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February 1, 2025
Ordinary

Readings for today: [Exodus 1-4](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

The Exodus story is one of the most powerful in human history. It is the great national narrative of the Jewish people. It brought hope to millions of African-Americans living under slavery and later, segregation in the Deep South. It inspired some of our greatest music, creating a whole new genre called “negro spirituals” that we continue to sing to this day. Artists, authors, and movie producers have all found it compelling. And it continues to galvanize those who suffer in captivity and bondage around the world.

It's easy as we dive in to focus on Moses. His miraculous deliverance at birth. His attempt to deliver his people by murdering an Egyptian. His flight from Egypt. His encounter with God at the burning bush. And then his return back to his people as he takes up the mantle of leadership. Often overlooked is the courageous faith of the ordinary women who make all this possible.

First, the midwives. Shiphrah and Puah are two of the most underrated heroes in the Bible. Their faithfulness to God placed them in incredible danger and yet they refused to obey Pharaoh's command. “The midwives, however, feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live.” (Exodus 1:17 CSB) Their actions saved who knows how many children in Israel and God honored their faithfulness. “So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied and became very numerous. Since the midwives feared God, he gave them families.” (Exodus 1:20-21 CSB)

Second, the older sister. When Moses was born, his mother hid him for three months. But eventually the time came where she had to let him go. She placed him in a little basket-boat on the Nile, probably with the hope that somehow, somehow his life would be preserved. His older sister followed the boat as it floated down the river. When she saw Pharaoh's daughter discover the basket, she immediately ran up to help. Again, this is an incredible act of courage. For all she knew Pharaoh's daughter would drown her little brother right then and there and perhaps that is exactly what would have happened except for her swift actions. “Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, “Should I go and call a Hebrew woman who is nursing to nurse the boy for you? ” “Go,” Pharaoh's daughter told her. So the girl went and called the boy's mother. Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse him for me, and I will pay your wages.” So the woman took the boy and nursed him. When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, “Because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.” (Exodus 2:7-10 CSB) Not only does she save Moses but she is able to reunite him with his mother while he is being nursed! It's an incredible act of faith for such a young girl!

Third, Pharaoh's daughter. I've always wondered why she rescued Moses from the river? What motivated her to lift him out of the little basket and adopt him as her own? Did she see the same thing in Moses that his mother saw? “The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son; and she saw that he was beautiful...” (Exodus 2:2 CSB) Or did she just take pity on a helpless baby? No matter her motivations, she too was acting courageously. Defying her father's orders to save this Hebrew child. Though she did not know God, she still was used by God to play a specific role in His salvation plan for His people.

It's amazing to think about, isn't it? The string of events that led to Moses appearing before God at the burning bush? It makes me think about my own life. What simple, yet courageous acts of faith am I being called to engage in that will further the Kingdom of God in this world?

Readings for tomorrow: No readings on Sundays

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February 3, 2025
The Name

Readings for today: [Exodus 5-9](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Who is God? It's a question that has haunted the human race from the beginning. Who is God? You see this question reflected in the deep cave paintings that represent some of the earliest records. They depict scenes of worship. You see this question asked over and over again by the patriarchs in Genesis and now Moses in Exodus. Who is God? Who is this God who keeps calling to us? It's easy to forget that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob didn't know much about God. They didn't know His name. They didn't know much about His character and nature. They just knew He had chosen them. He had blessed them. He would be with them. In this way, He was not all that different than the other tribal gods who surrounded them.

Perhaps this puts Pharaoh's initial reaction to God's demand in context. "Who is the Lord that I should obey him by letting Israel go? I don't know the Lord, and besides, I will not let Israel go." (Exodus 5:2 CSB) The ancient Israelites and ancient Egyptians had no concept of an all-supreme Being. They believed the world was filled with gods and goddesses who demonstrated their power by raising up empires. The stronger the gods, the stronger their people. And among all the people in the ancient world, Egypt was by far the strongest. Therefore her gods must be the greatest. By comparison, Yahweh was the god of slaves. The god of a people who were barely a nation. The god of a group of people descended from a family of wandering Arameans. Why in the world would Pharaoh listen to such a god? Especially when Pharaoh believed himself to be a god?

Believe it or not, the main point of the Book of Exodus is not the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. It is the revelation of the divine name of God. It is the revelation of God's supremacy over all the other gods and nations on the earth. It is the revelation that Israel's God is not just one among many but One who rules over all. He is all-powerful and all-knowing. He claims every square inch of the earth as His own. He claims every person on earth as His own. And His plan is to make Himself known through a particular people. A people who have no hope and no future. The most oppressed and powerless people on earth. In this way, He will leave no doubt as to who truly is God and who is not. Listen again to God as He outlines His plan to Moses, "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but I was not known to them by my name 'the Lord.' I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land they lived in as aliens. Furthermore, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are forcing to work as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. Therefore tell the Israelites: I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from the forced labor of the Egyptians and rescue you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and great acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from the forced labor of the Egyptians. I will bring you to the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord." (Exodus 6:2-8 CSB) This is powerful, heady stuff especially for a people group who had nothing to offer God in return. They were poor. They were powerless. They were weak. They were afraid. They had lived under the tyranny of the Egyptians for four hundred years. There was nothing redeemable about them except that God loved them and God had chosen them and God would make Himself known through them.

In an ancient cultural context, it would have been tempting for the people of Israel to claim God for themselves. To claim exclusive rights to His favor and blessing. This was what the other tribes and nations around them claimed. But as I said above, Yahweh is no tribal deity. When He chooses Israel to

be His people, He is not limiting Himself in any way. In fact, the whole point of what's about to unfold with the plagues and the conflict with Pharaoh is to make it clear to the Egyptians - and by extension, the entire world of the Middle East at the time - who is God and who is not. For God desires all to be saved, come to a knowledge of His truth, and worship His great Name. Every tribe. Every tongue. Every nation on earth. "The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the Israelites from among them." (Exodus 7:5 CSB)

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 10-13

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February 4, 2025
Hard

Readings for today: [Exodus 10-13](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Today we come face to face with one of the Bible's great mysteries. The human heart. And before we begin, we have to lay some groundwork so we can actually understand what's being communicated here. First of all, the Bible teaches we are all born with a "hardened" heart. A heart that is dead spiritually and therefore unable to respond to God. Second, the Bible teaches there is no such thing as a "free" will. Either our wills are enslaved to sin or they are enslaved to Christ. There is no middle ground. Third, the Bible teaches we are all born with a sinful human nature. A human nature irreparably broken by original sin. And we all act in accordance with our nature and therefore justly deserve the judgment of God.

So what if God chooses to save some and not others? What if God chooses to reinforce the already hardened nature of the human heart in some in order to deliver others? What if God chooses to make His glory known through His judgment as well as His grace? This is the essential truth being taught in the Exodus story. God makes Pharaoh and the Egyptian people "objects of wrath" in order to make Moses and the people of Israel "objects of mercy." This is what the Apostle Paul argues in Romans 9 and he summarizes things with this statement, "So then, God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy and He hardens whom He wants to harden." (Romans 9:18 CSB)

I know this runs counter to all we've been raised to believe. Those of us living in the United States have been raised on the fundamental principle of fairness. Everyone getting the same chance. Everyone getting an opportunity. God loving everyone equally. We believe these things are essential to principles like justice and righteousness. However, this is not a Biblical view. God's Kingdom is not a democracy. God's economy is not the free market. God's covenant is not up for debate. God chooses to harden whom He wills and He chooses to redeem whom He wills and we simply do not have the standing nor the authority to object. Hopefully, this helps us embrace what God does to Pharaoh in our passage today.

"Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may do these miraculous signs of mine among them..." (Exodus 10:1 CSB)

"But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the Israelites go." (Exodus 10:20 CSB)

"But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was unwilling to let them go." (Exodus 10:27 CSB)

"Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh, but the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go out of his land." (Exodus 11:10 CSB)

God is relentless with this man. He will not let him repent. He will not let him escape judgment. He will not let him give in until his nation lies in ruins. God will not let up until there is no doubt who is God and who is not. This is a different side to God that we aren't used to. A God who reigns over the affairs of humanity. A God who rules over the universe with a firm hand. A God who is to be feared as much as loved. The point here is clear. God will make His name known. And He chooses to make His name known through "vessels of mercy" (His people) and "vessels of wrath" (not His people).

So what does this mean for us? Does it mean we should be scared of God? Does it mean we are at the mercy of a God who is arbitrary and capricious? Not at all. In Jesus Christ, God has provided the perfect Passover Lamb! He Himself has become the sacrifice that saves! His blood delivers us from the angel of death! And because we have no idea whom God has chosen, we should go forth and gladly, even boldly, share this good news with the world!

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 14-18

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February 5, 2025
Test

Readings for today: [Exodus 14-18](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Life is full of tests. We test ourselves physically when we go to the gym. We test ourselves mentally when we learn something new. We test ourselves emotionally and psychologically when we address the recurring issues that hold us back. We test ourselves financially when we make a big purchase or start a new business. We stretch ourselves relationally when we meet a new friend or get married or have children. How do you respond to tests? Do you see them as necessary evils to endure? Interruptions to what is an otherwise comfortable life? Do you see them as opportunities to grow? A chance to become more well-rounded and whole as a person?

The people of Israel faced any number of tests on their journey to the Promised Land. And it's easy to get frustrated with all their complaining. But we have to remember Israel had been enslaved for hundreds of years. Generations had been beaten down. Generations had been whipped and abused and mistreated. Generations suffered from "learned helplessness" and one doesn't recover from such an experience overnight. Yes, they had thrown off the physical yoke of their oppressor but now God was going to address something much deeper. A slavery of the mind and heart. This is why God takes them to the edge again and again. He is trying to teach them of His sufficiency. His sovereignty. His supremacy. He wants them to know He is trustworthy and true. He wants them to know He is always faithful. He wants them to learn how to depend on Him and believe Him and obey Him.

So He takes them to the worst possible spot on the map. Pins them between the armies of Egypt and the Red Sea. Is this a military blunder on God's part? Did He make a strategic mistake? Far from it. He uses this moment to teach His people about His omnipotent power. He is more powerful than the most powerful empire on earth. He protects them with a pillar of fire and cloud. His glory is literally their rearguard. He rules all of creation with His mighty hand. He can split the sea with a blast from His nostrils. He delivers them in a way that is undeniably miraculous and, in fact, will form their seminal, collective identity from this point forward. Even today, the nation of Israel draws her strength and national identity from the Exodus story. But God's not done. He leads them through parched and thirsty lands and miraculously provides water. When they come to the end of their supplies, He provides manna from heaven and quail for meat. Over and over again, they grumble and complain. They fall back into old patterns of thinking and believing. They cry out to Moses, "Have you brought us out here to die?" And over and over again, God provides. God meets their needs. God passes their test.

Where have you put God to the test in your life? This month, my two youngest daughters traveled to the other side of the world. They traveled alone on international flights. They had to navigate airports and immigration. They arrived in a place they had never been to spend the next five or six months with people they had never met. It has not been easy. They've had good days and bad days. But they are learning to trust God. They have put Him to the test and He is showing Himself faithful. They are growing in their faith in amazing ways. Don't be afraid of the tests when they come. Don't be afraid of the trials you have to endure. Those are the very places where God shows up and shows out.

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 19-21

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February 6, 2025
Identity

Readings for today: [Exodus 19-21](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

I have spent countless hours talking to individuals about identity. Some are young people just trying to figure out who they are and who God created them to be. Some are older people who feel like they lost their God-given identity along the way. Some feel like they never found it in the first place. Some define themselves by what they do. Some define themselves by what they own. Some define themselves by who they are connected to either personally or professionally. Some choose markers like ethnicity or sexuality or gender to identify themselves. All of these fall short of the identity God gives us when we place our faith in Him.

Israel was all kind of confused when it came to her identity. Four hundred years of slavery will do that to a people. They had no national identity. No land to call their own. No real history. No real origin story. Nothing to set them apart from the other tribes on the face of the earth. But all that changed when God chose them. All that changed when God delivered them. All that changed when God brought them to His mountain to meet with them face to face. Listen to how He describes them, “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation.” (Exodus 19:4-6 CSB)

Can you imagine how they must have felt hearing those words for the first time? Formerly they were a group of slaves. They had no names. No material possessions. No freedoms. Nothing. Now they are God’s chosen possession out of all the people groups on the face of the earth. They are God’s kingdom of priests, interceding for the entire world. They are God’s holy nation, set apart to reveal His glory. This changes everything for them. Before they were not a people...now they are God’s people. Before they weren’t sure if they were beloved...now they know they are loved. Before they were helpless and hopeless...now they have a hope and a future all because God adopted them into His own family.

Do you know your God-given identity? Do you know you are beloved by your Father in heaven? Do you know He called you and set you apart before the foundations of the world? Do you know He predestined you in love to be adopted as His son or daughter? Do you know you are set apart? Do you know you are part of a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a chosen possession? Do you know you are loved with an everlasting love? Do you know you are a product of God’s amazing grace? Knowing who we are begins when we know “whose” we are. We are God’s people. We are God’s children. We bear God’s image. We are instruments in God’s hands to bring the message of the gospel to the world.

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 22-24

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February 7, 2025
Boundaries

Readings for today: [Exodus 22-24](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

My family has owned farmland in Nebraska for generations. In fact, my great-great-great grandfather was one of the largest landowners in the state at one time. Over the years, the land has been divided up between kids, grandkids, etc. However, I still had the privilege of being able to grow up going back to help with the planting and the harvest. I got to help run cattle in the pasture. I got to brand and feed and get them ready for market. Some of my fondest memories are spending early mornings with my grandfather on the feedlot. After my father died this year, my mom made the decision to sell the land. As we got the land ready for sale, we realized one of our neighbors up there had cattle who knocked down a fence and grazed in our corn land. So we had to work with her on restitution. It reminded me of what we read in Exodus today. “When a man lets a field or vineyard be grazed in, and then allows his animals to go and graze in someone else’s field, he must repay with the best of his own field or vineyard.” (Exodus 22:5 CSB)

Laws establish boundaries. They determine the limits of human behavior. They govern commerce, property, relationships, etc. They are critical to the establishment of a nation. Nations cannot exist without laws. Communities cannot exist without boundaries. One must know where the lines fall so we know where and when we transgress and we need to know the consequences if/when those things happen. Healthy laws and boundaries are critical to creating the conditions under which human beings thrive. Without the rule of law, human beings suffer unimaginable horrors as evil is allowed to run amok. Sadly, I have seen this firsthand in some of the places I travel to every year.

