

EXODUS

SEVEN LEADERSHIP



PRINCIPLES

A Seven-Session Bible Study for Men

by Steven P. Eason

Exodus

Seven Leadership Principles

A Seven-Session Bible Study for Men

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Exodus

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Introduction

Men's BIBLE Study

The Reason for This Study

*We trust in God the Holy Spirit,
everywhere the giver and renewer of life . . .
The same Spirit
who inspired the prophets and apostles
rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture.*

These words from "A Brief Statement of Faith," adopted officially by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 1991, state a primary conviction of Presbyterians. Presbyterians believe that God's Spirit actually speaks to us through the inspired books of the Bible, "the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the church universal, and God's Word" (Book of Order, PC(USA), G 14.0516) to each of us.

Recent studies, however, have shown that many men know very little of what the Bible says; yet many do express a desire to learn. To help meet that need, this Bible study guide has been prepared at the request and with the cooperation of the National Council of Presbyterian Men of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The Suggested Pattern of Study

Men may use this guide in a variety of weekly settings: men's breakfasts, lunches in a down town setting, evening study groups in homes, and many more. The material provides guidance for seven one-hour sessions. To facilitate open discussion it assumes a small group of men, no more than twelve, one or preferably two of whom might be designated as leaders. Each session is a Bible study; there must be a Bible for each man. The Bible, not this study guide, is the textbook.

The men are not required to do study outside the group sessions, though suggestions are given for such study. To be enrolled in this study, however, each man is expected to commit himself to make every effort to attend and participate fully in all seven sessions.

The pattern of study is to be open discussion. Agreement by all to follow seven rules will make such study most effective:

1. We will treat no question as stupid. Some men will have more experience in Bible study than others, but each man must feel free to say what he thinks without fear of being ridiculed.

2. We will stick to the Scripture in this study. The men in the group have gathered for Bible study, not to pool their own ideas on other matters, however good those ideas may be.

3. We will regard the leader(s) as "first among equals." Leaders in these studies are guides for group discussion, not authorities to tell the group what the Bible means. But following their study suggestions will facilitate learning.

4. We will remember that we are here to hear God speak. Presbyterians believe that the Spirit, which spoke to the Biblical writers, now speaks to us through their words. We do not come simply to learn about the Bible, but with minds and hearts expecting to receive a message from God.

5. We will listen for "the question behind the question." Sometimes a man's gestures and tone of voice may tell us more of what he is feeling than his words do. We will listen with sympathy and concern.

6. We will agree to disagree in love. Open discussion is an adventure full of danger. Men will differ. None of us will know the whole truth or be right all the time. We will respect and love and try to learn from each other even when we think the other person is wrong.

7. We will make every effort to attend and participate faithfully in all seven sessions of this study. Participation will involve making notes in the spaces provided for your own answers to questions relating to the study and, from time to time, sharing with others your answers, even when you worry that they are not the "right" answers.

Some Suggestions for the Leader

Those who lead groups in this study should be especially aware of these seven "rules."

Though two leaders are not required, having a team of leaders often helps to open up the group for freer discussion by all its members. One leader might be responsible for introducing the study at a given session and for summarizing other parts of the study where such summaries are suggested. The other leader might take more responsibility for guiding the discussion, helping to see that each man who wishes has a chance to speak, helping to keep the study centered on the Scripture, and moving the group along to the next subject when one has

been dealt with sufficiently. Or the leaders might alternate in their responsibilities or share them equally.

This material is a guide for study within the group. The study material for each session is to be distributed at the time of that session. The study guide for each session is in the form of a worksheet. Each man should have a pencil or a pen. Spaces are provided for each student to make brief notes for his answers to questions on the passages to be studied. A good deal of the time may be spent as the men quietly, individually, decide on and note their own answers to these questions. Some are designed simply to guide the students in looking at key passages. Others are intended to help the student think about what these passages mean to us today. The real basis of this study should be the ideas which come in the times when the men are quietly studying their Bibles and deciding individually on their answers to these questions. When a man has made a note on his sheet concerning his answer to a question, he has had to do some thinking about it. And he is more likely to be willing to tell the group his answer.

There should also be time, of course, for the group to share and compare answers to these questions. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit seems most often to be manifest within a group. God speaks to us authoritatively through Scripture, but often what God says to us in Scripture becomes clearest when voiced by a Christian friend. We learn through each other.

Each session ends with an Afterword. During the session the leader may call attention to things in the Afterword when they seem appropriate.

Among the many characteristics of a good discussion leader are these: (1) He tries to give everyone who wishes a chance to speak, without pressuring anyone to speak who does not want to. (2) He does not monopolize the discussion himself and tries tactfully to prevent anyone else from doing so unduly. (3) He is a good listener, helping those who speak to feel that they have been heard. (4) He helps to keep the group focused on the Scripture. (5) He tries to watch for signs that show that the group is or is not ready to move on to the next question.

This kind of study can generally be carried on much more effectively with the participants sitting informally in a circle or around a table rather than in straight rows with the leader up front. Frequently, especially in a large group, you may want to divide into groups of three or four, or simply let each man compare his answers with those of the man sitting next to him.

Often, more questions have been given than some groups are likely to cover in one hour. If you don't answer them all, don't worry. Pick the ones that seem most interesting and let the rest go.

The questions in this study guide are phrased in various ways and come in different orders, but basically they are intended to help the participants think through three things: (1) what does this passage say? (2) What does it mean? And (3) what does it mean now to you? It is our conviction as Presbyterians that when believers study together God's word in an atmosphere of prayerful expectancy, God will speak to them.

Throughout each study there are Scripture quotations. These are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. While this version is used throughout this study guide, it may prove beneficial for each participant to use the version with which he feels most comfortable.

Testing has shown that the discussion that arises in each study may cause the session to last longer than the intended sixty minutes. A clock figure has been placed in each session to suggest where a study might be divided into two sessions. Discussion is at the heart of these studies and should not be sacrificed for the sake of presenting the lesson exactly as suggested in this study guide.

In the letter inviting the writers of these studies to attempt this work, Dr. Marvin Simmers, having recognized some difficulties, added, "Remember, we are not alone!" The leader also may take courage from that assurance.

Exodus

INTRODUCTION

How in the world are you going to get a group of busy men to come together for seven sessions to study the Book of Exodus? That doesn't sound very exciting! Exodus seems ancient, even archaic. Exodus is not likely to be on the Top Ten Reading List of most men.

What we need is a "hook," a way to read Exodus in our context. Walter Brueggemann writes, "Scholarly niceties are not unimportant, but must, in the end, be mobilized for our own work of contemporary interpretation."¹

How will we get to the "contemporary interpretation" of Exodus? *Leadership* will be our hook. Most modern men spend a great deal of time thinking about and dealing with the challenges of leadership.

Exodus is a story about a people moving from one place to another. Where are they going and how do they get there? Who's in charge? What are the goals and objectives? It is the story of God's covenant unfolding with Israel. It is a story of the divine/human relationship in process. It is a story of commitment, of failure and success, of a God who moves toward us, in spite of where we move. It is a story of moving from here to there with God and all that lies in between.

In your reading, keep in mind that Israel is being formed into a nation. They were not a well-organized political machine. You will be reading about a nation in its infancy. They had no great army, no fortress, no capital city. They didn't even have a land that they could call their own. They had no treasury, no buildings, no place of worship. They had no laws or disciplines. They were slaves and had been for four-and-a-half centuries.

