHWH-Rapha – The LORD that Heals
- YHWH-Nissi (Adonai-Nissi) – The LORD Our Banner
- YHWH-Shalom – The LORD Our Peace
- El Elyon – God Most High
- El Shaddai – God Almighty
- El Olam – God Everlasting
- El Hai – Living God
- El Ro'I – God my Shepherd
- El Gibbor – God of Strength

- Elah-avahati – God of my fathers
- Elah Elahin – God of gods
- Elah Shemaya – God of Heaven
- El ha-Gibbor – God the Hero/Warrior
- Adir – Strong One
- Adon Olam – Master of the World
- HaRachaman – The Merciful One
- Melech HaMelachim – The King of Kings
- Rofeh Cholim – Healer of the Sick
- Matir Asurim – Freer of the Captives
- Malbish Arumim – Clother of the Naked
- Pokeach Ivrim – Opener of Blind Eyes
- Somech Noflim – Supporter of the Fallen
- Zokef kefufim – Straightener of the Bent
- Yotsehr Or' – Fashioner of Light
- Mechayeh Metim – Life giver to the Dead
- Mechayeh HaKol – Life giver to All

Yes, we have the blessing – through Jesus and the Holy Spirit – of knowing God intimately. He is with us always. We can pray to Him without fear. We are always welcome in His presence. He loves us passionately. He gave His life to redeem and save us ...

But this God is also the God of glory, Creator of the universe. That shouldn't frighten us, but rather encourage us. As we face the wildernesses of life – as we journey through the desert places – as we face the challenges – we are always in the presence of this amazing, incredible, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-seeing, all-capable, all-loving God. That is good news. Great news.

Rad through and reflect on some of the names of God, above. Which speak to you? Why? How can you know God more fully – more richly – through some of these names?

James (executed on the orders High Priest Hanan ben Hanan in 62 AD) writes, *"If you don't know what you're doing, pray to the Father. He loves to help. You'll get his help, and won't be condescended to when you ask for it. Ask boldly, believingly, without a second thought. People who 'worry their prayers' are like wind-whipped waves. Don't think you're going to get anything from the Master that way, adrift at sea, keeping all your options open ..."* (James 1:5-8)

*Spirit of God, who has charge from the dear Father of mercifulness,  
the shepherding King of all the saints,  
Protect me this day and this night:  
Drive from me every temptation and danger.  
Surround and protect me on the sea of unrighteousness.  
And in the narrows, crooks, and storms of life,  
keep my path safe and straight, keep it always.  
Be a bright flame before me,  
Be a guiding star above me,  
Be a smooth path below me,  
And be a kindly shepherd behind me,  
To-day, to-night, and for ever.  
I am tired and a stranger in the world ...  
And when it is time for me to go home  
Lead me to the land of angels, to the court of Christ,  
to the peace of heaven.  
Amen.*

Carmina Gadelica

## **Sunday, September 27: Exodus 20:1-20**

Do you recognize this passage? The Ten Commandments are probably the best known part of the Old Testament. And this is where they are first recorded. They are repeated, with slight variations, in Deuteronomy 5. The word "Deuteronomy" literally means "the second law" – much of the book of Deuteronomy is a repeat of laws, like the Ten Commandments, recorded in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers.

One wise professor pointed out to me that each of the Ten Commandments actually fits under the heading of one of the two great commandments that Jesus gives to us. When Jesus was asked, "*Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?*" He replied, "*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself. The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments*" (Matthew 22:36-40).

The Ten Commandments express things negatively – "*Thou shalt not ....*" The two great commands express things positively: "*DO love God ...*" "*DO love your neighbour ...*"

Read each of the commands through a couple of times. Think about each one. How is each one a reflection of one of the great commands Jesus gives us? (hint: commands 1-4 reflect the first great commandment to love God; commands 5-10 reflect the second great commandment to love your neighbour).

Which speak(s) to you particularly? Why?

How can you love God with all your heart, soul, and mind more and more? How can you love your neighbour as yourself, better?

What is God saying to you? What do you need to do about it?

