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FOR STUDENTS**

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its author; salvation for its end; and
truth, without any mixture of error,
for its matter and that all Scripture is
totally true and trustworthy. To review
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Editor's Note: In order to preserve the narrative flow of our study through Scripture (and since some users of *The Gospel Project* are on a different schedule), we have placed the Special Session for Christmas at the end of both the Leader Guide and Personal Study Guide. The week prior to your intended use of this session, remind your group members to study the Christmas session at the end of the book.

FROM THE EDITORS



ED STETZER

General Editor
The Gospel Project
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Research

Who is Yahweh? Perhaps you think this a strange question, especially in this context, but for every person who has a knowledge of God through faith in Jesus Christ, there are countless more who echo Pharaoh's words: "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?...I do not know the Lord" (Ex. 5:2). And God is not content with this situation; nor should we be.

In Genesis, God revealed Himself as the Creator and a Covenant-Maker. In Exodus through Deuteronomy, God reveals Himself—to Pharaoh, the Egyptians, and the Israelites—to be a Redeemer and a Lawgiver. Whether through displays of His power or communication of His law, God's concern was that the whole world would know "I am the LORD." There is no other God!

Nor is there another Savior than the One sent to redeem those who believe. You see, as grand as the story of the exodus is—and it is a great and awesome historical account of God fulfilling His covenant and bringing His people out of slavery in Egypt—as great as it is, it is still but a picture foreshadowing the even greater reality that One would come to free people from their slavery to sin and death! So, experience the ground-shaking account of Yahweh redeeming His people, but recognize the earth-shaking redemption from sin that comes through faith in Jesus Christ and proclaim His freedom to the captives.



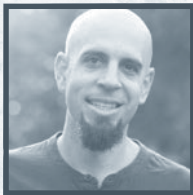
TREVIN WAX

Managing Editor
The Gospel Project
Author of *Gospel-Centered Teaching*,
Counterfeit Gospels, and
Clear Winter Nights: A Young Man's Journey into Truth, Doubt, and What Comes After

When I was a kid, I wanted to memorize more than just Bible verses. I wanted to memorize whole books of the Bible. I remember, around the age of 8, deciding I would memorize the Book of Exodus. Epic fail. I only got a few verses in before giving up. But looking back, it's not surprising that I would choose Exodus. Here was the story of Moses and his own deliverance and transformation into a deliverer to lead his people out of slavery. The story fascinated me as a kid, and it captures me still today.

Exodus (and the rest of the books of law) shines a spotlight on God as the Redeemer. Anytime in the New Testament we come across the words redeem or redemption, we ought to think back to God's redemptive work in Exodus. This is the pivotal moment in Israel's history that anchors the rest of the biblical storyline and provides the framework for our understanding of God's ultimate work of redemption in Jesus Christ. As you and your group work through these fundamental plot points of the Old Testament (the exodus, the Red Sea, the golden calf, the giving of the law, the tabernacle), I hope you'll not only be swept up in the drama of each story but that you'll also grow in gratitude for what they teach us about God, His salvation, and His mission to save His people to be a light to the world.

AUTHORS



UNIT 1

TONY MERIDA is the founding pastor of Imago Dei Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. He also serves as associate professor of preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. His books include *Ordinary* and the *Christ-Centered Exposition* commentary on the Book of Exodus, among others. He is happily married to Kimberly, and they have five adopted children.



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HOW TO USE

▶ INTRO

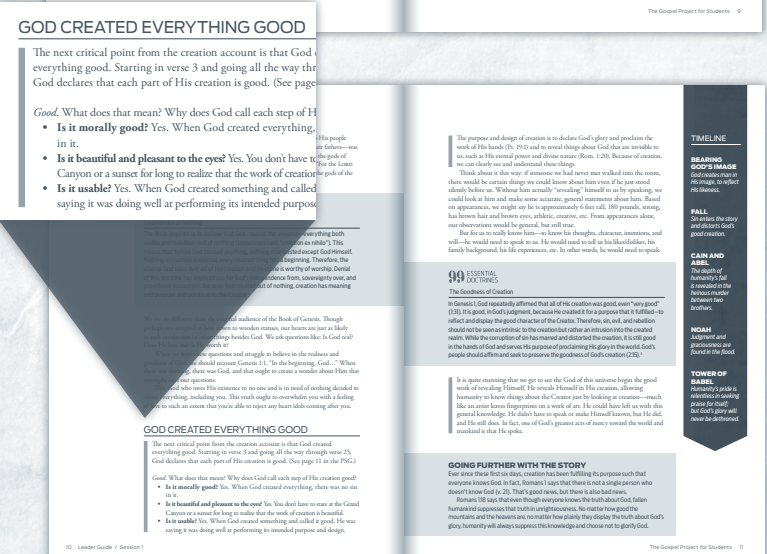
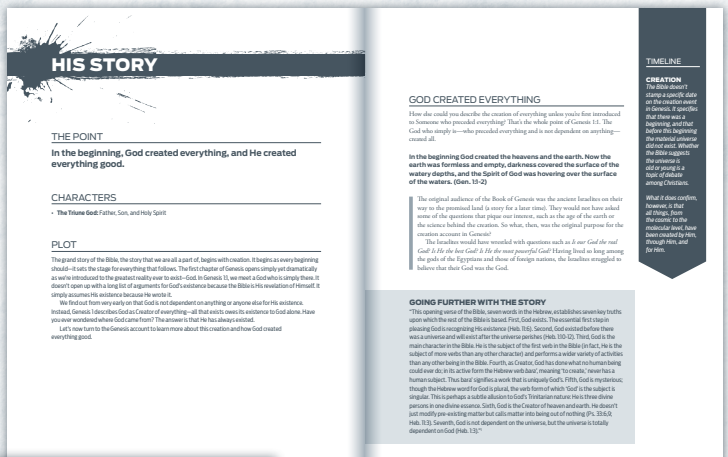
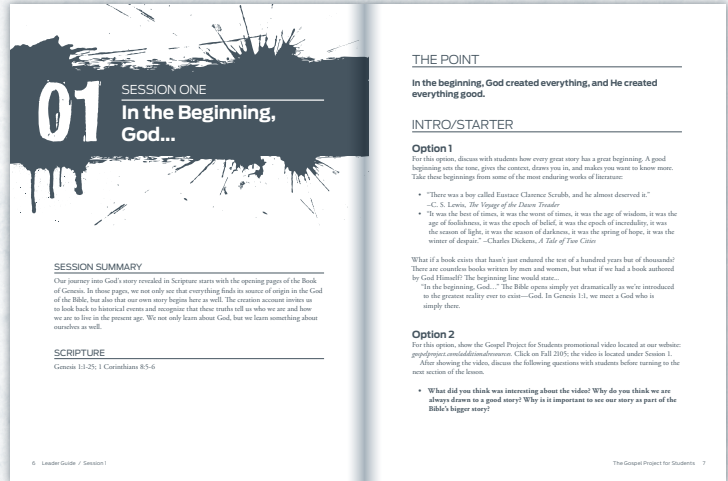
The two introductory pages begin with a summary that provides a brief overview of the session, including a list of Scriptures. The main point is also listed here, as well as two introductory options to choose from to begin the session.

▶ HIS STORY

The five His Story pages contain the main teaching material for each session. This section follows the storyline of the Bible, focusing on what God has done in redemptive history throughout the pages of Scripture. The first page restates the main point that is to be emphasized throughout the session and is followed by an introductory plot that serves as a transitional entryway to the main part of the session that begins on the following page.

In addition to these, there are other things to notice throughout the His Story section:

- **Personal Study Guide:** Any time you see a vertical bar in the His Story section, it indicates that the material can also be found in the student's personal study guide.
- **Timeline:** Each session features a timeline of events that corresponds to the timeline located in the student's personal study guide.
- **Going Further With The Story:** Most sessions will include at least one of these. They contain additional material that allows leaders to go deeper into the biblical story. It is up to the leader's discretion whether he or she would like to utilize this material in any way. One can simply bypass this option, however, and not miss anything vital to the session.



THIS STUDY

- **Essential Doctrines:** Each session will also contain an essential doctrine that directly relates to the Bible study material. The essential doctrine is also located in the student's personal study guide, though in an abbreviated format.
- **Christ Connection:** Each session will end with a direct look at how the content studied connects with Christ, emphasizing to students how all of Scripture is pointing to Him. The material in the Christ Connection will also be provided in the student's personal study guide.

▶ YOUR STORY

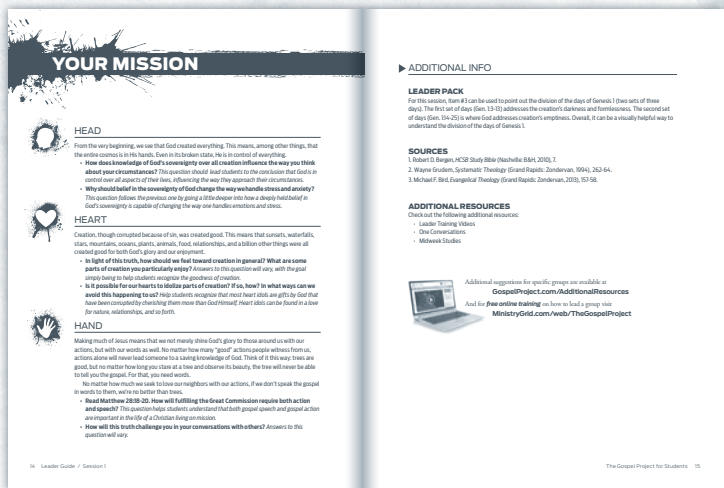
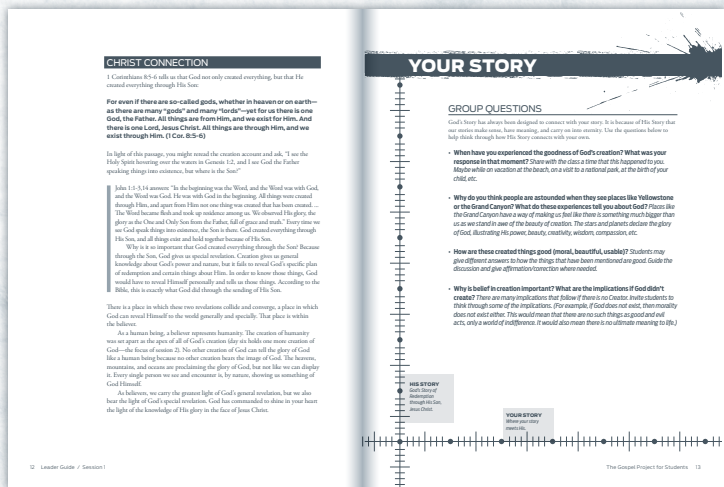
The Your Story section is designed to connect what God has done in the past to students' lives today by introducing group discussion questions that highlight how God's Story connects with their story. There are lead-ins with each question in the Leader Guide to help the leader walk students through each question.

▶ YOUR MISSION

The Your Mission section is designed to show how God's Story is capable of creating lasting transformation into how we think, feel, and live from day to day. By doing so, we emphasize to students that every session goes beyond mere Bible study to a calling to be on mission with God.

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

The final page of each session points leaders to additional resources that can be used in conjunction with each study. The resources listed, such as teaching tips videos and One Conversations, are designed to help leaders prepare for each session. There is also information about the leader pack posters that can be used with each session.



01

SESSION ONE

God Hears His People

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we see how God responds to Israel's terrible plight by listening to the prayers of His oppressed people, revealing His character to Moses, and promising to deliver and redeem them. Watching God reveal Himself and His justice should inspire us to worship our Redeemer and pursue His mission in the world.

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 2:23–3:15,16-17

THE POINT

God sees the suffering of the oppressed and promises redemption.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

In the 1980's a song called "Walk Like an Egyptian" by the Bangles shot up the charts and led to people of all ages doing the light-hearted "sand dance." In the side profile position, with arms extended, elbows and wrists bent at right angles, with one arm up and one arm down and alternate knees lifting and bending at right angles, the dancers walked while moving their heads forward and backward in rhythmic fashion. (The move was supposed to reflect ancient Egyptian art.) Even today, people unfamiliar with the song know the dance.