What they did have was the crisis of oppression. What they did have was divine intervention. They had a leader. They had a vision for a place and a way of life that none of them had ever experienced.

Even so, they had no proof that the Promised Land existed. Sometimes they questioned the vision. Sometimes they questioned the leadership. Sometimes they questioned God.

Israel was going through an identity crisis. They could no longer be who they were. They were to become someone else. In between *somebody* (slaves) and *somebody else* (Promised Land), they were nobody. That may help us to understand the need for the law, memorial feasts, the tabernacle, the leadership, and the land. God was forming Israel's identity as a people. They needed reminders and God provided them; even the wilderness served its purpose.

Exodus shows us the picture of an intentional God who had a plan and wouldn't let go of it—no matter what. We Presbyterians hold on to the faith position that *God is sovereign*. Yet, God chooses to be in relationship with us. That choosing is most intentional. That choice is God's choice not to act alone, but to act in relationship.

Exodus also shows us a picture of people, like us, who constantly attempt to hinder God from carrying out the divine plan.

Listen to Moses, who says, "I have never been eloquent ... I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (4:10). Notice the Lord's sovereign response, "Who gives speech to mortals?" (4:11).

Listen to Pharaoh, who says, "Who is the LORD, that I should heed him and let Israel go?" (5:2). Watch the sovereign process. The next thing Pharaoh knew Israel was leaving town!

The people complained in the wilderness, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt . . . for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (16:3). The sovereign Lord in effect responds, "Oh, stop your complaining and eat your peas (manna). You'll need your strength for the journey."

It's a story about moving from here to there in relationship with a sovereign God who operates—no matter what. That's sovereignty!

Leadership is about moving from here to there. Leadership asks the question, "Where are we going, with whom, for what, and how will we get there?" In Exodus, God answers those questions.

Another means of getting to the "contemporary interpretation" is through the slavery motif. Think of places of oppression, racism, sexism, classism. If our God is the same God as the God of Exodus, the places of "slavery" are not acceptable today, either. Our sisters and brothers must not be forced to dwell in bondage. If liberation is our goal, leadership is needed.

God didn't just remove Israel from Egypt. God moved them to a place of responsibility. They were free—but for a purpose. They were given the Law and charged to "obey my voice and keep my covenant" (19:5). The theme is consistent with what God said to Abraham when the covenant was first established: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you . . . so that you will be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2, italics added).

Once we leave Egypt, where we are going and for what purpose becomes the question. The story of Exodus moves

1. Walter Brueggemann, "Exodus," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), p. 685.

from oppression to responsibility, from servitude to service. We are redeemed for a reason. That reason is what gives our lives meaning and purpose. We, too, are being *led* somewhere by Somebody for some reason.

Finally, your study group can take comfort in the fact that Exodus is a story about God's self-disclosure. God wants to be known. It may not always seem that way. God is often hidden. Even for Israel this was true. But God is also revealed. God shows up! God shows up in the burning bush (individual experience) and God shows up in the tabernacle (corporate experience). God shows up in the negotiations with Pharaoh (politics) and God shows up at the Red Sea (nature) where there are no negotiations. God shows up in the law and God shows up in the wilderness. Exodus is about a God who shows up! (Or perhaps we should say it is a story about God teaching us how to "show up." God has always been there!) We believe that one of the times God shows up is when we come together and study the Word and share with one another.

It perhaps goes without saying that if we limit our reading of Exodus merely to a search for some new leadership tricks we will miss the point. Notice God's leadership style. God leads in a crisis. God has a vision of where things are going. God works through resistance. God brings good out of bad. God builds a leadership team, makes the rules and helps us to learn from our mistakes.

Hopefully, I've "hooked" you on the clothesline on which we'll hang our reading of Exodus. There are other ways to read Exodus, but it should be interesting to look at the story through the eyes of leadership and to glean some key biblical principles.

Before you begin, you might scan the entire book of Exodus. It may help to get a quick overview of the story. The following outline is taken from *The Westminster Guide to the Books of the Bible*:²

Exodus				
The Lord Rescues Israel. Makes a Covenant with Them, and Gives Them the Law				
<i>"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. . . Now therefore, if you. . . keep my covenant. . . you shall be for me a priestly kingdom" (19:4–6).</i>				
Redemption: The Lord, through Moses, Rescues Israel.			Responsibility: Israel Is to Keep the Covenant and Law.	
<p>1 The Lord Prepares and Calls Moses</p> <p>The baby Moses is rescued, 1:1–2:10</p> <p>Moses flees to Midian, 2:11–25</p> <p>There God reveals the sacred name and calls Moses, 3–4</p>	<p>5 The Lord, through Moses, Persuades Pharaoh to Release Israel</p> <p>God sends plagues on Israel's masters, 5–11</p> <p>The tenth plague forces their release, and the Passover is instituted, 12–12</p>	<p>14 The Lord Leads Israel through the sea to Sinai</p> <p>The Lord rescues them from pharaoh at the sea, 14–15</p> <p>God feeds and leads them, in spite of rebellion, 16–18</p>	<p>19 The Lord Institutes the Covenant and Its Law</p> <p>The Lord speaks at Sinai, 19</p> <p>Gives the Ten Commandments, 20</p> <p>The laws of the Covenant Code, 21–23</p> <p>The Covenant is ratified by the people, the elders, and Moses, 24</p>	<p>25 The Lord Makes Provision for Proper Worship</p> <p>God gives direction for the ark and the tabernacle, 25–31</p> <p>Instead, the people worship the golden calf, 32</p> <p>The covenant has to be renewed, 33–35</p> <p>Now the tabernacle and the ark are made, 36–40</p>
<p>Author: Traditionally Moses, but actually from various sources, spanning centuries</p> <p>Theme: The Lord is the Deliverer of Israel; therefore Israel is to keep its covenant with God.</p> <p>Special Significance: The themes of redemption, covenant response, and law, as introduced especially in Exodus, are basic to all the rest of the Bible.</p> <p>Best-known Passage: The Ten Commandments (20:1-17)</p>				

2. William H. Ramsay, *The Westminster Guide to the Books of the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), p. 40.

Stay curious as you read this book. Dig for the universal themes. Take notes on how God behaves, how humanity behaves, and the outcomes.

How in the world are you going to get a group of busy men to come together to study the Book of Exodus? I think the question is, "How could we *not* study it?"

Be careful—you might get hooked!

Some Additional Helps

The only materials necessary for leading this study are Bibles for all the group members and this study guide. Here, however, are a few commentaries that may be helpful:

Terrence E. Tretheim, *Exodus: Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991)

Walter Brueggemann, "Exodus," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 1:675n

H.L. Ellison, *Exodus: The Daily Study Bible Series* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982)

For the Larger Church

Small group ministries are quickly becoming a way of life for larger churches. Larger churches have the challenge of linking a wide variety of people together in intimate settings. This study is designed to help you do that. Baby boomers who are returning to the church (or coming for the first time) are looking for ways to connect. The Men's Bible Study helps make the connection.

Many larger church adult Sunday school formats are moving to five- to seven-week elective classes. This seven-week study fits perfectly in an elective format. Form a small group or use this study as an elective. Either way, this study series is packaged to meet your needs.