Sometimes Christians can get caught up making a false dichotomy. We set “grace” and “law” in opposition to one another when the Bible lays them side by side. Jesus Himself says, “If you love Me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15 CSB) Clearly, it’s a “both/and” and not an “either/or.” Does that mean Christians are bound to keep the entirety of the Old Testament law? Not at all. We have to understand the law’s purpose. Some of the laws in the Bible are specific to national Israel. Some of the laws are specific to the worship of Israel. Neither of these are in effect anymore as we don’t live in ancient Israel and Jesus fulfilled the ceremonial laws governing the worship of ancient Israel. What laws does that leave? The moral law. Laws like the Ten Commandments. These are still very much in force and actually reinforced by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

So what boundaries does being a Christian place in your life? What limits do you submit yourself to as a follower of Jesus? How are you seeking to apply the moral force of the Ten Commandments in your life today?

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 25-28

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February 8, 2025
Sanctuary

Readings for today: [Exodus 25-28](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Sanctuary. It's a word that conjures up a host of images. A safe place. A sacred place. A place where heaven and earth meet. A place where the eternal breaks into the temporal. A place where we meet face to face with God. The original sanctuary was a garden. A paradise planted by God Himself. Full of beauty and wonder and diversity. God walked with humanity in this Garden in the cool of each day. God met with humanity in this Garden at the end of each day. The garden was a sanctuary because it represented God's desire to dwell with His people. Tragically, sin corrupted this sanctuary and humanity was exiled. No longer able to commune with God, we tried to create our own sanctuary with the Tower of Babel. We tried to make a name for ourselves. We tried to do life without God. The result was a horror show filled with all kinds of evil and violence and injustice and suffering.

How does God respond? He refuses to leave us without a sanctuary. He calls Moses up a mountain. Gives him the divine blueprints. Commissions him to build a house for God to dwell. It's a stunning act of grace. God choosing to walk again with His people in the cool of the day. God choosing to meet again with His people at the end of the day. God creating a safe space, a sacred space. A place where heaven will meet earth. A place where the eternal will break into the temporal. A place for us to meet with God face to face. No longer a garden, this new sanctuary will be a tent. A portable building we can break down and take with us no matter where we may go. Over the centuries, this Tabernacle will give way to a Temple. A permanent sanctuary within a fortified city. Tragically, each of these sanctuaries will become corrupt as well and be razed to the ground. Humanity losing their connection to God once again.

In the fullness of time, God sends His Son into the world. The Word of God made flesh and blood and making His dwelling place, His tabernacle, His sanctuary among us. Once again, God walks with us in the cool of the day. Once again, God meets with us at the end of the day. And once again, tragically, humanity attempts to destroy the sanctuary once and for all by hanging Jesus on the cross. Thankfully, God raises His Son from the dead. Resurrecting His sanctuary. Making what was perishable, imperishable. Making what was temporal, eternal. Making what was vulnerable, indestructible. Now we have access to God 24/7. Now can approach Him with grace and confidence. Now we can meet Him face to face with nothing to fear.

Readings for tomorrow: No readings on Sundays

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February 10, 2025
Power of Intercession

Readings for today: [Exodus 29-32](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Yesterday was Super Bowl Sunday in America. An annual event that draws millions. Watching the game may be the one thing most Americans have in common. However, even the common passion we share for the game of football is not enough to overcome the sharp divisions that plague our nation. Rather than enjoy watching some of the world's most incredible athletes play at the highest level, we critique and complain. We don't like the other team. We don't like the coach or a particular player. It doesn't matter that we've literally never met them. We don't like the pre-game festivities. We don't like the half time show. We don't like the commercials. Even the Jesus one gets torn apart. Everyone and everything gets viewed through a binary, overly simplistic lens. And this is all just scratching the surface of what's really happening down deep.

Israel wasn't much different. She complained all the time. Criticized Moses and his leadership repeatedly. Every time things got difficult, she thought about turning back to Egypt. Can you imagine willingly re-submitting yourself to slavery? Craziness! She was impatient. She was easily frustrated. She constantly turned from God to idolatry. Mutiny and rebellion were always lurking below the surface. Is it any surprise then that God thought about wiping them out and starting over? In fact, there are times I wonder if God has the same feelings for us!

Thankfully, I know the answer. He does not. How can I be so sure? Because we have an intercessor greater even than Moses who stands in the throne room of heaven constantly advocating on our behalf. Whereas Moses called on God to remember His faithfulness and protect His own glory and reputation by sparing Israel, Jesus calls on His Heavenly Father to remember His great love for us and the sacrifice He made on our behalf to save us from our sins. When God looks down on us, it is through the eyes of His Eternal Son who gave His life for us. No other intercession is needed.

At the same time, we are invited to serve as intercessors as well. We are encouraged to pray for each other, pray for our loved ones, pray for our neighbors, pray for those with whom we disagree, pray for those who may even be our enemies and ask for God to intervene in their lives. Imagine what could happen if we channeled all the energy we spend complaining and criticizing into intercessory prayer? Perhaps the Lord would relent from His righteous judgment, forgive our sins, and heal our land?

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 33-36

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February 11, 2025
Friendship with God

Readings for today: [Exodus 33-36](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

It is not good for human beings to be alone. We were not created to be alone. We don't do well when we are alone. It's why solitary confinement in prisons is now considered to be a cruel and unusual punishment. Isolation and loneliness leads to feelings of fear and anxiety, depression and despair. We need to hear another's voice. We need to feel the touch of another's hand. We need to know and be known. We need to love and be loved. In particular, we need these things from God.

God spoke to Moses face to face. Just like Adam and Eve and Noah and Abraham before him. Moses enjoyed a deep, intimate relationship with God. In fact, he was even called God's friend. And like any friendship, it involved knowing and being known. Moses, of course, was already known by God but God wasn't necessarily known by Moses. Not at first. And this is why Moses asks God to reveal more of Himself to him. "Moses said to the Lord, 'Look, you have told me, 'Lead this people up,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor with me.' Now if I have indeed found favor with you, please teach me your ways, and I will know you, so that I may find favor with you. Now consider that this nation is your people.'" (Exodus 33:12-13 CSB) Moses longed to know God on a deeper level. Yes, Moses wanted to know God's ways so he could obey Him but even more, He wanted to know God's name so he could know Him. And what was God's response? He gave Moses the gift of His presence. He gave Moses the gift of His rest. Most of all, He shared with Moses the gift of His divine name. Exodus 34:6-7 is one of the most important passages in all Scripture. It represents God's self-revelation. God making Himself known, not only to Moses, but to all who would come after him. "The Lord passed in front of him and proclaimed: The Lord, the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation." (Exodus 34:6-7 CSB) Moses' experience of God left a mark on him. From this point forward, Moses face would shine with heaven's glory every time he met with God. In fact, his relationship with God was so deep and intimate that he had to veil his face when he left God's presence to meet with his people. Think about that! Moses could meet with God face to face but had to cover his face when he met with his own people!

Friendship with God is the antidote to every fear. It is the answer for every anxiety. It provides hope for the hopeless and help for the helpless. It lifts up the fallen. It pulls those who despair out of the pit and miry clay. Friendship with God gives us rest. Freedom. Peace. Joy. It is the constant, abiding experience of a love so deep and profound, it transcends all other loves in this world. Those who walk with God and know the friendship of God radiate the glory of God to those around them. There is nothing more important in life or this world than pursuing a friendship with God.

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 37-40

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February 12, 2025
Sealed

Readings for today: [Exodus 37-40](#) ([audio reading](#))

My grandmother was an incredible, but very eccentric lady. She experienced a ton of grief and loss in her life. She lost her first husband, my grandfather, when he was only 38 years old to a wasting neurological disease. She lost one of her sons, my uncle, to a drunk driving accident when he was only 18 years old. She lost her second husband, my step-grandfather, as he recovered from open heart surgery when I was four years old. As a result, she was vulnerable to exploitation. Add in the fact that she was independently wealthy, having inherited a lot of property from her first husband and a lot of valuable stock from one of her aunts, and it made her even more of a target. Sadly, she fell prey to a heretical Christian cult who robbed her of almost everything.