"Walk Like an Egyptian" doesn't lead you to take Egypt very seriously. For many in the West, Egypt is known primarily for its ancient pyramids and King Tut's tomb. In the period of the Exodus, however, people feared Egypt. Egypt had mighty Pharaohs, great building projects, and, some believe, dark powers. Everyone took Egypt seriously. Israel certainly wasn't doing the Egyptian sand dance. They were enslaved to the Egyptians. And it's the awfulness of their slavery that sets the backdrop for God's glorious deliverance.

- **Take a moment to review the biblical story leading up to the Exodus. Why were the Israelites in Egypt? How would their slavery have affected their view of God's covenant promise? (See Gen. 12:1-3.)**

Option 2

To begin the session, instruct students to call out the names of different charities and organizations they've heard about. Invite a volunteer to write the list on a white board or large piece of paper. Allow students to tell what they know about these organizations and how they are helping those in need. Invite students to name some of the local charities and organizations in your community.

Point out that each of these organizations started because someone saw a need when people were suffering and decided to do something about it.

- **When you see suffering, what are you moved to do?**
- **Do you consider yourself to be a compassionate person who cares about the needs of others?**
- **Have you ever felt like no one cared about you when you were suffering? Did you feel alone, invisible, or unimportant?**

Emphasize the fact that God always sees His people and their needs. There is never a single moment when God is not aware of your hurt, disappointments, or challenges. Today you will be reminded that God never forgets about His people. He sees our need and will respond with compassion and wisdom.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God sees the suffering of the oppressed and promises redemption.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land

PLOT

In Genesis, we saw how Joseph, Jacob's son, was taken to Egypt after his jealous brothers sold him into slavery. Eventually, Joseph gained favor in the eyes of Pharaoh after he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams. As a result, Joseph was promoted to rule over Egypt as vice-regent to the Pharaoh, and he wisely mapped out a plan that would prepare a reserve for the upcoming seven years of famine as revealed in Pharaoh's dreams. During the years prior to the famine, every nation came to Egypt to buy grain (Gen. 41:57), including Joseph's family and brothers who had sold him years earlier. Joseph provided food for them (Gen. 42), and they resettled in the Nile Delta. This family of seventy people entered Egypt (see Gen. 46) and from there, they multiplied greatly (Ex. 1:1-7).

In Exodus 1:8, we read that the new king over Egypt dealt harshly with the Israelites. As a result, Joseph's family was brought under political slavery (1:8-10), economic slavery (1:11-14), social slavery (1:15-22), and spiritual slavery (3:18; 4:22-23; 5:8). As a result, they desperately needed get out of Egypt.

Exodus means "a going out" or "departure." This book of the Bible provides the historical account of God's deliverance of His people from Egypt's cruel slavery. As we embark on our journey through the exodus story, let's make sure to allow the narrative to captivate and challenge us. We shouldn't see it as a story from distant past, but as an eternally important and practically relevant story for our lives.

Remember, every time you see this bar in the leader guide, it indicates the same material is also found in the personal study guide as well.

GOD HEARS THE PRAYERS OF THE OPPRESSED

In chapter 2, we read about Moses' birth (vv. 1-10), his growth (vv. 11-15), and his flight from Egypt (vv. 15-22). The story continues in verse 23 with a new king ruling Egypt. Despite this change in government, slavery remained intense. As a result, Israel groaned and cried out for help.

During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew. (Ex. 2:23-25)

When the people cried out, God heard them. God also saw their oppression, and the writer says that God took notice of the situation (2:24-25). God heard. God saw. God knew. God's attentive nature is revealed throughout Scripture. God's people can cry out to their God and trust that He hears them and cares about their situation.

In chapter 3, we hear some of the same language, and we see the Holy God to whom we pray. This time God tells Moses that He has heard the groans of His people. God calls Moses to serve as His agent of redemption, and in so doing reminds Moses that He has heard Israel's prayers. As a result of this, God tells Moses of His plan to free His people. The writer gives the description of Moses' call this way:

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. (Ex. 3:1-6)

TIMELINE

MOSES SPEAKS TO GOD

God reveals Himself to Moses and promises redemption.

GOD'S GLORY IS REVEALED

God displays His glory among all the peoples.

JUDGE AND SAVIOR

Even in the midst of His judgment, God provides a means of salvation.

In this passage, we read of the burning bush and the angel of the Lord who appeared to Moses. God spoke to Moses and called him to remove his sandals as an act of reverence. God then identified Himself with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (3:6). Before God entered a relationship with Moses, He entered a relationship with Moses' fathers (see 2:24). God was also giving Moses a bit of personal history of Himself.

All of this was to show Moses that the God of the burning bush wasn't an unknown God; He was the God who acted on behalf of these men earlier in history. Notice that God does not say, "I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob..." but rather, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob..." This indicates that God's people never really die; they're part of an eternal relationship with God.

Whenever you see PSG page numbers listed, it indicates that there is a section in the personal study guide for students to interact with.

- **Who are some famous or semi-famous people you've met? Does knowing about someone or meeting that person once mean that you know him or her? Why or why not? (p. 10, PSG)**

Point out that to know God, you must have a real encounter with Him. An encounter with God leaves a person with an unmistakable sense of His uniqueness and holiness. The next step is to decide if we are willing to trust the God we encounter.

Remember, these sections are optional and can be skipped if preferred.

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

The "fire" represents God's holy presence. Fire appears later in Exodus and elsewhere in Scripture: a pillar of fire that leads God's people; fire at Mt. Sinai; fire in the tabernacle; and fire on the Day of Pentecost. When God forbids idolatry later in Deuteronomy, Moses says, "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God" (Deut. 4:24). The author of Hebrews uses this language also in describing how to worship (Heb. 12:28-29). Fire is appropriate because we know that we are drawn to fire, even amazed by fire, but we also have to tell children, "Don't play with fire." Fire must be taken seriously. So must God because He is holy.

GOD RESPONDS TO THOSE IN NEED

We've seen how God hears the prayers of the oppressed. Now let's take a further look into how He responds to those in need.

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain." Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this

to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. (Ex. 3:11-15)

Moses wasn't eager to go on this mission. In their dialogue, Moses made several excuses for not obeying God's call. But God responded to each of Moses' excuses and questions with statements about His own sovereignty and power.

Moses' first argument was about himself. "Who am I?" (3:11), he asked. He felt insufficient. He essentially asked, "Have you considered my resume? For the last 40 years, I've been in a wilderness." Stop and think about it. Even though he was once a prince, Moses is now a humble shepherd. God asks this shepherd to confront the most powerful person in the world and tell him to let his slaves go free. This would be sort of like an average blue-collar worker declaring war on a president of a major country. Can you imagine your plumber declaring war on Russia?

Moses was an average guy, and alone he didn't have great influence. Yet God responded to Moses by revealing what was most important: Himself. God said, "I will be with you" (3:12a). Throughout the Bible this is what God's leaders need in order to lead: God's presence. It's the non-negotiable for serving God. Think about Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Jehoshaphat, and the disciples. (See Matt. 28:18-20.) God was with them all.

In addition to God's presence, God also promised deliverance. God gave Moses a message to give to the elders. Notice God's sovereign prediction about what was going to happen:

Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.'" (Ex. 3:16-17)

God was not only hearing the cries of His people, but He promised that deliverance was coming soon, and that nothing, or no one, would be able to stop His plan from taking place.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Enslaved to Sin

Because of the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, all of humanity has inherited a sin nature that inclines them toward sin and rebellion. Human beings are enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:17), continually living with the propensity to transgress God's commandments whenever possible. It isn't until one experiences salvation through the work of Christ that he or she is able to overcome sin's enslavement through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:2).

TIMELINE

THE RED SEA

God continues to provide for His people by parting the Red Sea.

THE WILDERNESS

Israel is to walk in faith and follow after God on their way to the promised land.

THE GOLDEN CALF

Israel commits idolatry against God.

Don't forget to mention the 99 Essential Doctrines throughout your studies. There is an abbreviated form of each doctrine in the personal study guide.

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

Moses still wasn't convinced that God's rescue plan would be successfully pulled off, or that he was the man for the job. In chapter 4, he argues with God, complaining that no one will believe his message (4:1-9). But God assures him that they will.

Then in the most widely known excuse, Moses uses his speech problem as a reason for not obeying God's plan (vv. 10-12). God tells Moses that his excuse is irrelevant and irreverent. Concerning the latter, God says, "Who has made man's mouth?" (v. 11). God tells Moses that He formed him for a purpose. God knows about Moses' weakness, and it's precisely because of this weakness that God will gain much glory.

God tells Moses that his excuse is irrelevant: "I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak" (v. 12). God is looking for reporters, not orators. We don't have to make fine speeches; we just give the news. Moses had to learn, like us, that "it's not about you!" It's about the I Am.

Moses' final excuse is not so much an excuse as it is Moses' desperate plea to pass the responsibility to someone else. He is out of excuses. Every one of Moses' questions has been answered in stunning ways. Now, Moses basically says, "Here I am, send someone else." God responds with anger (v. 14), but is gracious here as well. He gives Moses some help by sending Aaron with him (vv. 14b-16).

CHRIST CONNECTION

At the beginning of our story, we see Moses leading his father-in-law's flock. The fact that Moses is a shepherd is significant. Egyptians didn't think highly at all of shepherds (see Gen. 46:34), and yet there is an important pattern of shepherding throughout all of Scripture.

Whether it is Moses who spent forty years as a shepherd in Midian, or the shepherd David who was taken from the sheepfolds to become king, it is clear that God loves to use shepherds! God even refers to Himself as a shepherd (Ps. 23:1). And ultimately, salvation would come through Jesus, whom the Bible calls the Good Shepherd, the one who lays down His life for his sheep (John 10:11).

As we see in this story, the plan is in place. God responds to His people's suffering by revealing His promise of redemption to the reluctant shepherd-mediator, Moses. And here we look forward through the Scriptures to Jesus, the great I Am who gives us an even greater revelation of God's goodness and righteousness. He is the Good Shepherd, who would lay down His life for His sheep, in order to lead us out of a greater slavery into a greater freedom, from the kingdom of darkness into His kingdom of light.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How does it comfort you to know that God sees every sinful deed done against you? How does it challenge you to know that God sees every sinful deed you have done against someone else?** *These questions are designed to help students consider the fact that even though sinful and evil deeds often remain hidden in the world and in our lives, they don't remain hidden from God.*
- **How does it encourage you to know that God hears the cries of the oppressed? How can we make sure we pay attention to injustice and oppression in our world so that God can work through us?** *Although answers to this question will vary, help students realize how important it is for Christians to be concerned about injustice within our culture, whether it be social, racial, etc. Lead them to think through the biblical response to these issues.*
- **What are some areas where you feel unqualified or unable to do what God has called you to do? How does God's presence and His promise enable you to keep trying?** *In the same way that Moses felt ill-equipped and unprepared, it is likely that students have had similar experiences. Use Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 12:9 to help students think through how a Christian should respond to these feelings.*
- **What fears prevent you from speaking on God's behalf? How can faith in God's promised redemption help you overcome these excuses?** *Whether it is standing up for God in school or sharing the gospel with a friend, walk students through some of God's promises in the Bible and how those promises can help them overcome fears of doubt and unbelief.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

When Moses encountered God, the Scripture says Moses “hid his face.” Why? It’s because Moses was in the presence of the Holy One. We should understand Moses’ fear. We should also maintain a sense of reverence before God. However, as believers we don’t have to hide from God in fear because of the work of Christ. We are hidden in Him! We can seek God with confidence because of Christ.

- **What are some ways we can increase our sense of reverence for God?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What is the difference between being “terrified” by God and being “awed” by God?** *The former refers to feeling scared, where the latter has more to do with feeling reverence toward Him. The feelings of fear and reverence are common to believers given that we can approach God without terror because of the work of Jesus on our behalf.*



HEART

It’s important for believers to see our potential through God’s eyes. In God’s response to Moses (Ex. 4:11-12), He told Moses to rely upon His power. If God gives us the ability to see and speak, why could He not give Moses the power to speak before Pharaoh?