*O God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
Give us spiritual wisdom and insight so that we might grow in our knowledge of God.  
May our hearts be flooded with light  
so that we can understand the confident hope  
you have given to those you called – us –  
your holy people who are your rich and glorious inheritance.  
Lord, may we understand the incredible greatness of God's power  
for us who believe him.  
This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead  
and seated him in the place of honor at Your right hand in the heavenly realms.  
Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else –  
not only in this world but also in the world to come.  
Lord, thank you that you have put all things under the authority of Christ  
and You have made him head over all things for the benefit of the church – us.  
Lord, we pray for the church, his body, ourselves:  
May we be made full and complete by Christ,  
who fills all things everywhere with himself.  
Lord help us to be your body, your church, your people.  
Amen.*

## **Monday, September 28: Exodus 20:22-24:11 (read 23:1-9)**

I still remember studying the Drivers' Handbook for my Learner's Licence Exam. There were so many rules to memorize. At first, I thought, "*Why in the world would there be so many rules and regulations just to drive a car?*" At the time, they seemed overwhelming. And they seemed an unnecessary imposition on my

freedom. And yet, as I read each of them, I realized there was a reason for every one. And, collectively, if all drivers were to follow the same rules of the road, driving would be safe and traffic would flow well.

Now, of course, I don't even think about the rules. They are so much a part of my subconscious that I just automatically stop at red lights, observe playground zones, and yield to the person to the right at an uncontrolled intersection. Those rules no longer seem like an imposition on my freedom; they are necessary for us all to be safe and for traffic to move smoothly.

In Exodus 20-23 God gives an instructional manual for the people of Israel. Like the Driver's Handbook, principles like the Ten Commandments are not intended to stifle personal freedom; they are designed to help society function well. There is a specific – good – reason for each one. They all relate to Jesus' great commands to love God and love our neighbour – keys to a healthy society. You are welcome to read all of Exodus 20:22-24:11. Some laws will seem less relevant in our culture and society than they would have in the ancient near east 3000-4000 years ago. Some of them, however, are pretty timeless.

The passage I've suggested you read, 23:1-9, is a sampler, providing good advice for all people everywhere.

How is each of these commands wise counsel for us today?

Think back on the Ten Commandments as well. Why do we find the whole concept of "God's commands" annoying? Remember Adam and Eve? Their fatal flaw was they didn't like the (one and only) rule God had given them; not to eat the fruit of only one tree. Why do we find it so hard to follow the rules?

What rules do you chafe at? What guidelines do you resist? Traffic laws? Social distancing? Wearing a mask? Why? What does that say about me? What is God saying to you?

*O God, I cannot undo the past,  
or make it never have happened!  
Neither can You.  
There are some things that are not possible even for You – but not many!  
But You can forgive me.  
I ask you, humbly, from the bottom of my heart:  
Please, God, would you write straight with my crooked lines?  
Out of the serious mistakes of my life will You make something beautiful for You?  
Teach me to live at peace with You,  
to make peace with others and even with myself.  
Give me fresh vision.  
Let me experience Your love so deeply that I am free to face the future  
with a steady eye, forgiven, and strong in hope.  
All that I love I give into Your keeping.  
All that I care for I give into Your care.  
Be with me by day, be with me by night;  
and as dark closes the eyelids with sleep, may I waken to the peace of a new day,  
rested and refreshed, filled with Your Spirit. At rest.  
Amen*

## **Tuesday, September 29: Exodus 24:12-27:21 (read 24:12-25:16)**

What is holy? What is not holy? In Exodus, God commands the Israelites to build a Tabernacle – a portable tent/temple that the Israelites could take with them on their travels. This would be a holy place. Why? Because God would be personally present in the Tabernacle, just as He was personally present when He led them as a pillar of cloud/fire out of Egypt. As a result, the Tabernacle and its furnishings (like ark) were to be treated as holy – with respect, honour, and awe.

Exodus 24:12-27:21 is all about construction of and furnishing for the Tabernacle. Among the key components is the ark of the covenant – an ornate, gold-sheathed box that would contain the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments. You are welcome to read the entire section. I have chosen to highlight the opening verses (24:12-25:16) to give you a taste of the broader passage.