The cult she joined believed the Old Testament should be taken literally. They kept all the feasts and high holy days of the Jewish faith. My grandmother was so serious about following their rituals that she actually commissioned a piece of jewelry that was patterned after the breastplate mentioned in today's reading from Exodus 39. She had the same precious stones mounted in four rows just like the Old Testament law called for. As a young boy, I remember being struck by how weird it looked on the one hand and how special it was to my grandmother on the other hand.

The high priest wore the breastplate for a couple of reasons. First and foremost, his role was to present the twelve tribes of Israel before the Lord in worship. He was there to represent them. He was there to intercede for them. He was there to make the prescribed sacrifices on their behalf. Just as the names of the tribes of Israel were sealed on his breastplate, the names were also sealed on God's own heart. God had chosen them among all the people groups on the face of the earth to be His chosen possession. A second reason was to remind the high priest that when he entered the holy places and most holy place, he didn't go alone. All of Israel was standing there with him on some level and this added significant weight to his responsibility. Finally, and this may be more practical, I imagine as the priest offered the sacrifices, the blood must have spattered all over him. Once his duties were finished and he removed his sacred garments, washing the blood off the precious stones must have reminded him yet again of what God had done to redeem Israel.

In the same way, we have a faithful high priest who lives eternally in the heavens. He is the great high priest. Greater than Aaron or any of his descendants. The Song of Solomon says our names are "sealed on God's heart." Isaiah 49:16 says our names are "graven on God's own hands." So Jesus offers His own blood to redeem us from our sins. He lives to make intercession for us before His Heavenly Father. And He represents us before the throne of grace. This is why we can rejoice! God has chosen us among all the peoples of the earth to be His treasured possession.

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 1-4

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February 13, 2025
Offering

Readings for today: [Leviticus 1-4](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Cattle. Sheep. Goats. Grain. The fundamental building blocks of an agrarian society. I have seen this firsthand in some of the places I go around the world. Places where there is little to no modern infrastructure. Places where the people are still very nomadic, following the rains. Places where survival depends on a good harvest and your herds producing offspring on a regular basis. Places where drought, famine, disease, and plague are not just inconveniences but life-threatening to entire populations of people.

Imagine you are an ancient Israelite. You were just delivered from back-breaking slavery. You find yourself experiencing freedom for the first time in centuries. You now have hope for a future. You are on your way to a land full of milk and honey and promise. You are excited about the potential opportunities that await you. But first you stop at Mt. Sinai. You receive laws from the same God who delivered you. These laws are intended to shape and form you into a nation. A particular people with a particular culture. One of the first laws has to do with worship. It has to do with sacrifice. It has to do with what is acceptable before the Lord.

Without blemish. Firstfruits. Fresh grain. Fine flour. The best of what you have to offer. This is what you are commanded to bring before God. Before you take care of yourself and your family and your clan and your tribe, you honor God for all He has done for you. You honor God for creating the conditions under which your flocks and herds and fields can thrive. You honor God for providing the rain in due season. For protecting you from plague and disease. For preserving you through periods of famine and drought. You honor God with your best because He has blessed you beyond measure. You offer back to God a portion of what you have in recognition of all He has given you. The regularity of these sacrifices are intended to keep God always before you. To remind you of all He has done for you. This is why we are commanded to give. Not out of obligation. Not out of guilt. Not because we have to “pay God off” like some kind of mafia boss. We give because He has first given to us. We give out of gratitude of all He has done for us. We give to honor Him for His grace and love and mercy in our lives.

The same principles hold true for us today. Do we offer to God our best? Do we offer to God our firstfruits? Do we offer Him the best of our wealth and time and energy? Do we give Him the firstfruits of our day or give out of the firstfruits of what we earn? Do we offer Him an unblemished sacrifice? Do we give from a pure heart? A desire to honor Him and bring Him glory? Do we give from a posture of gratitude for all He has done for us?

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 5-7

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February 14, 2025
Purity

Readings for today: [Leviticus 5-7](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Who is God? This is the ultimate question the Bible is written to answer. What kind of God is He? What qualities make up His nature and character? Can He be trusted? Is He good? Is He worthy of our love and devotion? So many have this idea that God is harsh and rigid and legalistic and pedantic. They read a book like Leviticus and it only confirms their worst fears. God is arbitrary and capricious. He is arrogant and egotistical. Why else would He need all these sacrifices? Why else would He put in place all these laws? Why else would He want His people making sacrifice after sacrifice in order to stay right with Him? Where is His grace? Where is His unconditional love? Where is His mercy? Why can't He give them a break? What these questions reveal is the fundamental problem that plagues humanity. We think too highly of ourselves and too lowly of God. We believe, on some level, that we are in a position to judge God. We think we have the right or the standing to put Him on the witness stand and make Him defend His actions. The reality, of course, is much different.

Why doesn't God walk away? That's the question we should be asking. Why didn't God just walk away when Adam and Eve sinned? Why didn't God walk away when He flooded the earth? Why doesn't God walk away as humanity plunges into ruin over and over again? What is it about God that keeps Him coming back? Why does God keep offering us an olive branch? Why does He make way after way after way for us to approach Him and live in relationship with Him? That's what these laws in Leviticus are ultimately all about. Purity. Ritual purity. Sacred purity. The kind of purity we need if we are to meet with God and talk with God face to face. Without purity, we would be destroyed. His holiness would overwhelm us. That's why He protected Moses in the cleft of the rock when His glory passed by. Even Moses couldn't stand in God's presence without some kind of protection!

The law of God is given to teach us the depth and breadth of our sin. The law is like a mirror for the soul. It reveals all that is sinful about us. The law also provides a way to forgiveness. A way to purity. A way to holiness. By performing the prescribed sacrifices and living intentionally within the boundaries the law set, Israel would enjoy a deep, intimate relationship with God. A relationship that would set them apart from the other tribal nations who surrounded them. They would experience the blessing of God. The favor of God. The protection of God. The provision of God. They would become a city set on a hill. A light in the darkness. Salt on the earth. And in this way, God's reputation and glory would spread. The nations would come to Jerusalem to see this God and to know this God. They would bring their own offerings and sacrifices. This is the glorious vision God has for His people and it's why He makes a way for them to literally dwell in His presence.

None of us live in ancient Israel. We are not governed by the same laws that governed them. So what can we draw out from Leviticus? What practical purpose does this book serve in our lives? It points us to Jesus. Jesus, our great high priest and perfect sacrifice. Jesus, the one who fulfilled all the demands of the law by offering His own life in our place. Jesus, the one whose purity and holiness is available to us by faith. Jesus, the one who covers us in His own righteousness. In Jesus, God made yet another way, the only way, for us to live in relationship with Him. And because Jesus died once for all, we no longer have a need to bring any sacrifice except the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for all He has done.

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 8-10

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February 15, 2025
Ordination

Readings for today: [Leviticus 8-10](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Ordination. It is the act of setting apart certain individuals for a holy purpose in the community. Typically, this is something we do for pastors and priests, elders and deacons. They take vows. They undergo strict training. There is often a ritual during worship where they are anointed and prayed over as they begin their work. Historically, the practice of ordination goes all the way back to ancient Israel. The priesthood was first established by God through Moses. Aaron and his children were set apart for this holy purpose. Special garments were made. Special rituals performed. And a host of expectations were now laid on these men as they went about their work. They were entrusted with nothing less than the worshipping life of Israel. There could be no higher calling. Nothing more sacred. Through their priestly actions, the people of Israel will be given an opportunity to experience the glory of God.