For the Smaller Church

The Men's Bible Study series will work well for smaller churches that want to find new ways to do "old things." You likely have an established men's Bible class. They may want to try this series, or you could target a group of up to twelve men who are not currently attending Sunday school. Personally invite them to commit to a seven-week series. After the fourth or fifth session, recontract for seven more weeks. If you have dropouts, recruit new members for the next study. The seven-week format provides you a means to be "invitational" and to reach out to prospective as well as inactive members.

one

Born Out of **CRISIS**

Exodus 1—2

Principle #1: Leadership Is Born Out of Crisis

To the leader(s):

- 1. If this is the first time the men have been together as a group, take a few minutes to allow each man to give his name and to make a one-sentence statement about his expectations for the series.*
- 2. As leader, you may want to review the introductory pages of this study booklet before beginning the first session.*
- 3. You may begin the session either by asking participants to read the following or by summarizing it for the group.*

Introduction

We know about crisis. Crisis is that thing that comes to interrupt the way things are supposed to be. Sometimes you can live in a state of crisis, like slavery, and it becomes the norm. Other times, crisis is momentary. It comes and it goes.

The Bible is full of crisis. We hardly get started before we run into the Adam and Eve crisis. Cain killed Abel. There was the Flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah. Jacob cheated Esau out of his birthright. Nothing went right.

If we have the idea that the human race used to be in better shape, perhaps we should reread our Scriptures! Crisis has been the rule, not the exception.

To top it off, God's chosen people became slaves in Egypt. That's not where they were supposed to be. Jacob's sons sold their brother, Joseph, into slavery to the Egyptians. Later, during a famine, all the tribes entered Egypt as slaves due to Joseph's favorable position with the Pharaoh. Being a slave was better than dying of starvation (Genesis 47:19-26).

The initial crisis of Exodus is slavery. They "groaned under their slavery" (Exodus 2:23). They weren't where they were supposed to be. The slavery issue of Exodus can be seen as a microcosm of the more universal human condition. In that sense, it is no longer "they" but "we" who are not where we're supposed to be. Slavery is that place outside God's will for human life. Have you ever been there? I'd be surprised if anyone in the group says No.

That's *our* crisis—the place of slavery—wherever it may be. For each of us it's a different place. For some folks, *Egypt* is a marriage or an affair. For others, it's an addiction. For some it's just a misspent life, chasing the wrong gods. For others it's a career ladder. Racism, classism, ageism, and sexism are all places of slavery. *Slavery* is any human condition in which we are not where we're supposed to be. We "groan" under our slavery.

It is out of this context that leadership arises. Leadership is one of God's many gifts to us when we are in slavery. Leadership says, "We're getting ready to leave here!" Leadership says, "This crisis does not define who we are." Leadership looks past the crisis to the future. *Leadership is born out of crisis!*

Exercise A: What's The Story?

Exodus begins with Joseph "already in Egypt" (1:5). Let's find out where we are in the bigger picture and get everyone on board.

Arrange the following events in the correct sequence. (Write the correct order in the blanks provided.)

The Lord became sorry that he made humankind (Genesis 6:6).

The Creation Story (easy!) _____

The Covenant with Abraham _____

Noah _____

The birth of Isaac _____

Cain and Abel _____

The birth of Jacob and Esau _____

Joseph sold into slavery _____

Jacob has 12 sons _____

Jacob and sons go to Egypt _____

Isaac blesses Jacob _____

Now, go around the group and collectively get the correct order. Don't be embarrassed if you make mistakes—we're getting the cobwebs out!

Exercise B: What Is Slavery?

We can study the issues in Exodus solely as history or we can also see them as paradigms. Stephen R. Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, writes, "The word *paradigm* comes from the Greek. It was originally a scientific term, and is more commonly used today to mean a model, theory, perception, assumption, or frame of reference."¹

If the story of Israel was just a one-time historical event, it has little use to us. As a paradigm, their slavery represents any such human condition—then or now. The question becomes, "What is slavery?"

Make a list of what you consider to be the top ten crises of our time. Rank them 1 to 10 (1 being most severe; 10 being least severe). Be ready to share your list with the group.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

(Have each member first read their entire list—without comments. Then discuss items in common and the reasons behind your list.)

Exercise C: Is the Modern Church in a Crisis?

John H. Leith, in his book *From Generation to Generation*, writes, "Today in the industrialized West the church is at grave risk." The thesis of his book is "that the primary reasons for the decline of churches are to be found within the community of faith itself ... "² The following characteristics of our society are listed as being most influential at putting the modern church at risk:

1. Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 23.

2. John H. Leith, *From Generation to Generation* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), pp. 19-20.

(As a group, discuss how you see the following as "at-risk" elements for the church. Give an example for each one. In what way is the church in a crisis?)

1. Contemporary society living in the present moment

2. Secularity

3. Pluralism

4. Mobility

5. The pervasive influence of the mass media

6. The scientific, technological character of society

Or, instead of Exercise C:

Personal Reflection

This exercise is for you to do on your own. You may choose to do this at home or somewhere outside the group. The members of your group may choose to share some of their personal reflections as a group.

(The leader(s) may want to play some taped music during this exercise.)

Where is your personal slavery? Who/what has (or has had) you in captivity?

How did you get there? What were the "lures?"

What has been the number one crisis in your life up to this moment?

Can you write a brief prayer to God about your crisis? Tell God where you are/were. Identify the place of your slavery.

Conclusion

Did We Learn Anything?

Have each man share one brief insight that he gleaned from today's lesson. Insight is a precious gift. Hopefully we all received at least one new thought!

You may also want to end with a prayer of thanksgiving and mention those your group is aware of who are in crisis today. Thank everyone for coming. We're off!

Afterword

In pastoral counseling, most people come into the sessions wanting relief from whatever it is that is causing them pain. Pain is a bad thing. After a while the pain may take on more value. Our pain (crisis) is a signal that something is wrong. What if we had no such signal? What if we didn't know something were wrong? If that were the case, we'd inflict more pain on ourselves and on others.

Pain or crisis can be a time of great learning and growth. It can be an opportunity for change and new life. It is in our crises that most of us become more loving, more empathetic, more gracious. It is in our crises that we most clearly experience God.

Looking Ahead

Next week we'll be looking at *Principle #2: Leadership Is Empowered by a Vision*. Read about the call of Moses in Exodus 3-4. Be familiar with it.

Empowered by A VISION

Exodus 2:23—4:17

Principle #2: Leadership Is Empowered by a Vision

Introduction

May be summarized by the leader(s) or read individually by the group.

God initiates most of the action in Exodus. God has the future in mind. God knows where things are going. God calls Moses. God deals with Pharaoh. God opens the sea. God knows where we're going and how we're going to get there. What a relief!

Today's lesson is about *vision*. The vision, for Christians, is lodged within the mind/will of God. Vision begins there. It is God's idea to share vision with human leadership. God chooses to use human instruments to flesh out the plan, then shares the vision with us!

We can assume that God doesn't need human leadership. In fact, human leadership is probably a hindrance to God. Even so, God chooses to share leadership with us. We get to participate with God in God's business. Notice I said "get to," not "have to." It is an opportunity and a privilege.