In our culture we don't have many sacred spaces or sacred objects. In Europe, cathedrals and churches used to be sacred places, but now they are more museums than holy sites. In museums and galleries, gold- and gem-encrusted crucifixes and religious art speak to us of the excesses of the medieval church, rather than inspiring awe and worship. In the Middle Ages, however, these places and this art represented the genuine presence of God (rather like in Exodus). So no expense was too much. No decoration was too elaborate to embody and represent what they believed was the actual presence of almighty God.

During the Protestant Reformation, however, emphasis was placed on the presence of God, not in buildings, but in His people, through the Holy Spirit. Through His Spirit, God dwells within each of us (Luke 17:21, John 14-16). As a result, we believe God is not "present" in a church building in a special way – and a church building is not by definition a "holy place" – unless His people are gathered there. The church, after all, is US – God's people – not a structure of wood and brick. **WE** are the church, anywhere, all the time.

If holiness has something to do with the presence of God, and if God is present within His people through the Holy Spirit, what does this say about who we are as God's people? God is present within each of us, therefore each of us is holy – therefore we are all to be treated as holy – with respect, honour, and awe.

C.S. Lewis writes, *"There are no 'ordinary' people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations – these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously - no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption."*

The people you know, meet, and interact with are not mere mortals. Each is, by definition holy. Each is a temple of the Holy Spirit. How then should we treat them?

*Lord, may this day be a place of peace.  
May this day be a place of peace as I do Your will.  
May this day be a place of peace as I serve my neighbour.  
May this day be a place of peace as I obey You.  
May this day be a place of peace as I praise You from dawn to dawn.  
Lord, take this day and fill it with Your blessing.  
Lord, take this day and fill it with Yourself.  
Amen*

### **Wednesday, September 30: Exodus 28:1-31:18 (read 31:1-11)**

When we think of "spiritual gifts" or "God's blessed people" we tend to think of folks like great musicians, teachers, maybe missionaries, perhaps even pastors. Do we ever think of art as a spiritual gift?

In Exodus 28-31, God gives more practical instructions on worship. He talks about priests and elaborate priestly garments (28-29). He talks about altars, incense, basins, and anointing oil (30). But someone is going to have to actually make this amazing Tabernacle, ark, altar, and priestly garments. So God equips and calls artists like Bezalel and Oholiab (you can read more about them in Exodus 35:30-36:4).

I love this passage – I get very excited by the fact that God specifically chose craftsmen and artists to fill with his Spirit. It reminds me that art – both the ability to create art and the creations fashioned by artists – is actually one of God's good gifts. Although these people were commanded to follow God's instructions



about the tabernacle and its furnishings, they weren't just joining the dots or colouring in a picture. With the creativity of the Spirit to guide and inspire them, they were free to "make artistic designs" (31:4) and to work in all kinds of precious materials.

The Tabernacle could have been just a plain tent; God, however, wanted it to be beautiful. The ark could have just been a plain wooden box; God, however, wanted it to look amazing and awe-inspiring. The priests could have worn any old rages; God, however, wanted them to look special and inspire worship of God.

God was clearly concerned for the details. The sights and smells, the glow of the colours, the feel of the fabrics, the grain of the wood and the sparkle of the precious stones were lovingly indicated in the previous chapters. But they didn't spring fully formed from heaven. It would need ordinary men and women to work hard, using their God-given skills, and keeping in step with God's Spirit, for the tabernacle to become a beautiful reality, a suitable focus for God's holy presence.

Philip Ryken, in *Art for God's Sake*, notes that Moses, while he recorded the divine design for the tent of meeting, did not work on it himself. He did not have the ability and skills to execute the design, and he relied on others, the artists. Francis Schaeffer's classic *Art and the Bible* challenges us to bridge the artificial gap between art and faith by allowing the significance of art to enhance worship and challenge our faith. For Schaeffer all reality is grounded in God's ultimate reality, so that our spiritual lives are related to every other aspect of life, including the arts. Richard Harries, in *Art and the Beauty of God*, argues that biblical faith must give an important place to the idea and appreciation of beauty, as part of our worship. Art has a spiritual dimension, and spiritual life has artistic expression.

You may or may not be artistic. That's totally fine. If you are, thank God. And use your skills and talent for His glory. If you aren't, that's ok (neither was Moses, apparently). But we all can appreciate how art can help us worship God. What art (visual art, music, literature) inspires you? Why?