This is why it's so painful when Nadab and Abihu fall. They refused to honor God by performing their prescribed duties. Instead, they decided to do their own thing. Go their own way. Offer "unauthorized fire" before the Lord. No one really knows what constituted the "unauthorized fire" but we do know it dishonored God. They deliberately presented something unholy before the Holy One and they paid the ultimate price. Fire came down from heaven and consumed them on the spot and they died "before the Lord." Their disobedience was so severe, their father, Aaron, and their brothers, Eleazar and Ithamar, were forbidden to grieve. Why did God treat them so harshly? Here is what He says, "This is what the Lord has spoken: I will demonstrate my holiness to those who are near me, and I will reveal my glory before all the people." (Leviticus 10:3 CSB) God will not be mocked. He will not be trifled with. He will not be taken for granted or treated with contempt. His glory and holiness are a double edged sword.

I was always taught that leaders are held to a higher standard. As an Eagle Scout, I was held to a higher standard than a Tenderfoot. As a senior on the football and lacrosse teams, I was held to a higher standard than a freshman. As a leader in my college youth group, I was held to a higher moral standard than someone who just attended. As a Manager of Patient Access Services at Boulder Community Hospital, I was held to a higher standard than my employees. And, of course, as a pastor, I've always been held to a higher standard because of the nature of my position in the church. It's why it's so painful when leaders fall. Over the years, I've been called to help in situations where pastors have failed. Sometimes it's a moral failing usually having to do with money or sexual sin. Sometimes it's a leadership failure usually having to do with the sin of pride. In either case, the fallout is brutal. The congregation suffers the most. Their trust is broken. Their faith is shaken. Their fellowship with believers is typically torn apart by division as people take sides. The pastor's family suffers as well. Especially in the case of sexual sin, there is often a divorce. The wife and children lose friendships and community as the pastor is no longer allowed to be part of the church. And then there is the pastor themselves. The damage to the soul of their leadership is almost incalculable. Not to mention the loss of a job or career or livelihood. Most refuse to walk the road of restoration and instead try to find ways back in without having to repent. It's painful to witness.

This is worth thinking about in our own lives. All of us hold positions of influence and power in some way, shape, or form in life. It may be in our homes. It may be at school or at work. It may be in our church or community. The greater the influence and power and leadership entrusted to us, the more God expects of us. The more He demands from us. And the greater the consequences when we fail. As Christians, all of us are called to a higher standard. The standard set by Jesus Christ. How are you seeking to embody that standard today?

Readings for tomorrow: No readings on Sundays

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February 17, 2025
Holy

Readings for today: [Leviticus 11-14](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Holy. It's a word that defies definition. We don't really understand it. We can't fully grasp it. We've never experienced it or seen it or touched it with our hands. At best we use words like "sacred", "perfection", and "righteous" as we grope after it. But it's like the blind leading the blind in the dark. Only God is holy. Perhaps this is why we struggle to grasp what holiness is all about. It is something unique to Him. And because holiness is unique to God and because God cannot be defined, we will never be able to truly define what holiness is all about. At the same time, we run across passages where God calls us to be holy as He is holy. How is that possible if holiness is a quality reserved for God alone? How in the world can we be holy as He is holy?

The answer, as always, is found in relationship. This is why God says, "For I am the Lord, who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God, so you must be holy because I am holy." (Leviticus 11:45 CSB) Holiness is not a quality we can muster on our own. It is not a characteristic we can develop over time. Even if we were able to channel all our effort and energy and attention into being holy every single day of our lives, we would fall short. Holiness is something that comes from God alone. It flows from a deep, intimate relationship with Him. It cannot be experienced apart from Him. It is a byproduct of dwelling in God's presence. Remember how Moses' face lit up with the glory of God after meeting with Him? It was like a bit of God's glory "stuck" to Moses and he had to veil his face as a result. The same is true for holiness. As we spend time with God and develop our relationship with Him, we will find His holiness beginning to stick to us.

One cannot understand the heart of today's readings without understanding this basic principle. All the rules and regulations regarding what is clean and unclean seem arbitrary and capricious if you do not ground them in relationship to God. God is seeking to set His people apart. He wants them to live a particular way. A purified way. A sacred way. And that requires they take certain steps to keep their food and kitchens clean, maintain personal hygiene, and eliminate disease. Even the person who is "unclean" bears a responsibility to make sure he or she doesn't contaminate the entire community. It's why they separate themselves and live alone. It's why they yell, "unclean" when others are around. Everyone has a share in making sure the community remains pure and holy before the Lord. I know this sounds strange to our 21st century Western ears but in ancient near east culture, the community is always prioritized over the individual. (Important Note: The text doesn't say the community should shun or not care for the individual in need. It simply says that person should live alone. Don't let how human beings have cruelly chosen to treat those with disease over the centuries skew your reading of the Bible.)

"Be holy as I am holy." Thankfully, as always, Jesus Christ shows us the way. He was unafraid to dine with the unclean. Unafraid to touch women with menstrual conditions. Unafraid to touch lepers and others with disease. He was unafraid because He knew He was the conduit for His Father's holiness. He knew God's holiness was far more "contagious" than any mold or blood or disease. He knew as soon as people came into relationship with Him that a bit of His holiness would stick to them. And the same is true for us today. As we enter into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, we are made holy. We become holy because He is holy and this leads to a desire to remain holy in order to honor Him.

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 15-18

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February 18, 2025
Atonement

Readings for today: Leviticus 15-18 (audio reading)

I still remember the first time I celebrated the Day of Atonement. I was with my grandmother in Beijing, China. She belonged to a religious group that made it a point to celebrate all the Jewish high holy days and festivals. Each year, they would host “feast sites” around the world where church members could go to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles and the Day of Atonement. It was a day of self-denial. It was a day of prayer and fasting. It was a day when we basically engaged in little to no activity. I was twelve years old and I have to admit I found it very strange. I wasn’t sure I understood all the reasons why non-Jews would engage in Jewish religious practices. As I got older, I learned that my grandmother was part of a Christian cult who believed they had “replaced” Israel on some level. Not only that but they preyed on the elderly and widowed - my grandmother was both - and stole millions from the people who belonged to their “church.” It was a textbook case of spiritual abuse and my grandmother would eventually die, in part, from the guilt and shame of being part of it.

Though the views of the religious cult were abusive, manipulative, and highly destructive; they gave me my first introduction to God’s time. God’s time is not like our time. It is not time as it ticks away on a clock or watch. It is sacred time. It is heavenly time. It is time oriented around the first commandment which is to worship God alone. In the passage we read today, we are introduced to God’s time. He sets up the Day of Atonement. A single day every year where the high priest would make a special sacrifice for the sins of Israel. Listen to how Leviticus describes it again, “This is to be a permanent statute for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month you are to practice self-denial and do no work, both the native and the alien who resides among you. Atonement will be made for you on this day to cleanse you, and you will be clean from all your sins before the Lord. It is a Sabbath of complete rest for you, and you must practice self-denial; it is a permanent statute. The priest who is anointed and align, to serve as high priest in place of his father will make atonement. He will put on the linen garments, the holy garments, and make atonement for the most holy place. He will make atonement for the tent of meeting and the altar and will make atonement for the priests and all the people of the assembly. This is to be a permanent statute for you, to make atonement for the Israelites once a year because of all their sins.” (Leviticus 16:29-34 CSB) Incredibly enough, this day is still observed by faithful Jews all over the world. It’s called Yom Kippur. A day set aside for prayer, fasting, and confession of sins. It’s a day to remember the grace and forgiveness of God and concludes with the blowing of the shofar which signifies hope for the future.