- **What are some other excuses Moses could have offered for not following God’s plan? What excuses have you used for not following God’s plan?** *Point out that we can always find an excuse for something we don’t want to do. The key to following God’s plan is trusting that He has already equipped us for whatever He calls us to do.*
- **What is one way you sense God calling you to serve Him? Are you willing to depend on God and not on your own abilities to see it through? Explain.** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

When talking to Moses (Ex. 3:1-10), God explains that He is going to save His people from something (slavery), for something (worship and witness). In the same way, Paul tells the Ephesians that’s exactly what has happened to those who trust in Jesus (Eph. 2:1-10). According to Paul, Christians have been saved from wrath, and for good works.

- **Why should the grace of God motivate us toward good works?** *Since humanity is undeserving of salvation, and since we cannot earn God’s grace from our works, we should be overwhelmed with what God has done for us that we would naturally live differently as a result.*
- **How can you demonstrate this week the truth that God has saved you from slavery to sin and to be a witness of His great grace and mercy?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #4 to the students, which is an artistic poster of the burning bush.

● ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/storystart15)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

Don't forget to check out these additional resources to help equip you for each session.

02

SESSION TWO

The Sending of the Plagues

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we see how to find comfort through knowing and resting in the God of all glory and grace. We find comfort when we recognize God's unrivaled supremacy and when we embrace God's redemptive promises. We also trust God to reveal His glory by confronting and defeating all the enemies of goodness and justice.

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 6:2-9; 7:14-18

THE POINT

God demonstrates His glory by comforting His people and confronting those who oppose Him.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

As students arrive, provide them with name badges and instruct them to write either what their name means or some characteristic that describes them. Allow time for students to introduce themselves to one another using their name meaning or characteristics.

- **Why is it so different to think in terms of someone's character or personality than just his or her name?**
- **Why is it important to know a person's character or personality if you are going to be in a relationship with them?**
- **Would having a relationship be easier if you had more knowledge of someone's character beforehand? Why or why not?**

Share that the name "Yahweh" is based on the Hebrew verb "to be" and is a combination of the consonants YHWH and the vowels of the word *Adonai* ("Lord"). "Jehovah" is based on English and means the same thing. "LORD" (with small caps) also means the same. This name expresses God's exclusiveness and covenant loyalty. It also indicates that God is not just a superior power or force but is a Person. In the Old Testament, the name came to describe the God who was present to save and was supremely able to deal with all circumstances.

Option 2

Begin the session by playing a game of Simon Says. Before you begin, announce that the person who wins the game will be awarded \$50. Play until one student wins. However, instead of awarding the winner with real money, give him or her a \$50 bill of play money from a board game. Ask the winner the following questions:

- **Did you have any doubts in your mind about whether or not I would really provide such a large prize? What was your reaction when you didn't receive the prize you were promised?**

Reward a real prize to the student for being a good sport. (A \$5 gift card is a great option.)

- **What is one promise that someone's made to you and kept? How did that strengthen your relationship with them?**

Point out that God never fails to keep His promises. There isn't a single promise in the Bible that He has broken.

- **What is one promise that someone's made to you and kept? How did that strengthen your relationship with them?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God demonstrates His glory by comforting His people and confronting those who oppose Him.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land
- **Pharaoh:** ruler over Egypt

PLOT

In the previous session, we saw how God not only hears the cries of His people, but He responds by promising redemption. God has not forgotten the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is still unfolding His plan of redemption that began in the garden and would one day make all things right. God has chosen Israel to play a significant role in that redemption—to be the corridor by which all other nations will be blessed. And He will see to it that Israel is delivered not only for their good and joy, but for His glory as well.

In this session, we see God's glory and grace through the unleashing of the plagues against Pharaoh and the false gods of Egypt. And through it all, we learn that God has unrivaled supremacy. He alone is God, and He alone is worthy of all praise and glory.

TIMELINE

GOD'S GLORY IS REVEALED

God displays His glory among all the peoples.

JUDGE AND SAVIOR

Even in the midst of His judgment, God provides a means of salvation.

THE RED SEA

God continues to provide for His people by parting the Red Sea.

GOD COMFORTS HIS PEOPLE

In the previous session, we saw how God commissioned Moses and his brother, Aaron, to deliver a message to Pharaoh on behalf of the Israelites. As Moses and Aaron encounter Pharaoh, we see God reassuring Moses that He is in control (Ex. 6:1). Then God comforts Moses by giving several promises:

God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.’” Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery. (Ex. 6:2-9)

- **Make a list of the promises of God in this passage. What promises do you think would have been most meaningful to the Israelites?**
(p. 16, PSG)

Promises provide us with hope of what is to come. In the midst of darkness, promises remind us of the glory of God. Here, we find that God gave Moses several awesome reminders.

Consider these four “I will” statements: God says: (1) “I will deliver you” (Ex. 6:6a); (2) “I will redeem you” (6:6b); (3) “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God” (6:7); and (4) “I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (6:8). These four statements highlight God’s work of salvation. Let’s take a closer look at each:

Liberation

God said, “I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them” (Ex. 6:6a). This is a picture of salvation. God is going to bring His people out of slavery and deliver them. God will liberate the people from bondage through his mediator Moses. This will be

accomplished by grace through faith; it isn't something that Israel earned. The purpose of this liberation is that they might worship the Almighty God. And, as we will see in Exodus 15, the people celebrate their liberation.

Redemption

In Exodus 6:6b God said, "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment." With the exception of Jacob's blessing in Genesis 48:16, this is the first we see of the word *redeem*. Later it is used in Exodus 15:13, where the people are singing of God's redemption. In both cases it is the Hebrew word "gaal." When a person is the subject of this verb (as God is here), the word is "goel." God is the "redeemer," the "goel."

Adoption

God said, "I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians" (Ex. 6:7). This shows the familial nature of salvation. It reminds us of the doctrine of adoption. God is going to take Israel as His people. He has already called them his "son" (4:22). This is a display of God's matchless love.

Inheritance

"I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession" (Ex. 6:8). God promised His people that they will have a possession. This promise was first mentioned to Abraham. (See Gen. 12:7.) Later, in the book of Joshua, we see the people entering, conquering, and inhabiting the land. These people had nothing. They were slaves in Egypt. But God is going to give them an inheritance—all by His grace.

GOD CONFRONTS THOSE WHO OPPOSE HIM

Despite these amazing promises in chapter 6, Moses and the people still struggle to believe God's plan. (See 6:9-13,26-30.) In 6:10-13, God told Moses to go back to Pharaoh, yet Moses' response was one of unbelief and despair. Moses responded to God with confusion. He couldn't understand how Pharaoh would listen if the Israelites wouldn't even listen. But once again, God charged Moses and Aaron to go confront Pharaoh and finish the mission.

In addition to comforting His people, we now get to see another way that God revealed His glory: by confronting false gods. The following chapters reveal God's judgment on the Egyptians through a series of severe plagues. Today someone may look at these plagues and say, "Are you kidding me? This scene is bizarre! Is God a cosmic jerk? Is he trying to annoy the Egyptians?" Or they might be tempted to say, "This is silly and hard to believe."

It's certainly strange and severe. But we must understand that there's something bigger going on than what we see at first glance. God is judging not only the Egyptians, but also the gods of Egypt. In Exodus 12:12, God says that he is going to perform the last sign, the death of the firstborn, and in so doing he is

executing judgment “on all the gods of Egypt.” This is also repeated in Numbers: “On their gods also the LORD executed judgments” (33:4b).

The plagues fell on all the areas of life that were supposed to have been protected by Egypt’s gods. God put His glory on display by judging these false gods. He’s the Almighty.

As we take a closer look, we will see that God’s first display of superior power is appropriate: a miracle on the Nile River:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water. Stand on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that turned into a serpent. And you shall say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, “Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness. But so far, you have not obeyed.” Thus says the LORD, “By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood. The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile will stink, and the Egyptians will grow weary of drinking water from the Nile.””’” And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, and their ponds, and all their pools of water, so that they may become blood, and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.”’” Moses and Aaron did as the LORD commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the Nile, and all the water in the Nile turned into blood. And the fish in the Nile died, and the Nile stank, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. There was blood throughout all the land of Egypt. But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts. So Pharaoh’s heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile. Seven full days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile. (Ex. 7:14-25)

The Nile was the lifeblood of Egypt. Essentially, Egypt couldn’t exist without the Nile. It was responsible for transportation, irrigation, water, food, and the setting of the calendar. This type of catastrophe would be similar to cutting off all oil supplies, the stock market collapsing, drinking water being contaminated, and having no food in the grocery store. It would be total chaos. It’s no surprise that the Egyptians worshiped the Nile as their creator and sustainer. At least three deities were associated with the Nile. But God totally humiliated these gods when he turned the mighty Nile into blood. (See also Ps. 78:44; 105:29; Rev. 16:3-7.)

TIMELINE

THE WILDERNESS

Israel is to walk in faith and follow after God on their way to the promised land.

THE GOLDEN CALF

Israel commits idolatry against God.

THE COMMANDMENTS (PART I)

God gives Israel instructions on how to relate to Him.

The magicians countered the miracle. But the fact that the people were digging for water shows that while Egypt’s magicians repeated the sign, they couldn’t cleanse the water from the Nile. Nevertheless, Pharaoh refused to “take even this to heart” (v. 23).

Overall, the dominant theme in these passages is this: “You shall know that I am the LORD” (Ex. 7:17; see also 8:10,22; 9:14,16,29; 10:2). God lets everyone know that He alone is God. We must not miss this overarching theme in the midst of all the details of the plagues. God’s desire is to be known and worshiped.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Miracles

A miracle is an event in which God makes an exception to the natural order of things, or supersedes the natural laws, for the purpose of demonstrating His glory and/or validating His message. Miracles are recorded throughout Scripture; miraculous signs and wonders were oftentimes evident when a prophet or an apostle was speaking God’s message to the people. Because we believe God to be all-powerful and personally involved in this world, we believe He can and does perform miracles.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The truths we see in this Old Testament story are taught in the New Testament as well. For instance, Paul said that Jesus “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). Spiritually, God sets us free from slavery and our inability to keep the law through the mediator, Jesus Christ. This occurs only by grace through faith; we haven’t earned this. The purpose of our release, like the Israelites, is worship.

Not only that, but Paul said of God’s choice of Israel, “to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises” (Rom. 9:4). In redemption, God has rescued us from a dreadful situation, but there’s more! Through adoption, God brings us into His very own family. This is privilege! (See 1 John 3:1.)

Finally, The New Testament draws on this idea of inheriting the promised land to the believer’s hope in the new heavens and new earth. By Jesus’ resurrection, we have an “inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:4). Peter said this inheritance is awesome (“imperishable, undefiled, and unfading”) and assured (“kept in heaven for you”). Jesus told us that the meek will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5).

For reasons like these, we can continue to live in obedience, even when it is difficult. We can rest in God’s promises and trust in God’s sovereignty as we make the one true God known to everyone on the earth.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Why is it easy to put our trust in things we can see (money, homes, people, etc.)? Why is it more difficult to rely on the One who is invisible?** *The writer of the book of Hebrews said of Moses: "By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible" (11:27). In a similar fashion, we endure by relying on Him who is invisible.*
- **When was the last time you were discouraged by God's timing or lack of intervention in a difficult situation? What truths about God helped you through this time?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Why should God's deliverance in our lives lead us to genuine worship?** *Genuine worship is a natural response of the heart that understands it has been rescued and redeemed, not by itself or through good works, but by Christ who saves.*
- **What are the false gods our society turns to for security?** *Reputation, good grades, work, insurance, home security systems, etc. Of course, that is not to say any of these things are bad in and of themselves—only that when placed on the throne of our hearts, they become false gods within our lives.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

When you think about it, God could have obliterated Pharaoh at a moment's notice, but He didn't. God's ways aren't our ways. There are things that happen and timing of events that may not make sense to us, but in the end put God's glory on full display. This means that even in our confusion and sometimes disappointment, God's ways are just and good, and they inevitably benefit us in the end.