*I am no longer my own, but Yours.  
Put me to do what You will,  
rank me with whom you will;  
put me to doing,  
put me to suffering;  
let me be employed for You,  
or laid aside for you;  
let me be exalted for you,  
or brought low for you;  
let me be full,  
let me be empty;  
let me have all things,  
let me have nothing;  
I freely and heartily yield all things to Your pleasure and disposal.  
And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
I covenant that you are mine, and I am no longer my own –  
I am yours.  
Amen.*

#### **Thursday, October 1: Exodus 32**

After all God did for the Israelites, rescuing them from slavery in Egypt and providing food and water in the desert, you would think they would be thankful and commit to following Him. But instead of looking back in gratitude, they forget what He has done. They want a god they can see and touch.

Unbelievably, the people of Israel seem to struggle to understand it was actually God Himself who brought them out of Egypt. They seem to think it was Moses, who now appears to have abandoned them (32:1).

So now it feels like they're casting about for someone to believe in. They want a tangible image like other nations. So they worship the creature – a cow! – rather than the Creator. And they have fun, while it lasts. The Hebrew word translated "revelry" (32:6) has a connotation of sexual free-for-all (Paul exploits this sense in Romans 1). By the time Moses came down from the mountain the people were out of control.

By the end of the episode there will be massive death and destruction (32:27-35).

This passage is a sad commentary on human nature. Because we cannot see God, we can easily fall into worshipping things we can touch and see. It's no accident the Israelites make this image out of gold. Gold – money, today – is probably the thing that most leads us into temptation, and most distracts us from thanksgiving to God. And gold – money – can be the hardest thing for us to give to God in worship.

It's interesting to contrast Moses and Aaron in this passage.

Aaron shows no leadership. In fact, he is complicit in their sin (32:2).

- He takes no responsibility. He blames the people (32:22). Do we ever do blame others?
- Compare verses 32:2–5 with the mother of all excuses in verse 24: *"I told them, 'Whoever has gold jewelry, take it off.' When they brought it to me, I simply threw it into the fire – and out came this calf!"* Do we ever excuse ourselves saying, "It's not my fault; it just happened"?
- He loses control. The party takes on a life of its own. Do we ever just give up?

Moses shows remarkable leadership. Look at the elements of his intervention and intercession:

- His first concern is for God's glory.
- He understands his place in God's unfolding narrative.
- He appeals to God's promises.
- In verse 32 he shows himself a forerunner of Jesus, and offers himself for the forgiveness of God's people. His concern is not for himself, but for God's great plan of redemption.

Reflecting on this incident, Paul writes, *"I don't want you to forget, dear brothers and sisters, about our ancestors in the wilderness long ago. All of them were guided by a cloud that moved ahead of them, and all of them walked through the sea on dry ground. In the cloud and in the sea, all of them were baptized as followers of Moses. All of them ate the same spiritual food, and all of them drank the same spiritual water. For they drank from the spiritual rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ. Yet God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. These things happened as a warning to us, so that we would not crave evil things as they did, or worship idols as some of them did"* (1 Corinthians 10:1-6).

What can we "worship" other than God? What occupies our thoughts? What shapes our decision? What get first priority in our lives? What is God saying to us?

*Even though the day be laden and my task dreary and my strength small,  
a song keeps singing in my heart.  
For I know that I'm Yours.  
I am part of You.  
I know you can forgive all my sins. Forgive me, Lord.  
I know you can strengthen my faltering feet. Strengthen me, Lord.  
You are my Father, my Brother, my Counsellor.  
I trust in You, O Lord; I say, "You are my God!"  
My times are in Your hand; my times are in Your hand.  
Blessed be the Lord, for He has wondrously shown His steadfast love to me,  
His steadfast love to me.  
Amen.*

## Friday, October 2: Exodus 33

With instant access to mounds of information, personal news and irrelevant ephemera, today we are constantly connected through wi-fi and mobile phones. On one hand, that's great. On another hand, how do we find peace? We struggle to find separation. Time to ourselves. Time to spend with God. Moses' problems were different, but he had the same need to spend time alone with God. Sometimes we just need to find space – and time – to spend in focussed prayer with God, too.