God calls humans to leadership positions and then empowers them for the task. Almost every leader in the Bible was not qualified for the job at the time he or she was called. The gift of God was their empowerment for the task. God empowers leadership with a *vision!*

What a rare privilege! We get to *see* what God *sees*. We participate with God in God's business. We're working alongside God—the Maker of heaven and earth. We're not left to design a plan. We have *a vision*, a future, from God.

The Scriptures remind us, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18, KJV).

Our task today will be to study the vision in Exodus. We will also explore our understanding of God's vision for us. Remember, leadership is empowered by a vision.

Exercise A: What's The Story?

1. Read Exodus 2:23-4:17. This is a lengthy passage. Choose one of the following ways to read it:
 - have one person read it aloud
 - have each person read a paragraph aloud
 - have people read it silently
 - play a tape of it (get a copy of the Bible on tape)

2. Let's find out who does what. Allow time for each person to comb over the passage and fill in the chart below. Mark down God's activity (e.g., "heard their groaning"). Note Moses' activity (e.g., "was keeping the flock"). Record Israel's activity (e.g., "cried out"). This will help you to get the story down cold. When everyone is finished, share results.

God's Activity

Moses' Activity

Israel's Activity

It becomes clear that God is initiating the activity. Israel is the target. Moses and Aaron (leadership) are the vehicles. The vision comes from God.

Exercise B: What Is the Covenant?

Exodus 2:24—25 says, "God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them."

Since the Covenant is mentioned in Exodus, let's turn back to Genesis 12:1—3 and read the Covenant for ourselves. (Remember that the Covenant is stated in

Genesis 12. Twelve is a key biblical number: 12 tribes of Israel, 12 disciples, etc.) The Covenant appears to be the basis for the future.

On the lines below, break down the Covenant into the various promises God makes. You should find eight promises. Write out the phrases from Genesis 12:1-3.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

Exodus 2:24—25 says, "[God] remembered his covenant with Abraham ... and God took notice of them [Israel]." The Covenant is the bedrock of the Old Testament. God sticks by the Covenant; God sticks by us. From the Covenant springs forth the vision for the future. God will do what God says God will do. The future belongs to God.

Exercise C: What Is Our Vision?

Remember Proverbs 29:18: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (KJV).

God appears to be working overtime to ensure that humanity does not perish. This theme is a thread that runs from Genesis to Revelation.

Perishing is the antithesis to the will of God. (Remember John 3:16?) If the Bible shows us anything, it shows us the Maker of Heaven and Earth with *a vision* for the future—a future that does not include *perishing* in its agenda.

(To the leader(s): Let the group randomly select at least three of the following questions to discuss as a group. The group can "fire at will" at whatever question strikes their fancy.)

1. Do you think God communicates vision to all types of human leadership? (i.e., political, educational, medical, etc.) Explain your answer.

2. Do you think God has a vision for the modern church? Explain.

3. Does your particular church have a vision of where it is going? If so, what is that vision? If not, why not?

4. Who would you identify as leaders with a vision in your church?

5. What's the difference between God's vision and our "good ideas"?

6. How would you explain God's *vision* for humanity in light of God's *justice*? (See Genesis 3:13-24.) How can we have a future when we are condemned by our sin?

Or, instead of Exercise C:

Personal Reflection

(This exercise is for you to do on your own, or the group may choose to share their personal reflections with each other.)

Write out your vision statement. Where do you think you will be in five years? What are you working toward? What do you envision for your family? your work? your church? What vision do you have for yourself? Put in writing what *you see*.

Family Vision:

Work Vision:

Church Vision:

Self Vision:

Conclusion

Did We Learn Anything?

To the leader(s): Ask the youngest man to lead off, followed by the next youngest, up to the oldest.

What one significant insight did you gain from today's lesson? Why did that particular thought strike a chord with you? Share with the group.

Close with saying the Lord's Prayer together. Listen to the words. They are full of vision!

Afterword

R. Robert Cueni has written an excellent book entitled *The Vital Church Leader*. In Chapter Two he writes,

The Australians incorporated this determining dimension of vision into their nation's coat of arms. It pictures an emu, a large flightless bird, standing with a kangaroo. These animals were chosen because they share a common characteristic—neither can move backwards. If an emu, with its three-toed feet, tries to go backward, it falls over. The kangaroo is similarly handicapped by its long tail. Thus, these animals depict the spirit of Australia—never backward, always forward.

Of course this coat of arms does more than merely describe the Australian spirit. It helps to *determine* it as well. People who believe that they cannot move backward are more likely to value moving forward.

Vision shapes behavior as well as describes it.¹

George Barna, in his book, *The Power of Vision* writes,

In every one of the growing, healthy (i.e. user friendly) churches I have studied, a discernible link has been forged between the spiritual and numerical growth of those congregations and the existence, articulation and widespread ownership of God's vision for ministry by the leaders and participants of the church. Conversely, visionless congregations fail to experience spiritual and numerical growth. Rarely in my research do I find such overt, black-and-white relationships.²

Looking Ahead

Next week we'll be looking at *Principle #3: Leadership Overcomes Resistance*. Before the next session, read Exodus 5—13.

1. R. Robert Cueni, *The Vital Church Leader* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), pp. 40-41.

2. George Barna, *The Power of Vision* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1992), p. 12.

Overcoming RESISTANCE

Exodus 5—12

Principle #3: Leadership Overcomes Resistance

Introduction

May be summarized by the leader(s) or read individually by the group.

Pharaoh is a huge figure in Exodus. Everybody knows about Pharaoh. He's the guy who *resisted* God! It is to Pharaoh that God says, "Let my people go ..." (Exodus 5:1). Pharaoh responds, "Who is the LORD, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and I will not let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2).

Famous last words! He may not have known God, but he was about to meet him. I've learned to be careful about saying what I *won't* do.

Leadership overcomes resistance. That may appear obvious, but sometimes we are prone to forget it. We give up when we should dig in.

The sexton of our church gave me the following poem one day. We had been discussing how difficult it is to hang in through the challenges. We both found some encouragement in these words of an unknown author:

Don't Quit

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,
When the funds are low, and the debts are high,
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is queer with its twists and turns,
As every one of us sometimes learns.
And many a failure turns about
When he might have won had he stuck it out.
Don't give up though the pace seems slow,
you may succeed with another blow.

Success is failure turned inside out.
The silver tint off the clouds of doubt.
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems so far.
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit.
It's when things seem worse
That you must not quit.

Today's lesson is about leadership overcoming resistance. Hang in there!

Exercise A: What's the Story?

Israel is still in Egypt groaning "under their slavery" (Exodus 2:23). Nothing has changed . . . or has it? They have no idea what God is about to do.

When asked to let the people go, Pharaoh did the opposite. He increased their work (5:7-9). Wrong move!

Moses turns to God and asks, in effect, "What's happening? Things aren't getting better—they're getting worse!" (see 5:22-23). (A typical leadership prayer!) Here's where things turn around:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh: Indeed, by a mighty hand he will let them go ... (6:1).

As a group, scan Exodus 6-12. At random, call out the plagues God put on Pharaoh and his people. There are ten. List them below:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Discuss for a moment your reaction to an all-loving God using plagues against the Egyptians. How do you think modern Egyptians feel when they read Exodus? Do you think God really did this, or were the plagues just natural phenomena ascribed to God?

Exercise B: What Is "Resistance"?

How many times in our passage for today do we read,

"Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them . . ." (7:13).