- **Share of a time when you felt disappointed and questioned God's ways and goodness.** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How can this session help alter the way you view those disappointing times?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HEART

In Exodus 7, the text says on a few occasions that Pharaoh's heart was hardened (vv. 14,22), which consequently prevented him from listening to the word of the Lord. Instead of allowing the series of plagues to convince him to release the Israelites, Pharaoh continued to resist the word of the Lord, and therefore became more hardened as a result. Eventually, God gave him over to the hardening of his own heart, which eventually resulted in his own death.

- **How is it that sin causes us to turn our hearts from God and His Word?** *Sin not only causes disobedience to God, but also unbelief in His Word. Because sin would make us think that disobedience to God would be more beneficial and more joyful than obedience to Him, it draws us away from His Word in unbelief.*
- **What are some ways we can guard our hearts from being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin?** *One way we can do this is practice what the psalmist taught us in Psalm 119:11, namely, that by hiding God's Word in our hearts, we will be less inclined to sin against Him.*



HANDS

Like Moses and Aaron, God calls us to war against the powers of this world that keep people in bondage to sin and suffering. These powers might be things from our own fear of rejection or failure in our abilities to putting our trust in cultural messages that promise happiness in sinful pleasures that ultimately can't deliver.

- **When have you, like Moses, felt that God was asking you to do something you couldn't do?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How can resting in God's promises and trusting His sovereignty help you be obedient to Him?** *Knowing that God is faithful to keep His promises we can walk faithfully and with full assurance in the mission He has given us.*

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #5 to the students, which contains an informational chart of the plagues of Egypt and each false god they were directed against.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/storystart15)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
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03

SESSION THREE

The Passover Lamb

SESSION SUMMARY

The Passover story gives us a beautiful picture of God’s judgment as well as God’s salvation. We see the severity of God’s judgment as He warns and then unleashes His wrath upon the Egyptians. But we also see the beauty of God’s grace as He provides a substitute in order to protect His people from His wrath and free them to worship Him with full and grateful hearts. As God’s “passed-over” people, we now celebrate His salvation with joy.

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 11:4-8; 12:1-13,29-32

THE POINT

Even in His righteous judgment, God offers salvation through the sacrifice of a substitute.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Briefly review the discussion from the previous session, reminding students that when Moses went to Pharaoh to seek the release of the Israelites, he was denied. Pharaoh didn't want to free over a million people. They were Egypt's field slaves and laborers. Who would do all the work? Because of Pharaoh's hardened heart, God made things so difficult in Egypt that Pharaoh would have to give up and let them go. The first nine plagues hit the country. They were bad, but not enough to make Pharaoh change his mind. The tenth plague changed everything.

Invite students to call out each of the plagues as you list them on the board or on a large sheet of paper. Then ask:

- **Do you think the Egyptians deserved what happened to them?**
- **Does the thought of God as judge scare you or comfort you? Why?**

Emphasize that because of Jesus, our Passover Lamb, and the blood He shed on the cross, followers of Christ have nothing to fear. Just as the death angel passed over the houses that demonstrated their faith by the blood on their doorposts, God sees His children through the blood of Jesus.

Option 2

Every Good Boy Does Fine, ROY G. BIV, Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally ... any of these sound familiar? These techniques, called *mnemonics*, aid in memorization. Such memory devices do not state outright what is being remembered, but help recall information.

Share the following information about the Passover: In Exodus 12:14-28, Moses conveyed God's instructions to the Israelites concerning the Passover. The liberation of God's people took place with the slaying of a lamb and the smearing of its blood on the doorposts. God commanded Moses to commemorate this event annually.

- **Why was it important for the Israelites to remember this event?**
- **What event does taking the Lord's Supper help Christians recall today?**

As the Passover celebration recalled God's faithfulness to the Israelites, the Lord's Supper reminds us of God's faithfulness in sending His Son to die for our sins.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Even in His righteous judgment, God offers salvation through the sacrifice of a substitute.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land
- **Pharaoh:** ruler over Egypt

PLOT

In the previous sessions we saw God response to Pharaoh's refusal to let His people go. However, the plagues God sent only served to harden Pharaoh's heart even more. By now, nine plagues have passed and Pharaoh has still refused to part with the Hebrew people. As we will see, this refusal to listen to God would cost him something very dear in the end.

In this session we take a look at the tenth and final plague, the one that started the Passover tradition. The Passover story gives us a beautiful picture of both God's judgment and God's salvation. We see the severity of God's judgment as He warns and then unleashes judgment upon the Egyptians. We see the beauty of His grace as He provides a substitute in order to protect His people from His wrath and free them to worship Him with full and grateful hearts. As God's "passed-over" people, we now celebrate His salvation with joy.

TIMELINE

JUDGE AND SAVIOR

Even in the midst of His judgment, God provides a means of salvation.

THE RED SEA

God continues to provide for His people by parting the Red Sea.

THE WILDERNESS

Israel is to walk in faith and follow after God on their way to the promised land.

GOD WARNS OF JUDGMENT

The first nine plagues had wreaked havoc on the Egyptians, and God had manifested His glory in unleashing judgment upon the empire that stood against Him and His people. One final plague remained—one that would be worse than all the others. And through Moses, God chose to warn Pharaoh of the judgment to come:

So Moses said, “Thus says the LORD: About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt, and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle. There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again. But not a dog shall growl against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. And all these your servants shall come down to me and bow down to me, saying, ‘Get out, you and all the people who follow you.’ And after that I will go out.” And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger. (Ex. 11:4-8)

In this threat of judgment, Moses didn’t ask Pharaoh to “let the people go.” He knew that Pharaoh’s hardened heart would lead to awful consequences. The plagues were coming to a horrible end.

Moses foretold that the “firstborn” of both man and animals would be killed (Ex. 11:5). Earlier in the Exodus story, God referred to Israel as His firstborn (4:22) and indicated that Pharaoh would pay with his firstborn (4:22-23). Now the time had come for this hard-hearted Egyptian ruler. This judgment was going to be severe.

- **List some techniques your parents used when you were younger (or still use) to warn you that you were about to get into trouble? (for example: count to three; call you by your middle name; etc.) What did it take for your parents to get your attention? (p. 22, PSG)**
- **What warnings might we receive from God today when we refuse to listen to His instruction? What does it take for God to get your attention? (p. 22, PSG)**

Take another look at verse 8. Moses first told how Pharaoh’s officials would bow to him and say, “Leave.” In light of God’s judgment, Pharaoh’s closest leaders would be totally humiliated before Moses, and ultimately before Moses’ God. They would bow to Moses instead of Pharaoh.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Sin and Death

The ultimate consequence for sin is death—physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death (Rom. 6:23). God was clear to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden that if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die (Gen. 2:17). The type of death that would result from the fall in the garden of Eden wasn't only physical death, but spiritual death—separation from God. Spiritual death continues in a permanent state when someone dies apart from the reconciling work of Christ, who defeated death through His own sacrifice on the cross and subsequent resurrection.

GOD OFFERS PROTECTION THROUGH A SACRIFICE

In the United States, significant events are marked by scheduled holidays. We take time each year to celebrate Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Veterans Day, and many more. These days are a time to remember what has happened in the past.

In Exodus 12, we find God doing something on a much grander scale. God changes the calendar of the Israelites so that they celebrate the Passover. He tells Moses and Aaron that there will be a new calendar (vv. 1-2), and it will be a sign of a new beginning. God establishes their calendar based on theology. At the beginning of each year, they will remember God's great salvation. God must be at the forefront of their lives and be central to all that they do.

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight. “Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. [...] For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt. (Ex. 12:1-7,12-13)

The people were to take a lamb on the tenth day of this month for each household, or for the number of people who could eat a lamb. The lamb served as a substitute. However, the lamb was only acceptable if it was a one-year-old male without blemish. In Deuteronomy 17:1, God said that a blemished animal used for a sacrifice was an abomination. Israel needed a perfect substitute, a perfect sacrifice.

In verses 6-7, we see what was to happen to this unblemished lamb. It was to be killed at twilight. The slain lamb would be a vivid reminder to everyone that all deserve judgment. (See Rom. 3:23.) Consequently, a blameless life had to be sacrificed in the place of the guilty people who needed salvation. The blood of the lamb was to be applied to their doorposts (v. 7). The obedience of placing the blood on their doorposts showed that they believed God would keep His word and pass over, sparing that house from judgment. So, Israel escaped judgment through this sacrifice, and salvation was accomplished by faith in the work of the substitute. The blood on their doors served as a sign that judgment had already fallen at that house. Just as the plagues were a sign to Egypt of God's justice and judgment, now the Passover was a sign of God's mercy to Israel.

Thus, we see God continue to keep the promise of Genesis 3:15 and the Abrahamic covenant. In the midst of looming judgment, God provided. He protected Israel from slavery and death for future salvation. In accomplishing this, He said, "And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt." God accepted the blood of the sacrifice and passed over their sin.

At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead. Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!" (Ex. 12:29-32)

In this passage we see God's redeeming power displayed in a "great reversal." God began by striking down the firstborns of Egypt. He would end the debates with one cataclysmic sign. He judged all of Egypt without distinction, from rich to poor, good to bad. The cries in the land extended to all peoples. The destroyer would go through the mightiest nation in the world, like a knife through butter.

Earlier we read God's word to Moses, "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve me.' If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son'" (Ex. 4:22-23). Here we see that God kept His word.

TIMELINE

THE GOLDEN CALF
Israel commits idolatry against God.

THE COMMANDMENTS (PART I)
God gives Israel instructions on how to relate to Him.

THE COMMANDMENTS (PART II)
God gives Israel instructions on how to relate to others.

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

Through the tenth plague, God turned evil on its head. Pharaoh had enacted an unrighteous judgment on Hebrew boys by throwing them into the Nile. Now, God enacted a righteous judgment on the Egyptians. Pharaoh's judgment came back on his head. In addition, by striking down the "gods" of Egypt, in particular Pharaoh's son, God tells Pharaoh that he isn't God, and neither is his son. There's only one true God! This blow hurts Egypt not only personally through the loss of the son of succession, but also theologically as God's power over their gods is displayed.

CHRIST CONNECTION

This need for a perfect sacrifice reminds us of our own state. We, being corrupted by our sin, cannot save ourselves. Our good works are like the blemished lamb—unworthy before a holy God. We need one who serves as a substitute on our behalf. Jesus is the Lamb for the household of God. Only through faith in Him are our sins covered. He alone is our hope. Paul says, "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7b).

Similarly, those who have been born again have Christ's blood covering them. God sees Christ's blood on us and passes over our sin. He forgives our trespasses and accepts Christ's righteousness as our own.

So how do we respond to this story of the Passover? First, we must remember that true freedom comes in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He's the Lamb who provides us with total protection from God's judgment (1 John 2:2; 3:10). He was the spotless, unblemished Lamb, chosen before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:19-20). He was the Lamb whose bones were not broken (John 19:33-36); the ultimate Lamb, crucified during Passover (Matt. 26:26-32). This Lamb will apply His blood to our account (2 Cor. 5:21). So trust in Him alone for salvation.

Second, we must worship the Lamb. If you have come to Him by faith, then you can sing the song of the redeemed (Rev. 5:11-14). Our Savior is worth all of our praise—both our verbal praise and the praise that comes through an obedient life.

Finally, we must tell the world about the Lamb. We should tell everyone about the judgment that is to come, and offer to everyone the good news of salvation through Jesus, our substitute Lamb. Many around the world have yet to hear about the good news.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Why was it important for the sacrificial lamb to be spotless? What did being spotless signify?** *Being spotless meant being without blemish, and it signified that the lamb was a perfect sacrifice.*
- **The blood on the door was a public statement for all to see. How does this influence the way we think of our Christian faith? What characteristics should distinguish your life from the lives of others?** *The blood on the doorposts were outward expressions of an internal belief that God would spare those who trusted Him. It was a sign of identification, showing everyone that the members of that household were trusting in God. Help students think of similar ways that their inner trust and faith is outwardly displayed to those around them.*
- **What does the Passover event communicate about our sin?** *At the very least, it tells us that we are all guilty, both Jew and Gentile. No one is without sin, and everyone needs God's free gift of a perfect sacrifice to die in our place.*
- **How has this session challenged you when thinking about God's judgment and grace?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

This story causes us to remember the severity and mercy of God. When we think about it, we all will have to admit that we deserve this kind of judgment. We are all like Pharaoh. Some think they will never be judged. They think that they can spend their life piling up pyramids full of stuff, chasing fame, and refusing to bow down to the true God. Sadly, they will end up much like Pharaoh unless they look to God alone for mercy.