Day of Atonement. Weekly Sabbath. Annual feasts and festivals to govern the life of Israel once they arrive in the Promised Land. These festivals serve as a regular reminder to the people that it is God on whom they depend. He is the one who provides the rain and sunshine that allows their crops to grow and their herds to flourish. The weekly Sabbath reminds us that life does not depend on us or our hard work but on the work God is doing all around us. The Day of Atonement reminds us that no matter how deep we plunge into sin, God’s grace is deeper still. As Christians, we believe the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus fulfills the true meaning of these ancient feasts, including the Day of Atonement and the Sabbath. This is why we no longer celebrate them or offer animal or grain sacrifices. However, that doesn’t mean we don’t hold to sacred time. Christmas, Easter, Advent, Lent, Pentecost, and Epiphany. These are the Christian feasts and festivals we honor and celebrate because they help us center our hearts around the life of Jesus. We do continue to keep the Sabbath holy - though it is now held on the first day of the week because of the resurrection - for Jesus is worthy of all praise, honor, and glory. We continue to orient our lives around God’s time in order to remember all He has done for us.

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 19-22

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February 19, 2025
Love in Action

Readings for today: [Leviticus 19-22](#) (audio reading)

Everyone is a fan of love. We all want love. We all need love. We all crave love. It's essential for the flourishing of human life. Without love, we fail to thrive. Without love, we struggle to connect. Without love, we become isolated, alone, afraid, and anxious. If we remain without love, our hearts fill up with hate, rage, and potentially, even violence. Violence against others. Violence against ourselves. Communities that lack love are fractured, divided, abusive, and exploitative in all kinds of ways. Nations where love is absent are chaotic, unjust, oppressive, and volatile. The lack of love in our world today creates all kinds of trauma and brokenness in our lives.

This is why God gives us a law. He is not only seeking to restrain our worst impulses as human beings but also seeking to create an environment where love is put into action. Don't glean to the edges of your fields. Why? Because you are to love the poor. Don't dishonor your father or mother. Why? Because you love your parents. Do not steal or lie. Why? Because you love your neighbor. Do not have sex with someone other than your spouse. Why? Because you love others and don't want them to be exploited for your own sexual pleasure. Give the land rest from agriculture. Why? Because you love creation. Offer pure offerings before the Lord. Why? Because you love the Lord. Such boundaries are not arbitrary. They are absolutely necessary to create the conditions for love.

Loving one another is not an abstract idea. It's not an aspirational idea or wishful thinking. Love takes concrete form in laws and regulations and policies and healthy boundaries that define relationships. The relationships might be familial or collegial or communal or civic. As much as we may resist them at times, they are essential for us to experience love or learn love or show love to those around us. The fact that we don't often associate laws with love - especially God's Law with God's Love - only shows how much we need them. As you read through the laws in Leviticus, I know many of them may seem archaic and strange. It's because they were designed to some extent for a far different world. Don't let that throw you. Instead, think about how such laws might promote the experience of love in an ancient near east context. Now think about the laws we live by in our own world. The moral law God has given us through His Word. The civic law we live by in our communities and nation. Prayerfully reflect on how such laws lead you to experience love and share love with others.

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 23-25

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February 20, 2025
Trust

Readings for today: [Leviticus 23-25](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

If you've ever wondered what life will be like once heaven comes to earth and Jesus returns again, spend some time meditating on the verses from Leviticus 25. Consider the care God exercises for His creation. Ponder God's perspective on personal property. Think deeply about God's special love and provision for the poor. Fundamentally, these laws are designed to build trust.

Will you trust God to provide when you give your land a Sabbath rest? Will you trust the land to yield up enough of a crop on its own to feed your family and your livestock? Will you trust God to bless the land and make it fruitful? Allowing land to lie fallow for a period of time is important. It allows nutrients to replenish so it can produce during the years where you sow seed. We see similar practices in our own time as farmers rotate crops to allow certain sections of the land to rest for a year.

Will you trust God with your personal property? The Year of Jubilee was designed to serve as a reset for the people of Israel. All property was returned every fifty years to the original owners. Those who had fallen on hard times over the previous fifty years and were forced to sell off their inheritance as a result had the opportunity to get it back and start over. Those who had accumulated much and grown wealthy during the previous fifty years were reminded who truly owned the land and therefore were set free to be generous. While there is no evidence Israel ever declared a Year of Jubilee, the principle is a beautiful one. We are all essentially "stewards" of what we've been given. Everything we own is God's and is intended to be used for the blessing of others.

Will you trust God as you care for the poor? No charging him interest. No enslaving him for economic gain. No price gouging or huge markups to take advantage of his helpless condition. Quite the contrary. You are called to take him into your home. Care for him as you would your own. Treat him as part of the family. You do this to honor the memory of your family's slavery in Egypt and to honor the redemption of God.

Can you imagine how different life would be if we would follow these principles? Imagine a world where the church were on the frontlines of caring for creation, caring for the poor, and held all things in common. You actually don't have to imagine it. Just look to the early church. This describes the life they pursued and it's what gave their witness such power. From the first to the fourth century, the number of believers grew from a few thousand to almost twenty million! They literally conquered an empire! Not by military might but by the sacrificial way they lived. I know there are many praying for revival in our nation today. Many praying for the spiritual renewal of the church. I am too. I join them in those prayers. However, I also know revival comes through repentance. And repentance is about turning from the sinful, exploitative ways of this world to the generous and gracious ways of God.

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 26-27, Numbers 1-2

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February 21, 2025
Covenant

Readings for today: [Leviticus 26-27, Numbers 1-2](#) (audio reading)

Throughout the Bible, we see God establish a series of covenants with His people. Adam and Eve. Noah and his family. Abraham and Sarah. Isaac and Rebekah. Jacob and Leah and Rachel. Moses. David. The climax of the covenants is Jesus Christ. The new covenant God makes with us through the death and resurrection of His eternal Son. All of these covenants hold several things in common. They are initiated and established by God. They are grounded in God's desire to have a relationship, even to dwell, with His people. There are blessings and curses associated with obedience and disobedience. Finally, covenant renewal is always possible through confession and repentance.

Consider how this maps out in Leviticus 26. The covenant is established in the right worship of God. He essentially summarizes the first four commandments in verses one and two. This is followed by the promise of blessings to those who are faithful. The point here is not to create some legalistic system whereby God's people "earn" God's favor and blessing. The point is that these blessings are the natural byproducts of living for God. The flip side is also true of course. There are natural byproducts to disobedience. Natural consequences for sin. God will not bless us when we walk away from Him. Instead, He will patiently wait for us to repent and turn from our sinful ways. This is why, when we finally do come to the end of ourselves, He welcomes us back with open arms. He renews or "remembers" His covenant with them.

The covenantal way of life promoted throughout Scripture offers a pattern for us to follow as Christians. God has initiated a covenant with us through Jesus Christ. He has fixed His covenant in our hearts through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. He has promised blessings for obedience and discipline for those who do not follow His will. Finally, He never closes the door on us but always offers forgiveness and grace for those who confess and repent of their sins.