Walter Brueggemann writes, ". . . action for liberation leads to greater repression, and greater repression produces more intense resolve for liberation. In that process, it is never known who will be the first to lose nerve. Moreover, the very sign itself becomes the means whereby the hardening is accomplished, as the very gesture toward liberation is what evokes more repression—i.e., hardening."¹

Surely God wasn't hardening Pharaoh's heart on the one hand and working toward liberation of the people on the other! It is more likely that Pharaoh's heart was hardened as God persisted to free the people.

Hard hearts are a definite problem. There's a load of *resistance* within a hard heart. A hard heart is non-receptive. A hard heart is opposed to God, bent toward the self.

Do you see resistance to God in our day?

Below you will find a list of contemporary issues. They are all controversial. As a group, go through the list and spend a few minutes on each issue. Do you see resistance to God in any of these issues? If so, how?

- abortion • sexism
- premarital sex • AIDS
- ageism • materialism
- homosexuality • racism
- euthanasia • classism

Can you relate to Pharaoh's resistance to God?

Exercise C: What is Our Resistance?

To the leader(s): Have the group break off in pairs. Spread out.

Interview your partner. What does he think about the following questions? Record his responses. When you are finished being the "interviewer," then you become the "interviewee."

1. Walter Brueggemann, "The Book of Exodus," *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), vol. I, p. 739.

1. Do you see "hard hearts" (resistance) to God in our culture? If so, give three examples:

- _____
- _____
- _____

2. Is there a particular issue in the church (universal) today in which you sense God's people displaying a "hard heart" toward God? Explain.

3. Where in your own life do you sense your resistance to God?

Or, instead of Exercise C:

Personal Reflection

Provide a 3" x 5" card for each member of the group. Have each man write down the main resistance he sees in his own life that hinders him from growing in his relationship with God. Please don't put your name on the card.

Now have each person place their card on the floor in the center of the group. After all cards are on the floor, each man is to pick up someone else's card. They should not pick up their own card.

You now have someone else's card with their number one resistance to God on it. Can you identify with it? Let each person talk about how they may or may not identify with the resistance on the card.

Conclusion

Did We Learn Anything?

Exodus teaches us that God overcomes resistance. Do you perceive God to be moving against resistance in our modern day? If so, how? Briefly discuss this as a group to bring closure to today's lesson.

You might ask a member of the group to close with prayer or read in unison the following prayer:

Gracious God, forgive us for our foolish ways. Too often our hearts are hardened against You. We want You to overcome all of our obstacles but we fail to see the obstacle within us. Free us from our bondage so that others may see Your wonderful works and come to worship You—the Author and the Finisher of our faith. Through Christ we pray. Amen.

Afterword

The famous psychiatrist, Sigmund Freud, discovered that "patients who requested that he relieve their distress resisted revealing their thoughts and feelings, resisted his interpretations, and resisted exploring their relationship to him."²

Those in leadership expect resistance. Resistance is normal. In fact, leadership itself might be a part of the resistance. Not only did Pharaoh resist God, but so did Moses ["I have never been eloquent . . . but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (4:10)], and the Israelites themselves, ("What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt?" (14:11b)).

The secular world in which we live is not the only resistance to God. We in the church are often locked in resistance. We can be a part of the problem.

God has always had to deal with the resistance of humanity—from Adam and Eve to the seven churches in Revelation. The good news is that God does deal with it. The leadership of God does not yield to our resistance. God knows where we're going and God is determined to get there! This is our faith. Thanks be to God!

In the Scots Confession we find the following section titled "The Revelation of the Promise":

We constantly believe that God, after the fearful and horrible departure of man from his obedience, did seek Adam again, call upon him, rebuke and convict him of his sin, and in the end made unto him a most joyful promise, that "the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent," that is, that he should destroy the works of the devil. This promise was repeated and made clearer from time to time; it was embraced with joy, and most constantly received by all the faithful from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to David, and so onwards to the incarnation of Christ Jesus; all (we mean the believing fathers under the law) did see the joyful day of Christ Jesus, and did rejoice.³

Looking Ahead

Read Exodus 12:37—17:16 in preparation for next week's lesson, in which we'll explore *Principle #4: Leadership Hangs On in the Wilderness!*

2. Carol M. Anderson and Susan Stewart, *Mastering Resistance* (New York: Guilford Press, 1983), p. 5.

3. From "The Scots Confession," in *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, Part I, *Book of Confessions* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, PC(USA), 1994), 3.04.

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Surviving IN THE WILDERNESS Exodus 12:37—17:16

Principle #4: Leadership Hangs On in the Wilderness

Introduction

May be summarized by the leader(s) or read individually by the group.

Today we come to the wilderness! What a powerful place the wilderness is. What a classroom of spiritual education we find in the wilderness. Almost everyone has been to the wilderness; if not, they'll soon be there.

The wilderness is that place where you aren't where you were, nor are you where you are going to be. We sort of lose our identity out there in the wilderness. We forget who we are.

We're no longer slaves in Egypt nor are we yet residents of the Promised Land. We're somewhere in between.

We need a particular type of leadership when we're in the wilderness. It's one thing to be a leader in Egypt. It's another thing to be a leader in the Promised Land. It's a completely different thing to be a leader in the wilderness!

Today's lesson is applicable to churches, individuals, businesses, families, communities, and anyone else who is moving through life. We can leave our Egypts, our places of oppression, and we can move toward our Promised Land, that place of healing and wholeness. In between lies the wilderness! Even there, God shall seek us out.

Leadership hangs on in the wilderness!

Exercise A: What's the Story?

Lets's make sure that we know the story of the wilderness. Spend a few minutes reading to yourself the selected passages below. Beside each one there is space for you to summarize that text.

Exodus 12:29—32 _____

Exodus 13:17—22 _____

Exodus 14:10—31 _____

Exodus 15:1—18 _____

Exodus 15:22—27 _____

Exodus 16:1—21 _____

Exodus 20:1-17 _____

Exercise B: What Is Wilderness Leadership

As mentioned earlier, it takes a particular type of leadership when we're out there in the wilderness. One of the greatest challenges of leadership in the wilderness (those places of transition) is the tendency of the group to complain! Some would call it whining. Others might label it fear. Whatever it is, it's a challenge for leadership. Listen to it:

"Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? . . . Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians?'" (14:11a, 12a).

And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" (15:24)

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt . . . you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (16:2-3).

The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink. . . . the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" (17:2a, 3b)

To the leader(s): Match the oldest man with the youngest man, the next oldest to the next youngest, etc. Break off in pairs.

Having listened to all the complaining in the wilderness, address the following questions with your partner. Record each other's responses.

Do you agree or disagree with the Israelites' complaints?

What do you think makes Moses so confident in the face of such challenges? Identify his leadership strengths. What did he do right?

What was God's response to the people's complaints? What kind of leadership does God offer?

Do you see a transferable lesson from their story to our story? Is there a lesson about leadership for us to embrace? Think of an application.

Exercise C: Does God Provide Leadership in our Wilderness?

As a group, can you think of times when people are between "Egypt and the Promised Land"? Think of times of significant transition when folks might have to go through the wilderness. Can you name twelve? (There are some answers on the bottom . . . but don't cheat!)

Answers:

divorce, grief, move to new town, job change, sickness, mergers, church problems, empty nest, retirement. . .