- **Why do you think God gave Pharaoh advance notice of the coming plague instead of simply unleashing His wrath? What “advance notice” has God given humanity regarding His judgment?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How should the severity of God’s judgment and the magnitude of His mercy affect the way we live?** *We serve a God who, because of His holiness, must judge sin accordingly. However, we also serve a God who has provided mercy for those who would turn to Him in repentance, and who has born the wrath we deserve in Himself through the death of His Son.*



HEART

In Exodus 12:27b-28, notice the people’s reaction to the Passover instructions: worship and obedience. They “bowed their heads and worshiped. Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.” This theme of worship and obedience runs right through Exodus. By remembering who God is and what He has done, they give God praise and obedience.

- **What is the connection between our worship of the Lamb and our witness to the gospel?** *Similar to the Israelites’ pattern of worship and obedience, when we recognize what Christ has done for us through His death and resurrection, we ought to naturally respond in obedience in sharing the good news of the gospel with others.*
- **Share of a time when you responded in obedience as a result of God’s goodness in your life.** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

God calls us to warn others of His coming judgment and to offer the good news of salvation through Jesus, the substitute Lamb.

- **Do you find it difficult to talk about the coming judgment of God? If so, why?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What difference does it make in talking about judgment knowing that Jesus bears the wrath of judgment in our place through faith in Him?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out items #1 and #2 to the students, which contain all of the essential doctrines and key figures students will encounter throughout the quarter of study.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/storystart15)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



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GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

04

SESSION FOUR

The Waters are Parted

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we see what happened to the children of Israel as they left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea. God demonstrated His worthiness to be praised by guiding His people, manifesting His glory, and delivering them in love. As God's children, we too can praise God for His guidance, His glory, and His deliverance.

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 13:17-22; 14:1-14,21-31

THE POINT

God protects His people and brings judgment upon those who oppose Him.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Different people enjoy different types of music. Music shows us the diversity of humanity and the different preferences that exist. Music is also a wonderful way to teach God's Word. It is "portable theology," because a song filled with truth is something you get to take with you.

- **What is your favorite album of all time? How about your favorite song? What genre of music do you prefer over others?**

In Exodus 15, we come across an ancient song of praise. Apparently, Moses penned this song right after God delivered Israel from Egypt. Like other songs in Scripture, it's rich in lyrical content. The people could take the truth of God's deliverance with them, and they could remind one another of God's power and grace through this song.

And so they sang: *"Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them. You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode"* (Ex. 15:11-13).

- **What brought about such an expression of praise?**
- **When have you worshipped God with the same attitude of praise and thankfulness over His love for you?**

Option 2

Display a variety of items (or images of items from the Internet) and play a game of "What's it worth?" Hold up one item and instruct students to state what they believe the item costs. After each student has revealed his or her guess, share the correct price. Award one point to the student with the guess closest to the actual price. Continue with each item. Declare a winner. After the game, for each item, ask: Is this item worth this price? Why or why not? How do you determine how much something is worth? Point out that the prices of things change, but God's value never changes.

- **Write WORSHIP on the board. What does worship mean to you? (List synonyms or responses.)**
- **What makes God worthy of your worship?**

Share that God does not have worth just because we assign it to Him—He is worthy because He is God. This study will focus on why we should worship God and why only God is worthy of our worship.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God protects His people and brings judgment upon those who oppose Him

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land
- **Pharaoh:** ruler over Egypt

PLOT

As we continue our journey through the story, we see God's people exiting Egypt only to be caught between a rock and a hard place. In this session, we see what happened to the children of Israel as they left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea. Once again, God demonstrates His worthiness and strength as He delivers His people from the armies of Pharaoh.

TIMELINE

THE RED SEA

God continues to provide for His people by parting the Red Sea.

THE WILDERNESS

Israel is to walk in faith and follow after God on their way to the promised land.

THE GOLDEN CALF

Israel commits idolatry against God.

GOD GUIDES HIS PEOPLE

In the previous session, we saw how God delivered the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. As we pick up the story, we notice how God guides the Israelites' next steps.

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, “Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.” But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.” And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people. (Ex. 13:17-22)

Notice Israel didn't exit by the way of the sea, though it was the quickest route. They would have arrived in less than two weeks instead of forty years! That was the shortest way, but not the best way. There were enemies in that direction, and Israel was not ready for battle.

The text says, “Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt” (Ex. 13:17). They would have turned back to Pharaoh at the first sign of trouble. Even though they left “equipped for battle” (v. 18), this doesn't mean they were ready to fight. Later in their journey, once they reached Canaan and saw how big their enemies were, they said, “Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt” (Num. 14:4).

God's route wasn't an easy route. They would spend 40 years in the wilderness, and soon they would be hemmed in between the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army. God planned to teach them many things on this journey; He had other purposes in mind, involving much more than moving them from point A to point B.

Our guidance-giving, promise-keeping God led Israel in a most extraordinary way—by day and by night. God provided a cloud in the day, and fire by night (v. 21). Once again, fire is a picture of God's presence.

GOD PROTECTS HIS PEOPLE

The Israelites' journey takes an interesting turn in the next scene. The Lord tells Moses that an epic showdown is about to take place.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, ‘They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’ And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.” And they did so. (Ex. 14: 1-4; for a complete reading of this section, also see verses 5-14).

If God weren't in charge, then one might conclude that this strategy was crazy. Israel was on their way out when God told them to go back and camp between the sea and the desert. If Pharaoh were to pursue them, they would be trapped.

As the story continues, we see how Pharaoh pursued God's people just as God said he would (vv. 5-9). Even though Pharaoh thought he had a good military strategy, he was actually fulfilling the purposes of God. As Pharaoh pursued Israel, he would have used the best of chariots. Egypt had all the modern military advantages. Surely they thought the Israelites would be defeated. Pharaoh was probably singing victory songs before the battle began. But he was wrong.

According to verse 10, when Israel saw the Egyptians, they were afraid. No surprise here! The Egyptians were superior soldiers. They had “weapons of mass destruction” so to speak. But what was the real problem? Israel had forgotten that it was God who brought them to this place. They needed only to fear God and trust in His love. (See Ps. 106:1-10.)

Instead, the Israelites began to complain. Moses told these scared complainers, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent” (vv. 13-14). Stand still? “The Lord will fight for you?” Yes. That's the right strategy. (See also 2 Chron. 20:15-17.) Don't be afraid. The battle isn't yours. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.

Since God would give the victory, only God could get the glory. This isn't ultimately a story about Israel's victory, but about God's unrivaled, incomparable glory.

- **Do you usually react like the Israelites when your circumstances become difficult?** (*p. 29, PSG*)
- **Why do you think we are so quick to stress out and whine when life gets tough?** (*p. 29, PSG*)

When we are more focused on our circumstances (like the sea and the army in the case of the Israelites), we will always begin to worry. But when we are focused on God and His greatness and power, then no circumstances are too scary because God is always bigger.

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

God implements unusual strategies throughout the Bible. Remember Abraham and Sarah's age when they had a child? Later, we'll learn about Gideon and his little army (Judg. 6–8), Jehoshaphat's battle with the Ammonites and Moabites (2 Chron. 20), and a demon-possessed herd of pigs (Mark 5). Ultimately, God used an unusual strategy with Jesus Christ going to the cross. Satan, like Pharaoh, must have thought that he had Jesus trapped and defeated. Yet God brought deliverance for you, through the resurrection, and He glorified Himself.

GOD JUDGES THOSE WHO OPPOSE HIM

Through the end of chapter 14, we find one of the most important stories in the Bible: the crossing of the Red Sea. God will get His people out of Egypt through the miracle of parting the sea, and He's going to judge the Egyptians by swallowing them up in the sea.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. (Ex. 14:21-23) (for a complete reading of this section, also see verses 24-31).

Moses obeyed the instruction God gave him (v. 21). But think about these instructions: Pharaoh was coming, the people were complaining, and God essentially said, "Hold out your stick, and I will part the waters!" Why? Once again the theme of God's glory is repeated: "I will get glory over Pharaoh" (see 14:17-18). It may have sounded foolish, but Moses obeyed.

As the Egyptians pursued the Israelites, "the LORD looked down," majestically exalted above all (v. 24). He threw the Egyptians into a panic and clogged the wheels of their fine chariots (vv. 24-25). They should have fled, but they didn't. After Israel crossed the sea, Moses stretched out his staff so that the waters came down on the Egyptians and everything with them (v. 26). This was total elimination. At daybreak, the Israelites could see God's victory, for the Egyptians were swallowed up when the water went back into the gap (vv. 27-28). Verse 29 provides a summary statement: "But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left."

TIMELINE

THE COMMANDMENTS (PART I)

God gives Israel instructions on how to relate to Him.

THE COMMANDMENTS (PART II)

God gives Israel instructions on how to relate to others.

THE TABERNACLE

The tabernacle is built so that God may dwell among His people.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Just as Moses led his people through the waters of judgment to the other side, those who are in Christ will pass through the waters of death to the other side safely because of His mighty resurrection. This is what baptism represents: passing from death to life. In baptism we are saying, “I have died with Christ, I have been buried with Him, and I have been raised with Him!” (See, for example, Rom 6:1-4.)

The true story of the exodus provides a picture of what has happened to us in salvation and in the Christian life:

1. We are saved from bondage. Like the Israelites who were delivered from their enslavement, which is a picture of salvation, we too are freed from the bondage of sin through Jesus.

2. We are saved by grace. In Exodus 14:13-14, Moses tells the Israelites to stand still and “see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today” (14:13). He says, “The LORD will fight for you” (14:14). The principle of grace couldn’t be clearer here. Salvation is not about what we do but about what God has done for us in Jesus. (See also Rom. 4:3-8.)

3. We are saved through a mediator. The reason the Israelites didn’t drown in this event is because they had a mediator. Consider Moses’ role: On the one hand he’s identified with the Israelites, and on the other he’s identified with God. But there’s another mediator—a better one—Jesus Christ. He was not rebuked for just one sin, but this mediator took God’s wrath for all our sin. And this mediator was God. (See John 1:1.) Jesus is the only way we cross over. He is our mediator.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

People of God

Scripture describes the church as the people of God (2 Cor. 6:16). Comprised of both Jew and Gentile, the church is created by God through the atoning death of Christ. The term “church” is used in two senses—individual local churches that have covenanted together under the Lordship of Christ, and the universal church that comprises all believers in Christ in all times. As the people of God, the church seeks to live under Christ’s authority while we are protected and cared for by Him.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Why is it sometimes difficult to trust God's guidance? What are some things we learn as we walk by faith in God's guidance?** *Answers to this question will vary, but should be based on the fact that like the Israelites who doubted God, we too are tempted not to trust His wisdom and goodness toward us as we face many of life's difficult circumstances. While it's often hard to make sense of things in our own minds because we are not God and cannot see the big picture like He does, we can have full assurance that God knows what He is doing, and we can trust Him to get us where we need to be.*
- **When have you been able to look back on your life and see how God has guided you? How does looking at God's guidance in the past increase your confidence in His future guidance?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How do we give glory to God by obeying His instructions even when we don't understand His purpose?** *Obeying God, even in the midst of confusion, demonstrates that we are willing to rely on Him and trust in Him, and not in anything or anyone else. By doing so, we show God to be trustworthy and bring Him glory.*
- **In what ways is the complaining of the Israelites like holding a mirror up to our own hearts?** *It is easy to point to the Israelites and be amazed at their complaining in the midst of God's miraculous work in their lives. However, the story itself also shows that the same attitude and complaining we see in them can also be found within ourselves. Like the Israelites, we too complain and grumble in the midst of God's grace and goodness in our lives.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

The reality of judgment and salvation are clear in Exodus 14:30-31. Imagine the scene—bodies washed on the shore, giving a dreadful picture of unrepentant people. The waters of judgment had come down on those who refused to believe. In contrast, on the other side we see the happy picture of believers who have been saved from the waters of judgment. They were delivered by grace through faith.