Moses has gone from mountain-top experience to catastrophic outrage. He knows he needs to be with God so he sets up a tent of meeting outside the camp (33:7). This "tent of meeting" preceded the tabernacle. The word translated from Hebrew as "meeting" means an "*appointed place, appointed time.*" Apparently, Moses regularly and consistently met God here. This was a habitual practise. Meeting with God requires a personal discipline to make the time and create the quiet place where we can talk with God.

It's interesting that people see Moses meeting with God and are drawn by what they see, longing for that experience of prayer, too (33:10). I recall a colleague commenting that his Dad, a carpenter, would sit in the living room first thing every morning, reading his Bible and praying. That quiet example of lived faith profoundly influenced my friend, helping him see the genuine faith of his father, and encouraging him to discipline himself to read his Bible and pray, too. If it was important for Dad, it was important for him.

God has told the people that he will not travel with them (33:3). So, will Moses and his people stay sitting in the desert? Moses, aware of God's holiness and committed to obedience, nevertheless – as a respectful friend – questions God and pleads his case: "*If You don't lead us, who's going to help me?*" (33:12). God seems to change His mind (33:14, 17). God promises He will be with His people – always.

Moses doesn't give up asking for reassurance of God's commitment to him. His bold request (33:18) is not granted exactly, but there's no doubt that Moses has a very close encounter with God. We too often miss seeing God in the moment but recognise His presence as we look back (33:23).

The certain promise of Jesus is that He is with us always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). His Presence – His Holy Spirit – never leaves us. We may not always FEEL His presence, but that doesn't change the objective reality that He is with us every moment of every day. We may only recognize it as we look back, after the fact, too.

David writes, "*I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me*" (Psalm 139:7-10). Be encouraged. God is with you.

*Lord may I think often of You, by day, by night,  
in my business, and even in my diversions.  
You are always near me and with me; You never leave me alone.  
I would think it rude to leave a friend alone who came to visit me:  
why then do I ever neglect You, my God?  
You come to me so often, so many ways each and every day.  
May I never forget You, but think of You often.  
May I adore You continually.  
May I live and die with You.  
This life, spent always and only with You, is the glorious wonder of being a Christian.  
Lord, I yearn to be with You as you are with me.  
I yearn to know You as You know me.  
I yearn to love You as You love me.  
And in being with, knowing, and loving You I will be with, know and love Your people.  
May I love them with the same self-sacrificing love You showed to me. Amen.*

### **Saturday, October 3: Exodus 34:1-14, 29-35**

How do you feel about mountain climbing ... at 80 years old? About hauling stone tablets as an octogenarian? Moses, at 80, prepares another set of stone tablets and climbs the mountain again – alone.

However, as a reward for his obedience, Moses is given the most extraordinary experience: a new understanding of the character of the Lord himself. The proclamation in 34:6-7 is a new expression of the reality of who God is. His redeeming love is paired with his holiness: compassion and justice go hand in hand. By the way, God is not saying that He will punish children for their parents' wrongdoing, but He is highlighting that our misdeeds and mistakes may have long-lasting, unintended consequences.

Sometimes we think of God, in the Old Testament, as a God of wrath. However, 34:6-7 help us see God as a God of compassion and grace. In Judaism, faithful Jews are taught to meditate on thirteen Attributes of Mercy, coming directly from Exodus 34:6–7:

- God has compassion before a person sins;
- God has compassion after a person has sinned;
- God is mighty in compassion to give all creatures according to their need;
- God is merciful, that humankind may not be distressed;
- and God is gracious if humankind is already in distress;
- God is slow to anger;
- and God is plenteous in kindness;
- and truth;
- keeping kindness unto thousands;
- forgiving iniquity;
- and transgression;
- and sin;
- and pardoning.

Moses responds in worship. He continues to talk with God. As well as asking for the Lord's forgiveness and continuing to ask for His presence with His people, Moses goes a step further, asking the Lord to "*take us as your inheritance*"(34:9). We are sons and daughters of God, co-heirs with Jesus (Romans 8:17).

Even when we sin, God uses our experiences to teach us new truths. The character of the people of God is formed not just by miracles and commandments, but by discipline and restoration. Sometimes we learn the most through the lessons of discipline and discipleship that come from our mistakes and our failures. What is God saying to you?