Readings for tomorrow: Numbers 3-5

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February 22, 2025
Weird

Readings for today: Numbers 3-5 (audio reading)

The Bible is full of rituals that seem strange to us. This is part of the cultural distance we must keep in mind as we read. What may have been normative for an ancient near east Israelite is certainly not normative for a 21st century American and vice versa. Of all the strange rituals recorded in the Bible, the one detailed in Numbers 5 has to be among the strangest. A woman suspected of adultery is put to a test whereby she has to drink bitter water to determine if she is guilty of committing adultery.

First and foremost, we need to remember the context. Women and men were not considered equals in the ancient near east. In fact, women were more property than people so we shouldn't be surprised at the patriarchal tone of the text. It doesn't make it right. It doesn't mean God is in favor of patriarchy. It simply means God is speaking to His people through the cultural norms of the day and revealing His sovereign will just as He does to this day.

Second, we need to remember the seriousness of adultery. Adultery was one of the "big three" crimes in ancient Israel. It was punishable by death along with idolatry and murder. The reason God lays out such harsh penalties is to protect the family. The family unit is the fundamental building block for God's chosen people. It is through the family unit that faith is passed from one generation to the next and the story of God's history with His people kept alive. God wants to protect the family at all costs and adultery puts the family at significant risk.

Third, God is a God of justice. Unlike the pagan cultures that surrounded Israel, God wanted to make sure that women were not cast aside on the jealous whims of their husbands. He wanted to protect women by providing a way for them to prove their innocence. He uses the cultic practices of the ancient world to place a hedge of protection around women to prevent them from being slanderously accused.

Finally, God is a God of honor. The honor of the wife and the honor of the husband and the honor of the family are of paramount importance to Him. Jealousy threatens the honor of the family as does suspicion, gossip, and whisper campaigns that human beings seem to take so much delight in. By subjecting the woman to a public sacred ritual, all potential dishonor is put to rest. Furthermore, the public nature of the ritual would also act as a deterrent to husbands who might be tempted to bring frivolous charges against their wives.

So what do we take away from our reading today? Well, it's worth pondering our own attitudes towards sexual fidelity in marriage. Do we guard our hearts and take adultery as seriously as God? Second, how can we protect the honor of our families in the way we think, speak, or act? How can we protect those we love from frivolous and slanderous accusations? Finally, we look to Christ who drank the bitter cup and took on the curse for us and we give thanks for His willingness to take our place.

Readings for tomorrow: No readings on Sundays

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February 24, 2025
Blessing

Readings for today: Numbers 6-9 (audio reading)

One of the most significant milestones in my spiritual journey was when I realized God's greatest desire was to bless me. For years, I had labored under the assumption that I was primarily a "sinner saved by grace" rather than a "child beloved of God." While both are definitely true, it matters which one comes first. If I see my primary identity as a child beloved by my Father in heaven, then I will have confidence in His will to bless me. On the other hand, if I see my primary identity as a sinner saved only by grace, then I may live with an underlying fear of judgment. Fear is a terrible motivation. While important on some level, it's designed only for the short-term. Fear activates our adrenal glands. Our muscles swell. Our heart rate picks up. We prepare to either "fight" or "flee" based on the danger of a particular situation. It's not intended to work over time. It's not sustainable over the long-term. And that's why love is a far better motivation for saving faith.

For years, I wrestled with a deep fear of God's judgment. Then I started meditating on these words from Number 6:24-26. "May the Lord bless you and protect you; may the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; may the Lord look with favor on you and give you peace." It's known as the Aaronic Blessing. It is the most ancient blessing or benediction in the Bible. It comes directly from God and, as such, communicates His heart for His people. God loves His people. His desire is to bless them not curse them. He looks with favor upon them not judgment. His face shines upon them, conveying the pleasure of God as He interacts with those He loves. Most of all, God gives us peace. Not as the world gives. Not just a ceasefire or a temporary cessation of hostilities. But a true and lasting peace that transcends all understanding.

Do you understand God's heart for you? Do you believe God's primary will for your life is blessing? Do you believe God is at work protecting and providing for you? Do you believe God's face shines when He thinks about you? Do you believe His face is shining on you even now? Have you accepted the gift of God's grace? The gift of forgiveness and reconciliation with your Creator? Do you believe God looks with favor on you and those you love? Do you believe God wants to give you peace? Peace with Him? Peace with others? Peace with the world? Peace within your own heart? This is literally what the name of the Lord means. This is what God is trying to convey by giving them the blessing. Whenever His name is pronounced over His people, He wants them to know they will be blessed. And what was true for the ancient Israelites is still true for us today.

Take some time today and listen to "The Blessing." You can find it on YouTube in several different versions. The one I like best was one produced while our world struggled to fight COVID. Different artists came together to sing this blessing over the world. Here's the link - [The Blessing](#).

Readings for tomorrow: Numbers 10-13, Psalms 90

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February 25, 2025
Complaint

Readings for today: [Numbers 10-13, Psalms 90](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Humanity is never satisfied. It's part of our sinful nature. It's condition we are born into. No matter how much wealth we accumulate, it's never enough. No matter how much power and position and influence we have, it's never enough. No matter how much personal and professional success we achieve, it's never enough. As the Apostle Paul once wrote, "our god is our belly." Given the right set of circumstances, we will overindulge every time. Food. Alcohol. Material possessions. The list is endless because our appetite is insatiable.

Think of all the miracles the people of Israel had witnessed. The plagues in Egypt. The parting of the Red Sea. Manna from heaven. Water from rocks. The presence of the Lord on Mt. Sinai. Still, it wasn't enough. They grew tired of the hardship of the journey to the Promised Land and complained about needing rest. They grew tired of eating manna and complained about wanting meat. Aaron and Miriam grew tired of Moses' leadership and complained about wanting more influence and power. And when God fulfills His promise to bring His people to the edge of the Promised Land, what do they do? They complain about the strength of the people already living in the land. It's like God can't win with these people. No matter what He does, it's never enough.

If we're not careful, the same could be said for us. How easy is it for us to focus on all we don't have rather than on all we do have? How easy is it for us to be jealous of our neighbors or friends or colleagues? How easy is it for us to be envious of another's success? How easy is it for us to covet the attention and influence that others may have? And how easy is it for us to forget all God has done for us? All God has worked out on our behalf? All God has given us? How easy it for us to become complacent and start to complain rather than appreciate His blessings?

One of the spiritual practices I engage in on a daily basis is to spend time thanking God for all He has done for me. At the end of every day, as I lie in bed at night before I drift off to sleep, I count the blessings. I lift praises to God. I thank Him for the small things and the big things. For the ordinary and the extraordinary. I try to cultivate a mindset of abundance rather than scarcity by focusing on all I do have rather than what I don't have. I try to foster an attitude of gratitude and thanksgiving rather than envy or jealousy or coveting what others have that I do not. It has been a transformative practice in my life and one I would encourage everyone to engage.

Readings for tomorrow: Numbers 14-16, Psalms 95

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February 26, 2025
Rebellion

Readings for today: Numbers 14-16, Psalms 95 [\(audio reading\)](#)

Rebellion seems hardwired into our nature. I remember when my children were young. One of the first words they learned was “no.” They wanted to be in charge. They wanted to be in control. They wanted to do what they wanted, when they wanted. Very few of us ever progress beyond that stage. Not if we’re honest. I can’t count the number of times my heart resists serving others. I can’t count the number of times I want to say “no” when someone asks me for something. Because I am human, I would much rather serve myself. I would much rather take care of myself. I would much rather focus on myself and my needs and my wants and my desires. Thankfully, the Lord continues to teach me. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit continues to sanctify me. Thankfully, God is changing me from the inside out and making me more like Jesus every single day. And slowly, my rebellious heart is becoming a servant’s heart.