What type of leadership do we need when we're in the wilderness? List the characteristics you think are needed in wilderness leadership (use Moses as a model).

Discuss these as a group. Do you know anyone who has these traits?

Or, instead of Exercise C:

Personal Reflection

In Exodus, the wilderness is a corporate place. Even so, individuals go to the wilderness. When have you been there? Take a few minutes to reflect on your personal wilderness.

The situation:

Who was there with you?

How was God present?

How did it change you?

(Individuals in the group may or may not choose to share their responses.)

Conclusion

Did We Learn Anything?

Go around the group and have each man share one new insight he gleaned from today's lesson.

Close with prayer. Ask for prayer requests from the group. Name people who you know to be in the wilderness. Pray for them. Pray for the leadership in wilderness. Remember with thanksgiving that God meets us in our wilderness.

Afterword

Terence E. Fretheim writes,

Yet even in the wilderness God is responsive to the needs of these complaining people. God provides what the context cannot. The protests are answered, the cries are heard, quite undeservedly. Deliverance comes, but not in being removed from the wilderness. A table is spread in the very presence of the enemy (cf. Ps. 23:5). There is a gift of food where the resources are only ephemeral. There is a gift of water where only rocks abound. There is a gift of healing where the pain never ends. The movement from death to life occurs *within* the very experience of godforsakenness. Death is transformed into life from *within* a death-filled context. A sanctuary is provided, but in the wilderness.)

Looking Ahead

Read Exodus 18:1–27 and Numbers 11:1–25 in preparation for next week's lesson on *Principle #5: Leadership Builds a Team*.

1. Terence E. Fretheim, from "Exodus," in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 172.

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Building A TEAM

Exodus 18:1-27

Leadership Principle #5: Leadership Builds a Team!

Introduction

May be summarized by the leader(s) or read individually by the group.

There was only one thing in Creation that was "not good." It was "not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Everything else was fine, but it's not O.K. to be alone, to be disconnected or isolated, to carry the weight of the world on your shoulders . . . *alone*. Not good! It never has been good—it never will be good.

That's a powerful perspective God held concerning the relationships that would exist in this new world. We weren't built for solo flights. By design, humans need community. The less community one has, the less human one may feel.

Even God does not choose to work alone. The Scriptures show us a God who is initiating relationships. God chooses to be in relationship!

God chooses to share leadership with us. Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Aaron, Joshua, the judges and the kings, the prophets and the priests were all established by divine decree. It was God's idea to call forth, envision, and equip human leadership as partners with God.

If God chooses to operate in community, how much more do you think we need to operate in community? Remember, it is "not good" to be alone!

Today's lesson is about team-building. They didn't call it that, but that's what they were doing. When Moses burns out, the first thing God does is surround him with a team of leadership! Leadership builds a team!

Exercise A: What's the Story?

Allow each person a few minutes to read Exodus 18:13-27. Using the medical model below, use phrases from the story to answer the following questions:

Who is the identified patient? Who has the problem?

What is the patient's presenting problem? (signs and symptoms)

What is the diagnosis? (the actual problem)

What is the treatment plan? (suggested solutions)

What is the prognosis? (projected outcome)

Share your findings with the group.

Exercise B: What Do You Think?

Leadership that works alone is in trouble. That is true of leadership whether it's in the factory, the church, the school, or the home. We weren't built to fly solo.

Below are some quotes from various writers on the subject of leadership. Have a different member of the group read each quote aloud. After each quote, share your reactions as a group. What do you think? Do you agree/disagree? Would you add/subtract from these quotes?

If the laity are to be effective in the world, their pastors must be effective equippers and sustainers for them in the church.'

1. William H. Willimon, *Clergy and Laity Burnout* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 62.

Exercise C: Who Is On Your Team

[A]ny leader can maintain his or her position by taking a rigid, dogmatic stand or by cutting himself or herself off, but from that moment on, the leader is no longer a leader, only a head.²

North American religion is basically a consumer religion. Americans see God as a product that will help them to live well, or to live better. Having seen that, they do what consumers do, shop for the best deal. Pastors, hardly realizing what we are doing, start making deals, packaging the God-product so that people will be attracted to it and then presenting it in ways that will beat out the competition.³

[M]ost lay people are already doing what they assumed they were supposed to do—working hard in their jobs and trying to make their communities better. They are surprised and hurt to find that their leaders consider those expressions of faithfulness somehow wanting.⁴

The gifts he [God] gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

—Ephesians 4:11–13

There's an interesting little story in Exodus 17:8–15 about Israel's battle with Amalek.

Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands grew weary; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; so his hands were steady until the sun set (Exodus 17:11–12).

Leadership that operates alone will fail. Leadership that operates on a team will prevail. Leadership often needs someone to help hold up their hands!

Who holds your hands up when you're facing your enemies? Have you ever fulfilled the role of Aaron or Hur in holding someone up during one of their life's battles?

To the leader(s): Allow the group to choose one of the following exercises. If time permits, the group may want to attempt both.

a-1) Make a list of those persons in your life who have been a significant support for you. (They may be biblical or nonbiblical, living or deceased.)

a-2) Write a one-paragraph thank-you note to one of the above people. Tell them what they mean to you. What would have happened had they not been there for you?

2. Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), p. 230.

3. Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 35-36.

4. Loren B. Mead, *The Once and Future Church* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1991), p. 36.

b-1) Now make a list of those people you think would list *you* as one of their support people.

b-2) Write a brief paragraph telling one of the above people what it has meant to you to be a support for them.

Share your selections and responses with the group.

Or, instead of a-1 through b-2:

Personal Reflection

In his book *Ministry Burnout*, John Sanford writes,

Going on a vacation may not be the answer because the vacation may turn out to be an empty, fruitless, or even spiritually dangerous time. The word "vacation" and the word "vacate" both come from the Latin word *vacare* which means "to be empty." For some people a vacation may be simply that: a time of emptiness.⁵

1. In what ways do you try to *get away from* or *vacate* your work? Do they work?

2. Have you attempted to build a team of support around you in your life? If not, where would you start?

3. Are you a part of the leadership team in your church? Do you provide support for the clergy of your church?

5. John A. Sanford, *Ministry Burnout* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982), p. 28.

Conclusion

Did We Learn Anything?

By now you've got the hang of this. Have each man share one new insight gained from today's lesson.

Perhaps you can close with each man offering a brief prayer of thanksgiving today for someone (by name) who has been a support for him. After each man offers his prayer, have the group respond, "Thank you, Lord." The leader can close the prayer with his own prayer and a joyful, "Amen."

Afterword

The concept of team leadership is certainly not new. It's at least as old as Moses! In the New Testament it is understood as the priesthood of all believers. We're all on the team!

Wallace M. Alston writes:

The priesthood of all believers, therefore, does not only mean that each person is his or her own priest. It means that each person stands immediately and directly before God, and must answer for the stewardship of life. But it also means that each person is his or her neighbor's priest. In very personal terms, it means that the minister is your priest and that you are the minister's priest; that you are my priest and that I am your priest; that we are God's representatives to each other, and that we are each other's representatives before God.⁶

Leadership doesn't just fall out of the sky. Leadership is developed. A fundamental task of all leadership is to build a team. We don't work well alone. Lyle E. Schaller gives us some pointers on motivating a team of leadership:

1. One method of motivating people is to provide an immediate feedback evaluating performance.

2. The use of precisely defined terminal dates also is helpful in securing commitments from tightly scheduled and very busy people.