- **In what ways have you seen the power of God after waiting a long time for Him to act?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Why do you think it is important that God's saving actions on our behalf demonstrate our weakness and His strength?** *The reason, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:9, is because God's power is made perfect in our weakness.*



HEART

In Exodus 15, God's people sing, which is how a saved people should respond. If Israel sang with all their hearts over this salvation, how much more should we who have received a greater deliverance through Jesus? We praise what we prize. Do you prize your Savior?

- **How has God's work of grace and mercy in your life led you to praise Him?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How does the temptation to sin still affect our hearts even after we are redeemed?** *Answers to this question will vary, but might include the fact that sin often causes our hearts to be drawn away from prizing Jesus as we should, tempting us to prize things of far less value instead (things like praise of other people, possessions, relationships, etc.).*



HANDS

Treasuring Jesus for His work of salvation will inevitably lead to a love for others and a desire to see them come to know Jesus in a saving way. It is what fuels obedience to Jesus' command to share with others the good news of what He has done, so that they, too, may come to praise Him and bring Him glory.

- **Why do you think a love for God naturally leads to a desire to make Him known to others?** *One reason is because when a person sees Christ for the treasure that He truly is, and treasures Him more than the things here on earth, then that person will want others to experience that same joy in Christ as well.*
- **How has this session challenged you to live differently?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #6 to the students, which contains an artistic poster of Moses parting the Red Sea.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/storystart15)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



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05

SESSION FIVE

Tested In the Wilderness

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we obey the apostle Paul's admonition to learn from Israel's example in the wilderness. Like Israel, we too are sojourners who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, who have crossed over to the other side by grace, and are now on the way to the promised land. As we journey by faith through our own wilderness, God is sanctifying us and teaching us to trust Him, love Him, and follow Him.

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 17:1-7; 1 Corinthians 10:1-6

THE POINT

God's goodness is shown through His sustaining grace toward His people.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

As Christians, there's a school that we all attend. God trains us, disciplines us, and sanctifies us in "Wilderness University." Charles Spurgeon called the wilderness "the Oxford and Cambridge for God's students." Speaking of the wilderness is a way of referring to Israel's sojourn from Egypt, through the wilderness, on to the promised land.

In Exodus 17, we pick up the story with Israel's wilderness experience. To set the context, realize that three consecutive stories in the wilderness journey concern food (Ex. 16) and water (Ex. 15:22-27; 17:1-7). Israel gets hungry and thirsty, and they complain. Their grumbling serves as a warning to us.

- **What are some ways we receive an education "informally," apart from schools and universities? What are some life experiences that teach us things we can't learn anywhere else?**
- **What has God taught you recently through a difficult experience or period of suffering?**

Option 2

Display a compass or use a compass app. Point out that the needle doesn't point in the direction you need to go; it points to true north. True north helps you decide which road to take to get where you're going. That's like the Holy Spirit's teaching. He gives you truth in His Word; truth helps you know the way to go.

- **When you find yourself in a difficult situation, not knowing which way to turn or what decision to make, are you more likely to complain first or do you go to God? Explain.**
- **Think of an area in your life where you need the Spirit to guide you. What expectations can you have of God regarding this? What expectations does God have of you in this?**

Direct students to write three things on an index card: something they need God to teach or help them with, a temptation they often face, and a step they will take to seek God's help in the days ahead.

Point out that oftentimes, people don't look for God's help until they have a problem; instead, they complain or grumble to other people. Pray that God will help you grow every day so that when those problems come, you're ready to face them with the confidence that God will guide you in the direction He wants you to go.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God's goodness is shown through His sustaining grace toward His people.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land

PLOT

By this point in the story, the people of God have witnessed some miraculous defeats against the bondage and strength of Pharaoh and his armies. With all of that now behind them, the people find themselves in a period and place in time waiting to take possession of the land promised to their forefathers. Yet in this period of waiting, God still has some things He wants to teach His people, things that will continually shape them into the type of people God is calling them to be.

TIMELINE

THE WILDERNESS

Israel is to walk in faith and follow after God on their way to the promised land.

THE GOLDEN CALF

Israel commits idolatry against God.

THE COMMANDMENTS (PART I)

God gives Israel instructions on how to relate to Him.

GOD'S PEOPLE COMPLAIN

All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" (Ex. 17:1-2)

As the Israelites move on, this time at "Rephidim," they have no water. But instead of trusting and seeking God, they "quarrel" and "grumble" against Moses (Ex. 17:2-3). Because of this, Moses named the place "Massah and Meribah," which means testing and quarreling. (See also Ps. 95.) Instead of trusting God, they were testing God.

This sinful entitlement attitude was expressed in two ways. First, they demanded water. "Give us water to drink," Israel said (v. 2a). The text highlights their attitude. They weren't coming in humility asking for water, but were acting like spoiled kids.

Israel also expressed their entitlement by complaining about God's provision. "Why do you quarrel with me?" Moses asked (v. 2b).

This was a sad pattern for Israel. They grumbled under Pharaoh (Ex. 2:23). They grumbled at the Red Sea (14:11-12). They grumbled at Marah (15:23-24). They grumbled about their leaders (16:2-3; 17:3-4; also Num. 11). God had just turned bitter water into sweet water and had sent bread from heaven, yet they still complain here at Rephidim.

But God reacts to the Israelites with mercy. He continues to provide for them in spite of their ingratitude.

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

Complaining is a serious sin, more serious than you might think. (See 1 Cor. 10:1-12. Notice the sins mentioned there.) Paul told the church in Philippi these important words: "Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:14-15). Notice that Paul says one of the ways we shine in a dark world is by not complaining. You will stand apart from the world if you pepper your day with words of gratitude rather than words of complaint.

For the Christian, this life is as bad as it's ever going to be. This is our wilderness. The promised land is coming. And even in this difficult wilderness journey, we have a God who cares for His children. So avoid the culture's language of complaining, and instead let thanksgiving flow from your lips—to the God who parts seas and raises the dead.

GOD'S PEOPLE QUESTION HIS GOODNESS

But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” So Moses cried to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” (Ex. 17:3-4)

Next, we see Israel questioning God's goodness (Ex. 17:3). “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” they asked. They were beginning to question their entire deliverance from Egypt. Was the purpose of their liberation for death in a wilderness? Of course not! There was no need to question God's provision.

Following the people's grumbling, Moses cried out to the Lord. “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” (v. 4). Moses sensed that this complaint was serious.

God didn't redeem Israel to then forsake them. God redeems, and God provides. As believers, we should remember that God has brought us through a greater exodus. And if God would provide the solution for our greatest problem (through Christ's death and resurrection), then we have no reason to question His goodness or doubt His faithfulness when facing our day-to-day problems. God is good. Believe it.

- **Have you ever questioned God's goodness? Explain.** (*p. 35, PSG*)

Invite students to read Psalm 73. Draw attention to how the psalmist spends several verses perplexed at how the wicked are comfortable, well-fed, pain free, and so forth. Then, after some clear thinking, he writes this: “But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end” (vv. 16-17).

The psalmist began to look at things with an eternal perspective, which caused him to see that the wicked prosper for only a short time. Their terrible end is coming. As he sees things more properly, lament gives way to praise to God for His faithfulness, His presence, and His goodness. So yes, trials will come. But you need not doubt God's goodness—just look at the cross, and remember that you're greatest problem has already been solved. God is good.

- **We all grumble and complain. How does adding the words “against the Lord” after “grumble” or “complain” change our view of this attitude?** (*p. 35, PSG*)
- **What does grumbling about our circumstances say about our heart's posture toward God?** (*p. 35, PSG*)

GOD HAS MERCY AND PROVIDES FOR HIS PEOPLE

The presence of God is a major theme in the book of Exodus: God heard Israel's cry in Egypt. God was with His people at the Red Sea. God journeyed with them in the wilderness. God's presence appeared majestically at Sinai. God's presence was manifested in the Tabernacle.

Moses knew that what made Israel distinct was God's presence among them. Moses proclaimed that they could not move one step without God. What distinguished Israel wasn't their land (they didn't have it yet). It wasn't their wealth (they had been slaves). It wasn't their culture (it wasn't fully developed yet). What distinguished them? It was that God was with them.

Once again, God's presence was manifested to the people in a remarkable way. Look at how God solved this particular water problem.

And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?" (Ex. 17:5-7)

By the end of this story, we see how Israel doubted God's presence. "Is the LORD among us or not?" they asked (v. 7). They doubted God was with them. But after Moses prayed, God provided water from a rock (vv. 4-6).

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Sin as Missing the Mark

One aspect of sin is missing the mark of God's standards set for humanity. Missing the mark isn't simply making a mistake, but consciously choosing to sin and falling short of God's glory as a result. We may refer to sin as a failure on the part of humans to live according to God's standards, but we must recognize this failure is intentional. We miss the mark when we deliberately choose to cast aside God's purpose for us.

TIMELINE

THE COMMANDMENTS (PART II)

God gives Israel instructions on how to relate to others.

THE TABERNACLE

The tabernacle is built so that God may dwell among His people.

ATONEMENT SACRIFICES (PART I)

The burnt, grain, and fellowship offerings are explained.

CHRIST CONNECTION

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul reflects on this episode in the wilderness as he exhorts the church in Corinth:

For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. (1 Cor. 10:1-6)

There are a number of connections to Christ as you study the wilderness experience. Regarding baptism, Paul compares Israel's escape through the waters, through their identity with Moses, to being baptized into Christ (1 Cor. 10:1-2; Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). He then states that God nourished the people just as He nourishes us spiritually (1 Cor. 10:3-4).

In this "rock experience," Paul says that this story points to Christ who is the Rock that was stricken for our salvation. When Paul says, "the Rock was Christ" (v. 4), I take this to mean that the rock was a type of Christ. Moses struck the rock instead of striking the people, and water flowed to save people. Jesus, the Rock, was stricken for our salvation. Instead of striking us, God struck the Son. Like the rock, when He was stricken water flowed from His side (John 19:34). He died the death we deserved to die. Now, we drink from the water of life for eternal life (John 7:37-38). By believing in Jesus, we drink from the ultimate saving water.

The stories in Exodus instruct and encourage us, but they also serve as a warning to us. Paul used these stories as a warning to the Corinthian church. Despite seeing the signs and hearing God's Word, the Israelite generation that experienced God's miraculous deliverance from Egypt and His provision in the wilderness didn't get to see the promised land (1 Cor. 10:5; see Num. 14:22-23,29,37; 26:64-65). Despite these wonderful provisions, only a few had real faith in God (Heb. 3:16-19; 4:2).

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **When was the last time you grumbled about a situation you were in? How is grumbling related to a sense of entitlement?** *Answers to this question will vary, but the second part refers to the mind-set that we oftentimes think we deserve this or that, and when we don't get said thing, we complain.*
- **Do difficult circumstances cause us to have wrong attitudes and actions, or do they merely reveal wrong attitudes of the heart? Explain.** *They reveal wrong attitudes of the heart and can show us where desires (even good desires) have turned into demands within our lives.*
- **God intended to train and form His people during their years in the wilderness. In what ways might God be training you as you walk through difficult times?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Can you think of a parallel between God's provision of water for complaining Israel and a specific provision He has made for you when you were grumbling? How did God's provision affect your attitude?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

When most people question God's goodness, it is oftentimes the result of a difficult time in their life. However, Christians, knowing that God is good and is working for our ultimate joy in Him, rest in the fact that God is shaping us into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:28-29), and this process often involves trying times (Jas. 1:3; Rom. 5:3-4). God knows exactly what it will take for us to become more like Jesus in the way we live.