I resonate with today’s reading on a lot of levels. I resonate with it personally because I know how rebellious my own heart can be. I resonate with it professionally because I know what it’s like to lead God’s people right to the edge of the Promised Land only to have them turn back in fear. I remember a season in a church I once served where we were right on the cusp of great things. God had been faithful. By His grace, the church had grown. The church was pressing out into our community to serve. The church had become a fuller, richer picture of the Kingdom as it grew more diverse generationally, economically, and ethnically. Sadly, like Israel, we hesitated. We pulled back. We refused to step into the future God was giving us. Several people left. The leadership got discouraged. And the opportunity was lost.

I’ve been a pastor for over twenty years now. I’ve served in ministry for almost thirty years total. I’ve seen this dynamic time and time again. It’s hard to walk by faith. It’s hard to trust God when there are “giants in the land.” It’s hard to press to the edge of our resources time and time again, hoping and praying the Lord comes through. But God’s command is clear. We must place our lives in His hands. We must place our future in His hands. We must step out in faith. We must risk it all for the sake of His Kingdom. We must be willing to sacrifice everything to further the gospel in our world. Thankfully, God’s promise is equally clear. If we take care of the things He cares about, He will take care of the things we care about. If we put Him first, all our priorities will fall into their proper place. If we seek His Kingdom and His righteousness, everything we need will be added to us. We don’t have to worry. We don’t have to be anxious or afraid. We have nothing to fear. We can let go of our resistance, cease our rebellion, and embrace what He wants to do in and through us for the sake of the world.

Readings for tomorrow: Numbers 17-20

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February 27, 2025
Signs

Readings for today: Numbers 17-20 (audio reading)

One of the things I appreciate most about God is His willingness to give us signs. He doesn't just ask us to take Him at His Word. He actually provides tangible, visible signs because He knows how easy it is for us to forget or lose heart. Abraham and Sarah received the sign of a child in their old age. Jacob was given all kinds of visions in the night. Joseph clearly interpreted the signs when his brothers showed up before him after he became a ruler in Egypt. Moses was given the sign of a burning bush, a parting in the Red Sea, the pillar of fire and cloud, and manna from heaven. These signs were also given to Israel to bolster their faith as they made their journey to the Promised Land.

Over the last few chapters, Moses deals with significant conflict. The people he leads rebel against him. His own brother and sister question his authority. He is accused of all kinds of things. How does he respond? Does he lash out in anger? Does he marshal his supporters and drive the others out? Does he start a campaign to defend himself? No. He remains humble and intercedes on their behalf before God. Most recently, Moses is forced to confront the rebellion of Korah. They sought to overthrow his leadership. And what does Moses do? He calls on God to give them a sign. Every leader of every tribe brings their staff, their symbol of authority, to Moses to lay before the Lord in the Tabernacle. The next day, Moses enters God's presence to retrieve the staves. Clearly, one is now different than the others. Aaron's staff has blossomed, producing almonds, while the other staves remain dormant. God has spoken. The sign has been delivered. The leadership of Aaron and Moses is confirmed.

I've been a pastor for over twenty years now and seen my share of conflict. Leading God's people is not always easy. First and foremost, I recognize that I am chief among sinners. I am compromised myself in so many ways. And that makes it hard at times to know if I am leading from a place of humility or a place of pride. Second, the people of God are also sinners. Shocking I know! So when we gather as a church all we are doing is bringing a bunch of sinful, broken people into close proximity. Is it any wonder that sparks often fly? I've felt the sting of betrayal. I've had people try to destroy my career by making false accusations against me. I've been criticized more times than I can count, much of it probably warranted on some level. Thankfully, God has provided godly men and women in my life who have confirmed for me - over and over again - my call to lead. They have encouraged me and blessed me and spoken truth into my life and held me accountable. In short, God has used them as living "signs" to let me know His call on my life has not come to an end.

What about you? What signs has God given you in your life? As you look back over the course of your life, can you see where God provided the right people at the right time? Perhaps intervened in a particular circumstance? Answered a prayer? Performed a miracle? These are signs given to encourage you, dear friends, as you seek to follow Him.

Readings for tomorrow: Numbers 21-24

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February 28, 2025
Superstition

Readings for today: Numbers 21-24 (audio reading)

When I first became a Christian, I started eating at a little pit BBQ place in Boulder. It was owned and operated by an amazing man named Bruce. Bruce was the son of the famous “Daddy Bruce” who served the homeless of Denver for so many years, making sure they got a full Thanksgiving dinner. Bruce Jr. was cut from the same cloth as his father. He not only served the homeless of Boulder well, he also was a strong believer in Jesus Christ. I don’t know that I’ve ever met someone quite like him. He literally could quote you chapter and verse from the whole Bible. He would quiz me every time I came in before he would make me any food. He would tell the best stories about how God had worked in his life. One day, he was sharing with me his frustrations with how biblically illiterate Christians tend to be. He was a black Baptist preacher and could preach with the best of them. I still remember the crescendo of his sermon that day...“Doug, when I’m in need, don’t you give me Footprints in the Sand! I don’t need no Prayer of Serenity! Tell me about the donkey that spoke! Now that’s in the Bible!” I still chuckle every time I think of it!

Today we read a story about a pagan fortune-teller named Balaam and his donkey. To set the scene, Israel is marching towards the Promised Land. God is fulfilling His promise to Abraham. But taking the Promised Land won’t be easy. The land is already occupied. There are forces arrayed against them along the way. Nations and tribes and cities whom they will have to fight in order to claim the promise as their own. Arad. Amorites. Bashan. All fall before Israel. All are put to the sword. Now it’s Moab’s turn. One can almost imagine living in Moab in those days, receiving word of a new superpower rising from slavery, defeating the Egyptians, overrunning all who oppose them. Fear and trembling seize the Moabites. And Balak, their king, sends for Balaam. His hope is that Balaam will use his magic to put a curse on Israel, weakening them so they can be defeated. Balaam refuses to come at first but eventually relents under the pressure and promises Balak sends his way. So he mounts his donkey and begins his journey. It’s not long before the donkey freezes in its tracks. It can see the angel of the Lord blocking their path. Balaam, in his blindness both physically and spiritually, is unaware. God opens the mouth of the donkey and speaks to Balaam. The net result of all this is that Balaam will indeed go to Balak but will only speak blessings over Israel.

So what are we to make of these things? Magic? Fortune-telling? Donkeys that speak? The point is that God uses all things to accomplish His purposes, including our pagan superstitions. Remember when Jacob peeled poplar and almond trees in order to breed a specific kind of goat and sheep in Genesis? Does anyone actually believe the power was in the trees? What about the bronze serpent on the pole? Is it really the talisman that saved Israel from the poisonous snakes that were killing them? Think about the superstitions we live with today. The “invisible hand” of Adam Smith from his famous book, *Wealth of Nations*. The notion that democracy is transcultural and can be universally applied. The idea that we can choose to reject scientific realities like the laws of physics or biology. The truth of the matter is we too believe in magic. We too believe in myths. They may be couched in more sophisticated language or political, economic, and social theory but they are fairy tales nonetheless.

So what’s a Christian to do? We have to push past our superstitions and look to God. We have to push past the “bronze serpents” we create and stop looking to “fortune-tellers” to show us the way. We have to dig deep into God’s Word. We must fix our eyes on Jesus.

Readings for tomorrow: Numbers 25-28

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