*As gulls in hunger's flight keep to the boat's track,  
may I follow in Jesus' wake.  
As I hunger and thirst for truth, may I follow in Jesus' wake.  
My rudder constant, in following after Him.  
May I sound the depths of love for Jesus' sake.  
Teach me to care for all that is entrusted to me,  
and nurture every sign of your presence.  
Circle my dear ones in Your love and blessing;  
and protect us all from evil and from danger.  
Give me open eyes to see beyond what others say is possible.  
Give me the insight to recognize and name deceit.  
Give me a generosity that pushes back the boundaries,  
for even death by you as been defeated.  
All my power I find in You.  
The Light shines on, and my life is only lived in You.  
Amen*

**Sunday, October 4: Exodus 35:1-40:38 (read 40:1-16, 34-38)**

Think about the amazing phrase, "*the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle*" (40:34-35). What must that have been like?

As we come to the end of the Book of Exodus (Genesis 35-39 detail materials for the tabernacle. Construction of Tabernacle, Ark, altar, etc., and making of the priestly garments), the climax of the book is this passage. God has come, personally, to be among His people. His very Presence fills the Tabernacle and will go with His people on all their travels.

It's nearly two years since the Israelites' miraculous escape from Egypt. They have been through tough times. They have learned about the awfulness of sin, the terror of God's judgement, the awesomeness of his holiness. They've begun to understand that the Lord is compassionate, gracious and forgiving (34:6-7).

Now Moses obediently and faithfully sets up the Tabernacle. Both this and the priests are consecrated – set apart – for service to the holy God. And then, the amazing, unspeakable conclusion to all this: God himself comes to be among them (40:34-35).

In spite of the people's past sin and rebellion, the Tabernacle becomes the visible symbol of God at the centre of their lives – and He is the one who will direct their onward journey (40:36-37). So at the end of the Exodus story there is a sense of optimism as the people prepare themselves for the next chapter. God had promised to lead his covenant people to the Promised Land. They can be confident – as we can be – that God will complete the good work he has begun in and among us.

We may read 40:34-35 and think, "*How lucky they were – God was really with them. If only ...*" The reality is that, through His Holy Spirit, God IS within each one of us. In the New Testament, we are described as Temples of the Holy Spirit (the Temple replaced the Tabernacle as the "dwelling place" of the glory of God – His Presence – once the Israelites were settled in Israel) (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19, 1 Peter 2:5).

As we read this awesome description of the glory of the Lord filling the Tabernacle, we need to know that this same experience has happened in each one of our lives, as we have invited Jesus to come into our lives and our church and to fill us. This IS our experience. Just as the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle, the glory of the Lord IS within each of us – and us as a church – through His Spirit.

*"If you love me, obey my commandments," says Jesus. "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. 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 ... When the Father sends the Advocate as my representative – that is, the Holy Spirit – he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you"* (John 14:15-26).

His Spirit is in you. Thank Him. Worship Him. Talk with Him. Nothing need hold you back ...

*Lord, why do I spend so much time laying out my week  
and yet fail to plan a time for You, my Creator?  
Why am I so busy speaking with others,  
yet manage to find so little time for prayer with You, my Saviour?  
Why am I always running to and fro,  
yet find no energy for the joy and pleasure and blessing of prayer?  
Why is my life so full of bustle and busyness, yet so little satisfaction?  
Why so many meetings with people, yet so few meetings with God?  
Why so little time being alone, so little thirsting in my soul  
for the calm, sweet hours of unbroken solitude,  
when God and His child – me – hold fellowship together as if we could never part?*

*(continued)*

*In one single quiet hour of prayer my soul will often make more progress  
than days of company with others doing busy things.  
It is in God's presence alone, that my soul truly gathers  
in wondrous refreshment and power and energy.  
And it is in this way that I become truly useful to others.  
When I come out fresh from communion with God,  
I can go forth to do His work successfully.  
In nearness to God the vessel of my life is so filled with blessing,  
that, when I come forth, I cannot contain it to myself  
but must, as a blessed necessity, pour it out wherever I go.  
Lord, help me put as a high apriority on time with You  
as I do on the most essential parts of my week.  
Truly, nothing is more important than time well spent with the Author of Life.  
Time like right now ...  
Amen.*