- **How can Jesus' suffering and death on the cross encourage you during difficult times?** *Jesus' sufferings demonstrate that: 1) even when we suffer, God has not left us; 2) even when we suffer, God can turn it for something good; and 3) change often takes place through suffering.*
- **What is the greatest thing God could ever do for us?** *Some people might say that the greatest thing God could do for them would be to prevent difficulties and hard times, keep themselves and their loved ones healthy, let them live prosperous lives, and so forth. None of those are correct, however, since the greatest thing God could ever do for someone is the very thing He has already done—give Himself to us. When viewed through the lens of the cross, suffering takes on a different perspective.*



HEART

Grumbling and complaining are symptoms of a deeper problem taking place within the heart. When desires run rampant and turn into demands within our hearts, sin takes root and begins to produce grumbling behavior within our lives (Jas. 4:1)

- **Think about the last time you grumbled and complained. What demands have you created in your heart to cause you to respond that way?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How has this session challenged you to address the grumbling in your own life?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

The Rock, Jesus, was stricken for our salvation, but we can't keep this good news to ourselves. We must tell everyone about the Living Water. We can offer a lot of good things to the world, and so we should. The world needs clean water, food, and clothing. And while we offer these things, let's also make sure we are offering the gospel, the good news of the Savior who was crushed so that those who place their faith and trust in Him may live forever.

- **In what ways can Christians be a stream of living water to the lost around us?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How does being the recipient of God's mercy impact the way you show mercy to others?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #7 to the students, which contains a map of the people's departure from Egypt on their way to the promised land.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/storystart15)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

06

SESSION SIX

The Sin of Idolatry

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we watch how Israel's sinful idolatry leads to a distortion of true worship and brings about God's righteous condemnation. Idolatry is dangerous because it distorts our view of God and corrupts our behavior, leading us away from God as He has revealed Himself and toward a false god who is powerless to save and transform us. We also see how Moses stepped in between God and the people and interceded on their behalf. As those who have Jesus Christ as our mediator, we trust in His power to overcome our idolatries and empower us for His mission.

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 32:1-14

THE POINT

Idolatry is putting something or someone in the place of God.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Idolatry was an ever-present danger for the children of Israel. You may think idolatry isn't something people still struggle with today. But remember that idolatry isn't just about the idol—it's about the human heart. And that's the root of the problem we see as we encounter Israel building a golden calf at the base of Mount Sinai. The first Christian martyr, Stephen, reflected on this sad moment in Israel's history, saying, "In their hearts they turned to Egypt, saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us'" (Acts 7:39-40). Idolatry then and now is a heart problem.

So what, exactly, is idolatry? Idolatry is putting something or someone in the place of God. Anything you look to in hopes of finding what only Christ can give (joy, security, peace, meaning, significance, identity, salvation, and so forth) becomes an idol. Many people don't believe idolatry is a problem because they only associate idolatry with shrines, temples, and carved images. But heart idolatry exists everywhere. Common idols include things like money, sex, relationships, the praise of others, competence and skill, appearance, intelligence, success, etc.

- **What are some reasons our hearts tend to create idols for ourselves?**
- **In what ways can our view of God become distorted by our idolatry?**

Option 2

Provide modeling clay or Play-doh® and invite students to create something that might resemble a golden calf or other idol people would have worshiped years ago. As students complete their projects, ask:

- **Would you worship the "god" you just created? Why or why not?**

Discuss how absurd it would be to worship something you created out of Play-doh®. Share that while Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments from God, the Israelites became impatient and turned their hope and allegiance to an idol—a golden calf.

- **What are some things, besides God, that people put their hope in today?**
- **Why won't those things bring fulfillment?**

While we no longer worship literal golden calves, we turn our hearts away from God to the idols of money, popularity, power, image, materialism, and so forth. Remind students that only God is worthy of our loyalty and worship because He is a great, holy, and awesome God.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Idolatry is putting something or someone in the place of God.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land
- **Aaron:** older brother of Moses; chosen by God as Moses' spokesman

PLOT

In the previous sessions, we've watched how God heard the cries of His people in slavery, rescued them from Egypt, and guided them into the wilderness. The right response to God's salvation is gratitude and worship. Unfortunately, Israel redirected their worship—not to their Redeemer, but to a golden calf idol.

In this session we watch how Israel's sinful idolatry brings about God's righteous condemnation. Idolatry is dangerous because it distorts our view of God and corrupts our behavior, leading us away from God as He has revealed Himself and toward a false god who is powerless to save and transform us. We also see how Moses stepped in between God and the people and interceded on their behalf. As those who have Jesus Christ as our mediator, we trust in His power to overcome our idolatries and empower us for His mission.

TIMELINE

THE GOLDEN CALF
Israel commits idolatry against God.

THE COMMANDMENTS (PART I)
God gives Israel instructions on how to relate to Him.

THE COMMANDMENTS (PART II)
God gives Israel instructions on how to relate to others.

THE PEOPLE FALL INTO IDOL WORSHIP

While Moses was up on the mountain getting instructions for the proper worship of God, the people were back at the camp making a calf for the worship of a false god. Even though the Israelites had gotten out of Egypt, Egypt hadn't gotten out of the people. Moses was absent for about forty days, and Aaron assumed leadership. The people told Aaron how they wanted to worship, and Aaron demonstrated what a leader without conviction looks like. He gave the people exactly what they asked for.

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD." And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. (Ex. 32:1-6)

Why did Israel fall into idolatry? Why did they distort true worship? For the same reasons we, too, fall into idolatry.

1) We fall when we disobey the word of God. (Ex. 32:1a) Notice how sin works. We don't want to be told what to do. This tendency goes all the way back to the garden of Eden, where the serpent tempted our first parents by questioning God's Word.

Interestingly, Israel claimed to be worshiping "the LORD," and they even proceeded to give offerings (vv. 5-6). Perhaps they thought they were worshiping the real God, but they were worshiping in a way that clearly violated what God said. Their hearts craved Egypt, as evidenced by this godless practice.

This distorted worship shows us the importance of knowing God for who He truly is and not how we imagine Him to be. Worship is built on a right perception of God as revealed through Scripture. In *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer said, "The essence of Idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him."

2) Like Israel, we will also fall if we distrust the purposes of God. (v. 1b)

The people said they didn't know what had happened to Moses. But they knew where he was! They simply didn't trust God's purposes. Notice the reason for their idol making. They grew frustrated with Moses' extended absence. Instead of trusting in God's purposes, they moved on.

Failure to trust God is sin, and it also leads to countless other sins. Israel wanted to get on with their journey. God, however, hadn't given them the itinerary. He only promised to go with them. But the impatient Israelites failed to trust God. Did they have any reason to doubt Him? Of course not—think of all the miracles and provisions up to this point!

3) Like Israel, we fall when we forget the grace of God. (vv. 2-4) The people were instructed to remove their rings, which came from their plundering of Egypt and served to remind them of the grace of God. How did they get Egypt's gold? God gave it to them. (See Ex. 3:20-22.) The gold came from God's victory. It pictured His grace and His faithfulness. But here Israel belittled God's grace. They offered what God gave them to an idol instead of using God's gifts for His glory. Here's how the psalmist described the scene: "They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a metal image. They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass. They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt" (Ps. 106:19-21).

4) Like Israel, we fall when we fail to use our gifts to the glory of God. We should enjoy God's gifts, be thankful for His gifts, and use His gifts to build the Kingdom, not for idolatrous devotion. Think about not just the gold, but the skill and time it took to make this idol! Instead of using this skill, this time, and this gold to honor God, they used it for idolatry. It leads us to a question:

- **How are you using your gifts of time, talent, and treasure for God's glory? Explain.** (p. 40, PSG)

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Sin as Idolatry

Sin is not only a physical act of rebellion against God, such as lying or stealing, but it is also a matter of the heart. The physical displays of sin are the fruit of what has been birthed in the heart of a person. (See Matt. 15:10-20.) In Scripture, idolatry usually refers to bowing down to a statue made of wood or gold, worshipping created things instead of the Creator. But idolatry can take on more subtle forms: a seeking of approval, security, power, pleasure, etc. We can diagnose the idolatry of our hearts by examining the areas where the desires of our hearts have turned into idolatrous demands. (See Jas. 4:1-2.)

THE PEOPLE NEED A MEDIATOR BECAUSE OF THEIR IDOLATRY

Next, we see the Lord tell Moses to go down and confront the people because of their distorted worship. (See Ex. 32:7.) God was angered by how the people

exchanged His glory with an image of an ox (v. 8; see also Ps. 106:19-23). As a result, we see that idolaters deserve God's condemnation.

And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you." (Ex. 32:7-10)

The people chose to worship a created thing instead of worshiping the Creator God. The psalmist writes in Psalm 106, "Therefore he said he would destroy them—had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them" (v. 23). What a remarkable statement about the work of Moses on behalf of the Israelites. In verses 11-14, we learn about intercession, particularly about Moses' important role of intercession.

But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.'" And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people. (Ex 32:11-14)

- **What does it mean to intercede from someone?** (p. 41, PSG)

Simply put, *intercession* means, "stepping in between two parties in order to resolve a problem." Invite students to share examples of when they have seen someone intercede on the behalf of someone else by stepping in to resolve a problem.

- **How can we intercede for others in prayer? Why is this important?** (p. 41, PSG)

TIMELINE

THE TABERNACLE
The tabernacle is built so that God may dwell among His people.

ATONEMENT SACRIFICES (PART I)
The burnt, grain, and fellowship offerings are explained.

ATONEMENT SACRIFICES (PART II)
The sin and restitution offerings are explained.

This story teaches us a lot about pleading to God for others. For starters, we should appeal to God's character and faithfulness in prayer. Notice how Moses appeals to God's compassion, God's past investment and reputation, and God's covenant faithfulness.

Second, we must seek the will of God, not our own selfish desires, in prayer. Moses didn't ask for personal glory here. God said that He would start all over with Moses, "I may make a great nation of you" (v. 10). This could have been flattering, but Moses cared more about the people fulfilling God's purposes of making them into a great nation. We too should pray in line with God's will; that is, making disciples of all nations, not desiring our own fame.

Third, we must believe that God answers prayer! This account in Exodus 32 is one of the best examples of how God responds to prayer. Because God is personal, He responds to prayer.

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

In other passages of Scripture, God declared His holy anger as way of inviting intervention. In Amos 7:1-6, God shows Amos what He may do to Israel, but Amos intercedes, and God relents. In the Book of Jonah, the prophet announces God's threat to destroy Nineveh in forty days, but Jonah knew this was an invitation for the Ninevites to actually repent. They do repent, and God doesn't destroy them. The same thing happens here in Exodus.

When verse 14 says, "the LORD relented," it doesn't mean that God changed his mind. God was inviting Moses to pray. When Moses did, God turned away His wrath. God wasn't changing His plans; Moses carried out God's plans. In the end, God does in fact send a plague, but it was a lesser punishment compared to what was first mentioned (32:34-35).

CHRIST CONNECTION

Like the Israelites, we need a mediator who will intercede for us because of our own idolatry. Moses foreshadowed the final and ultimate mediator humanity would every need—Jesus. (See 1 Tim. 2:5.) Jesus, the Mediator greater than Moses, turned away the wrath of God from us through His intervention. (See John 3:16.) Without Jesus' work, we would all be justly condemned. But praise God for the God-Man, Jesus Christ, who rescues idolaters like us!

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Why is it important that what we believe about God match up with what He has revealed about Himself in Scripture? What are the dangers if our opinions don't line up?** *If our beliefs about God don't line up with the reality of who God is, then the biggest consequence is that we won't know God. Our beliefs would be grounded on a figment of our imaginations, and not on God as He has revealed Himself to us in Scripture. Of course, there are additional consequences that follow if we don't truly know God as He has revealed Himself, such as not knowing how He would have us live, knowing right from wrong, and so forth.*
- **What is the relationship between our view of God and our behavior? What are some choices we make that come from a wrong view of God?** *Our beliefs about God influence the way we believe God would have us live. So if we have a wrong view of God and, for instance, don't believe that He created all people in His image, then we will likely live in such a way as to reflect that belief, which may involve discrimination and racism toward others.*
- **Make a list of common idols that you struggle with today and how they fail to deliver on what they promise.** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Like the Israelites, what happens when we forget the past work of God's grace in our own lives?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HIS STORY

*God's Story of
Redemption
through His Son,
Jesus Christ.*

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Anything can be an object of idolatry. Usually, the better something is, the more likely people will idolize it. People live in bondage to sexual sin, in part, because the human body is an amazing creation. The same goes for food and relationships. But we must not take “good things” and turn them into “god things.” If we do, we will end up in a life of total bondage and corruption.