3. Experience strongly suggests that attendance at meetings will be higher if people . . .

- a. leave feeling that something has been accomplished
- b. enjoy themselves . . .
- c. learn something useful . . .

6. Wallace M. Alston, *The Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), p. 47.

4. The chances of securing an affirmative response . . . will be greatly enhanced if the person asked . . .

- a. feels self-confident about accepting the responsibility,
- b. feels competent to carry out the assignment,
- c. is assured of the reinforcement of some type of support groups and knows he or she will not be left in complete isolation.⁷

Someone gave me the following article years ago. The author is unknown.

A Lesson from the Geese

1. As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird following. By flying in a V formation, the whole flock adds 71 percent flying range than if each bird flew alone.

Lesson: People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going quicker and easier when they are traveling on the thrust of one another.

2. Whenever a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to fly alone, and quickly gets back in formation to take advantage of the "lifting power" of the bird immediately in front.

Lesson: If we have as much sense as a goose, we will stay in formation with those who are headed where we want to go.

3. When the lead goose gets tired, it rotates back into the formation and another goose flies at the point position.

Lesson: It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks and sharing leadership—interdependent with each other.

4. The geese in formation honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

Lesson: We need to make sure our honking from behind is encouraging, not something less helpful.

5. When a goose gets sick or wounded or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow him down to help and protect him. They stay with him until he is either able to fly again or dies. Then they launch out on their own, with another formation, or to catch up with the flock.

Lesson: If we have as much sense as the geese, we'll stand by each other like that.

Looking Ahead

Next week we'll be looking at *Principle #6: Leadership Makes the Rules*. Read Exodus 19—20. You might also peruse chapters 21-24.

7. Lyle E. Schaller, *Effective Church Planning* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), pp. 157-159.

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Making the RULES

Exodus 19—20

Principle #6: Leadership Makes the Rules

Introduction

May be summarized by the leader(s) or read individually by the group.

When you see a police car do you automatically take your foot off the accelerator? I do! Something about that police car makes me nervous—even if I'm not speeding! I must have done something wrong—I don't know what, but something! I slow down my car and speed up my heart!

The police car is a symbol of *the law*. If I'm speeding, then that symbol is an unwelcome sight. If someone just broke into my home, I can't wait to see that police car! Funny how we can be so two-faced.

The focus of today's lesson is the law (the rules). We have a police car with all its lights and sirens on right here in the middle of Exodus.

Is this a good thing or a bad thing? Is *the law* given to restrict us and to thereby rob us of our freedom? If so, the law is a bad thing.

What if the law was actually a good thing? What if we were to see God giving us the law as a gift? What if the law was seen as God's initiative to protect us, to guide us, to ensure "the good life" for us? Seen in that light, the law is a blessing, a gift, a means of grace.

In leading the people, God makes the rules (laws). Effective leadership will always seek to establish the parameters that will ward off danger and defeat. Leadership can't allow everything. Everything (whatever that may be) may not be for the good of the whole. Something in *everything* has to go . . . so say the rules.

Leadership makes the rules. Rules are there to protect us. Rules keep us away from defeat. Rules make sure we get to our destination—safe and sound.

Effective leadership will always set the parameters to ward off danger and defeat. It's a good thing that leadership makes the rules!

Exercise A: What's the Story?

We've hopefully developed a pattern in this study of always checking in with the text before we go running off with our ideas.

Allow time for each person to read the following passages and summarize them in the space provided:

Exodus 19:1–6 _____

Exodus 19:10–15 _____

Exodus 19:16–25 _____

Exodus 20:2–3 _____

Exodus 20:4–6 _____

Exodus 20:7 _____

Exodus 20:8–11 _____

Exercise B: Who Makes the Rules?

A rule (or a law) is made to protect something. That something is a value of the rule/law maker(s). We protect what we value.

Our present society is riddled with ethical dilemmas. Some say it is because there is a lack of moral authority in our day. The rules/laws are up for grabs because authority is up for grabs. What one values and thus seeks to protect, another rejects. Who is to say what is right?

For this exercise, you will need to cluster yourselves in groups of three. Each person in your group is to play one of the following roles (the leader might put these labels on name tags prior to the session):

- *The Conservative
- *The Liberal
- *The Moderate

(The definition of these labels may be vague, but go with your understanding of them.)

It might be advisable for you to take on a role that is *not* in reality your normal position. In doing so, you'll have to think the opposite or walk in your opponent's shoes.

After deciding who will play what role, choose one of the following issues and have a brief (and non-violent) debate amongst your threesome. (Guidelines for the debate are below.) Stay in your role!

- | | |
|---------------|---------------------|
| Abortion | Euthanasia |
| Safe Sex | Liquor-by-the-drink |
| Homosexuality | Capital Punishment |
| The Sabbath | Legalized Gambling |
| Adultery | Our issue is _____ |

During the debate keep in mind:

1. What is "the rule" on this issue from your perspective?
2. Who makes the rule? (for the conservative? for the moderate? for the liberal?)
3. From your perspective, who/what are you protecting?
4. What value is behind the rule?
5. For whom is the rule "good news?"
6. For whom is the rule "bad news?"
7. Is there a "Christian position" on the issue?

Exodus 20:12 _____

Exodus 20:13 _____

Exodus 20:14 _____

Exodus 20:15 _____

Exodus 20:16 _____

Exodus 20:17 _____

Before you move on, notice how many of the commandments are directed toward God (vertical faith), and how many are directed toward one's neighbor (horizontal faith). Note the balance. As a group, list the commandments under their appropriate category.

God	Neighbor
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Exercise C: Rule-Breaker or Rule Keeper?

To the leader(s): Come back together as a group. Allow the group to choose one of the following exercises. If time permits, the group may elect to do both.

Role Play

You need one person in the group to volunteer to be the "rule-breaker" and one person to be the "rule-keeper." (The leader(s) might prepare labels or tags with these titles on them ahead of time.) The rest of the group becomes the "Heavenly Jury." Set the room up in a courtroom fashion. The leader(s) can be "the Judge." Your job is to keep the role play moving along.

Situation:

Both the rule-breaker and the rule-keeper have died on the same day. They are now at the Heavenly Courtroom. The question is whether they can enter Eternal Life. Have jury members question the rule-breaker and the rule-keeper on their qualifications to enter. Remember to review the Ten Commandments, etc., in your interview. As a jury, push each one on their positions and come to a verdict.

Analysis:

The leader(s) can lead the group through the following.

1. Let's first hear from the jury. What difficulties did you face holding onto the rules? Did you find yourself on one side or the other? What are your overall reactions to the process? Why did you come to your particular verdict?
2. What role did the Judge play? What did you feel during the trial? How do you feel about the outcome? How did you feel toward the rule-breaker? How did you feel toward the rule-keeper? How did the group feel about you?
3. What was the experience like for the rule-keeper?
4. What was the experience like for the rule-breaker?
5. Did you find yourself going to the New Testament for help in this process? If so, how?
6. What, if any, help was this simulation game in gaining a better understanding of the Law given in Exodus?

Or, instead of Exercise C:

Personal Reflection

1. Is it possible for you to abide by the laws of God?
 Yes No
2. If so, how?

3. If not, what course of action do you have?

4. What is your understanding of God's justice in contrast with God's mercy? Does God expect you to do something (i.e., keep the law) that you cannot do? If you cannot do it (justice) how do you stay in a right relationship with God (mercy)?

5. What law of God could be most helpful to you right now in your life? Explain.

The group may or may not choose to share their personal reflections.

Conclusion

Did We Learn Anything?

Let's check out with each other! Have each man share at least one new insight or significant moment he experienced in today's lesson. What can we take with us out there on "the street"?

We are all "rule-breakers." God wants the best for us. New life begins with grace and grace helps us confess where we are. Close with a few moments of silent prayer for confession. After a sufficient amount of time, the leader may lead the group in praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Afterword

Ted Koppel, news anchor for ABC's *Nightline*, delivered the commencement address to the Class of 1987 at Duke University. In his remarks he said,

Our society finds truth too strong a medicine to digest undiluted . . . What Moses brought down from Mount Sinai were not the Ten Suggestions; they are Commandments. *Are*, not *were*. The sheer beauty of the Commandments is that they codify in a handful of words acceptable human behavior, not just for then or now, but for all time.¹

Looking Ahead

Next week will be our last session. Read Exodus 32—34 in preparation for *Principle #7: Leadership Learns from Its Mistakes*.

seven

Learning from MISTAKES

Exodus 32—34

Principle #7: Leadership Learns from Its Mistakes

Introduction

May be summarized by the leader(s) or read individually by the group.

No one likes to fail. The kids in my psychology class at the community college don't want to fail. The CEO of the local hospital doesn't want to fail. At 11:20 A.M. on Sunday morning when the pastor steps into the pulpit, he or she doesn't want to fail. No one wants to fail . . . but we all make mistakes.

Some mistakes are unintentional. We just don't know. We miss something or we don't pay attention to something important. Something gets past us. These are unintentional mistakes.

There are those other mistakes, however, that are intentional. We choose the wrong path. We decide to take a shortcut, to lie or to steal, or to withhold information. We set our sights on the wrong goal. We cover up. We fake it or we forsake it. Whatever it is, we intentionally go the wrong way, hoping not to get caught. But it seems that we always do!

Human leadership makes mistakes, whether unintentional or intentional. Since the '60s the American culture has learned to *distrust* leadership. "Who says they're leading us the right way?" Such a leadership crisis paralyzes the movement of the body—be it government, business, religion, or the home.

If I were in charge of evil, I would certainly target all leadership as a priority. If I could wound the leadership, then I would have crippled the entire body. No wonder leadership is so often attacked with temptation to abandon its ethics, its rules, its source of authority, the integrity of its calling. To wound leadership is to cripple the entire body!

So we conclude our study of Exodus with leadership making a mistake. The Bible is not a glossed-over fairy tale. There is a happy ending, but not yet. Effective leadership, biblical leadership, learns from its mistakes. In so doing, we do not fail but grow. That is the nature of God's grace! Leadership learns from its mistakes.

Exercise A: What's the Story?

Let's read the story like a play. Assign parts. You'll need:

Moses	Narrator
Aaron	Joshua
the Lord	People/Israel (the rest of the group)

Read Exodus 32 as your script.

After the reading, check with each other to see if anyone has any questions concerning the story or a need for clarification.

Exercise B: Can We Name the Golden Calf?

Maureena Fritz writes,

The story of the golden calf is a representative story of sin and rebellion in the face of the many favors received from the hand of God.¹

If the story of the golden calf is a "representation story of sin and rebellion," then what golden calves are there among us?

Can we name some golden calves? What are the names of the idols in our society? As a group, name them.

The leader can list all the names on a chalkboard or newsprint. Keep those names before you during the entire lesson.

1. Maureena Fritz, *The Exodus Experience: A Journey in Prayer* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 1989), p. 134.

Exercise C: Do You Learn from Your Mistakes?

Watch Moses. In his absence, things unravel. That's true in all time and places. What does Moses do? How should leadership respond to mistakes? Watch Moses. Record his actions.

Exodus 32:19 _____

Exodus 32:30 _____

Exodus 32:21 _____

Exodus 32:25—26 _____

Exodus 32:30—34 _____

What does God do? Record God's action.

Exodus 33:12—23 _____

What did the people do? Record their action.

Exodus 35:20—29 _____

Leadership faces what's wrong and makes it right. Leadership learns from its mistakes and grows as a result. Sometimes it is through our mistakes that we deepen our commitment!

Or, instead of Exercise C:

Personal Reflection

To the leader(s): You might play a cassette tape of classical music while the group spends this time in reflection.

This exercise is for you alone. Spend a few minutes reflecting on what golden calves you have erected in your life. Can you name the most significant?

Why did you turn to that idol or false god? What did you want at that time in your life?

Was there a Moses for you in your time of rebellion? Was there some leader who pointed you in the right direction? If so, who was it?

Did you manage to turn away from worshiping the wrong thing? If so, do you see certain steps in that process? What happened first? Then what?

How do you sense God responded to you during your rebellion? What was the Word of the Lord for you at that point?

What did you learn from your mistake?

Conclusion

What Did We Learn?

Today's conclusion will be a bit different. This is our last session. Let's close the study reflecting back over the time spent together. Not only have you been studying the Book of Exodus, you have been studying yourself and one another.

First, let each man turn to the man on his right and mention an attribute that he particularly appreciated in that person during this study.

Secondly, think about what you are taking away from Exodus that is most valuable to you?

Finally, if God were actually sitting in the middle of your group, what word of thanks would you offer for something you've received in this study?

The group may close with sentence prayers of thanksgiving or by praying together the Lord's Prayer. Go with what seems natural for your group, but be sure to affirm one another as we come to the end!

Afterword

The story of Exodus provides for us a wonderful paradigm. It's a story about our bondage, about our freedom, about a persistent God, about that place between bondage and the Promised Land. Through it all we learn lessons about *leadership—God's* and ours. We also learn about *fellowship!*

We read the story as modern Christians. We read the story as the Church of Jesus Christ. We identify with God's people. We look back to see how God behaves so we can look ahead with some hope of how God might still behave. We, too, need leadership.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been steadily losing members for the past twenty years. Statistics indicate a sharp rise in clergy "burn-out." Church school has drastically dropped in attendance. Today's families are stressed out with dual careers and less time to volunteer. Mobility is at an all-time high and denominational loyalty is at an all-time low. The "back door" is open, and when our youth leave the church fewer of them are returning. Many would agree that the church is in decline. We seem to be able to diagnose the problem but we struggle with a treatment plan.

A declining church needs strong leadership. When you are in the wilderness it is no time to buckle. We need God to provide leadership, to empower us with vision, to help us overcome the resistance. We need God to teach us through our mistakes, never forsaking us lest we perish in the wilderness.

The biblical principles of leadership found in Exodus are still applicable to our situation today. Their crisis is our crisis. Their hope is our hope. Their God is our God!

"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob . . . I have observed the misery of my people . . . I have heard their cry . . . I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them . . . to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey . . ." (Exodus 3:6a, 7-8a).

May it be so. May it always be so! Amen.

The Writer

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Born in 1954, Steve belongs to the so-called Baby-Boomer Generation, and has taught classes for members of this generation during the past seventeen years.

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