- **What are some good things God created that are often turned into “god things” by ourselves and others?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some ways we can avoid falling into this type of idolatry?** *One way to prevent and/or address heart idols is by looking to Christ. To paraphrase Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:18, we become what we behold, so if we are beholding the glory of God in the face of Christ, we will become more like Christ, transformed into His image.*



HEART

Because of Israel's rejection of God's Word, their lack of trust in God, their lack of gratitude for the grace of God, and their lack of desire for the glory of God, they fell into idolatry. This whole scene is a picture of distorted worship. They were doing everything their way instead of God's way. We must remember that worship is about glorifying God, not gratifying self. It's possible to do things in the name of the Lord but still not worship the Lord.

- **What are the signs that our worship has become “distorted” or focused on ourselves and our preferences rather than on God and what He has said?** *Some answers might include constantly singing songs that don't reflect your heart, serving in order to get the praise of others and not for the praise of God, focusing too much on preference of the style of music versus the content of the songs themselves, and so forth.*
- **What are some ways we can prepare our hearts for genuine worship during our time with others at church?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

As we see with Moses, God calls us to intercede for people who need Him, appealing to His character and His will as we pray for their salvation. Part of that interceding takes place by speaking truth in love to others, as well as pleading that God's grace would intervene in their life.

- **How can we help one another turn to God instead of idols during difficult times?** *Answers will vary, but Hebrews 3:12-13 is a good text to reference.*
- **How would you describe the way you divide your time in prayer? How much time do you spend praying for yourself? How much time do you devote to praying for other people? What are those prayers like?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #8 to the students, which contains a poster of a cow labeled with different modern day idols. The poster can be simply shown to your group and used as a conversation starter regarding typical idols students struggle with, or it could be cut out and used as an activity for students to reconstruct.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/storystart15)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



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GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject



07

SESSION SEVEN

The Commandments (Part I)

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will listen to God's declaration of love for Israel, and see how that declaration of love led to the giving of His law. The Israelites needed to understand God's love and what He expected from them. They needed to know God more fully and understand what it meant to live in a covenantal relationship with Him. Through God's law, we can see the holiness of God as well as His redemptive love for us, and as we obey, we reflect the holiness and love of God to the world.

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 19:1-6; 20:1-11

THE POINT

The first four commandments reflect God's desire to be first in the hearts of His people.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

- **Who makes the rules in your house? Do you ever try to “bend the rules”? Why or why not?**

Read aloud the first four commandments in Exodus 20:1-11. In Exodus 20, God was literally “laying down the law” after delivering the Israelites from captivity in Egypt. The first four commandments He gave are all about our relationship with Him. Call on students to share what each command means.

- **What are some things we put before God in our lives? (boyfriend/girlfriend, championships, success, etc.) What are some things that would pass for idols today? (money, celebrities, etc.) How do we misuse God's name? What might prevent us from keeping the Sabbath day holy?**

Emphasize that the very first commandment says to have no other god but God the Father. We honor God the Father through our love for Jesus. Without a relationship with Christ, we cannot have a relationship with God. Without Christ in our hearts, following the commandments is empty and without meaning.

- **In what ways does your life reflect your love for God? Is there a particular commandment that you need to work on? Explain.**

Option 2

Set up some simple board games around the room. As students arrive, invite them to play the games. After a couple of minutes, encourage each student to modify the rules in his or her favor. For instance, if a player with a blue game piece lands on a space that says, “Go back two spaces,” let that player change the rule to something like: “Whenever a blue token lands on a space that says to go back two spaces, they get to move forward two spaces instead.” Allow a few more minutes of play, then call time.

- **Did you enjoy getting to make up your own rules when it came to playing these games? Did you like the fact that your opponent could make up his or her own rules too? Why or why not?**
- **Was it easier to play the game following the rules set by the game maker? Why?**
- **Is there anyone in this world you would trust to set the standard of right and wrong for everyone? Why or why not?**

Read aloud Exodus 20:1-11. Point out that God's first words, “I am the LORD your God,” emphasized His sovereign lordship and right to give these commands. Today, the Ten Commandments continue to clearly state God's love for His people as well as His expectations for how we should honor Him in the way we live.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

The first four commandments reflect God's desire to be first in the hearts of His people.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land

PLOT

God communicated truth to the Israelites when He gave the law to Moses. The children of Israel had been wandering in the wilderness and had grown weary. God's great victory on their behalf at the Red Sea was a distant memory, and they desperately wanted to settle in the land that God had promised. However, the people of Israel were not prepared to enter the promised land. The work that God was doing among them was not yet finished.

In this session, we will listen to God's declaration of love for Israel and see how that declaration of love led to the giving of His law. The Israelites needed to understand God's love and what He expected from them. They needed to know God more fully and understand what it meant to live in a covenantal relationship with Him. Through God's law, we can see the holiness of God as well as His redemptive love for us, and as we obey, we reflect the holiness and love of God to the world.

TIMELINE

THE COMMANDMENTS (PART I)

God gives Israel instructions on how to relate to Him.

THE COMMANDMENTS (PART II)

God gives Israel instructions on how to relate to others.

THE TABERNACLE

The tabernacle is built so that God may dwell among His people.

GOD REMINDS HIS PEOPLE OF HIS GREAT LOVE FOR THEM

Israel had suffered in the oppression of Egypt for a long time. God delivered them in epic fashion, but now they were again in a state of waiting. The people were worn out, frustrated, and needed to hear from the Lord. That's when God called Moses up to Mount Sinai so He could deliver His Word to the people. God's message is found in Exodus 19:1-6:

On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." (Ex. 19:1-6)

When we think of Moses on Mount Sinai, we usually think of the Ten Commandments. But it's important to put those commandments in context. God reassured the people of His love and protection when He spoke of delivering the Hebrews by carrying them on eagles' wings. God told Moses to remind Israel that He was the One who delivered them from their bondage to the Egyptians and brought them to Himself. In delivering Israel, God was putting His character as Redeemer on display.

God goes on to talk about His love and protection for them in Exodus 20:1-2:

And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (Ex. 20:1-2)

This tells us that the Ten Commandments are not a list of rules from a rigid and uncaring taskmaster. They are from a loving Father who rescued His children from slavery.

- **Why is it important for all believers to recognize that the God who spoke these words is the same God who delivers us today?** (p. 48, PSG)

In a moment of great weariness and uncertainty for the children of Israel, God was reassuring His people that He loved them enough to rescue them, and He had not forgotten them. They were safe, and they should trust Him completely. God loved the people enough to show Himself in the law. By telling Israel about Himself through the law, God was establishing a clear understanding of how to know and please Him. The law removed any ambiguity and showed them what God's holiness looked like applied to the context of their lives.

GOD SHOWS HIS PEOPLE WHAT A HEART THAT LOVES HIM LOOKS LIKE

Once God had prepared the people to receive the law by reminding them of His love and how they belong to Him, He delivered the law to the people. The latter part of Exodus 19 recounts an awesome display of God's power and presence. Against the backdrop of fire and smoke and trembling earth, God allowed Moses to stand on the holy ground He occupied on Mount Sinai, and He gave him the law.

As we've seen, God reminded Israel again that He was their God and that He alone had delivered them out of Egypt. The lesson is simple: God deserves our full devotion simply because of who He is. Watch how the first two commandments reinforce this important truth.

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Ex. 20:3-6)

God has no rival, and He has called people to demonstrate their loyalty by giving no one and nothing else greater devotion than is given to Him. In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve fell to the temptation to "become like God." In this first commandment, God turns right side up what was turned upside down by human sin. Giving God the place He rightly deserves in our affections is necessary for every action, thought, and relationship.

The second command amplifies the first. In our sin, we who are made in God's image turn around and seek to make Him into ours. We fashion idols and put our trust in them, hoping they will make us significant and bring us salvation. The apostle Paul identified this desire in Romans 1:21-23: "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they

became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”

The desire to deify anything but God comes from a heart that is always striving to compete with God for first place. Left to our own devices, we will always choose to exalt ourselves and wrap our lives around things we believe will fulfill us. Our hearts have to be remade and empowered by something outside of ourselves—something that can break our sinful tendency to worship things that are inferior to God.

In the next two commandments, God gives a picture of what will flow out of a life fully devoted to Him.

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Ex. 20:7-11)

Let’s look at the third commandment for a moment. Do you see how seriously God takes the misuse of His name? We may have grown up thinking this command is only about cursing or swearing oaths in God’s name, but we should realize that revering God’s name means much more.

To revere God’s name means we will not use His name recklessly. When we use God’s name to speak about Him or for Him, it is serious business.

In 2 Corinthians 5:20, we are called “ambassadors for Christ” and told that God is appealing through us on Christ’s behalf for the world to be reconciled to Him. We are the ones who are present in every situation speaking for the King. Using God’s name well means speaking it in ways that will cause people to want to know Jesus and follow Him.

In verses 8-11, God commands a rest day each week. In commanding His people to keep the day holy, the Sabbath was to be set apart by both action and inaction. The other six days of the week were dominated by work to provide sustenance and to keep order. But God called for a pause in activity that provides time for us to rest so that our focus can be on Him.

As Christians, we believe Jesus Christ has freed us from the technicalities of Sabbath law, since He is the rest for our souls (Col. 2:16). Still, there are principles in this commandment we would do well to remember:

TIMELINE

ATONEMENT SACRIFICES (PART I)

The burnt, grain, and fellowship offerings are explained.

ATONEMENT SACRIFICES (PART II)

The sin and restitution offerings are explained.

MOSES’ FAREWELL ADDRESS

Moses’ final instructions to the children of Israel.

- **It acknowledges that we are not God.** When we pause to rest, we are acknowledging that we have limits and need rest. God rested to show His completion of creation. We rest because we are frail and less than God. When we are always pushing to do more and achieve more without resting, we can actually be rebelling against our created limitations and creating an idol of our own strength and endurance.
- **It acknowledges that we trust God.** When we stop working to rest and focus on God, we are acknowledging that we trust God to provide for us beyond our ability to provide for ourselves. Overworking and failing to rest shows that we do not trust God to do His work to sustain us.
- **It acknowledges that we need God.** It is far too easy to take our focus off God in the busyness of life. Reserving a day for worship causes us to stop and refocus our attention and affections upon God and to acknowledge His rightful place in our lives regularly.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Through the law, God pulled back the veil of heaven to give us a significant glimpse of Himself. He shows us His holiness and helps us to see our utter hopelessness to fulfill the demands that His holiness requires apart from the work of Jesus on our behalf. It is only at the cross that we can find the fulfillment of the law. When we repent and believe on Jesus for our salvation, He becomes our righteousness and satisfies the law for us. He is the One who put God's glory first, the One who perfectly revered His Father's name, and the One who became our Sabbath rest.

In Matthew 5:17, Jesus extended this vocation to the church when he said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." As we seek to live out the law in the power of Christ, we are to show others the way to God.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God Is One

The Bible affirms that God is one, as seen in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, otherwise known as the Shema. In both Old and New Testament times, the advocacy of monotheism (belief in one God) was contrary to the surrounding culture. Where most cultures practiced polytheism (belief in multiple gods) or henotheism (the worship of one god with the belief in multiple gods), the people of God knew, based upon God's self-revelation, that Yahweh, the Lord, was the only one, true God.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Like Israel, how has God given you evidence of His love and rescue of you? How is your life a testimony to the character of God as a deliverer?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some of the good things in your life that you struggle against making an idol?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some ways God's name is misused today? Why does God take this so seriously?** *We misuse the name of the Lord in many ways—flippantly, untruthfully, and hypocritically. Flippantly—when we use God's name by cursing and swearing or without sincerity. Untruthfully—when we speak about God in ways that are not true and tarnish His reputation or misrepresent His will. Hypocritically—when we damage the testimony of God by failing to demonstrate the worthiness of God's name in our lives.*
- **How has this session challenged you in thinking about the command to keep the Sabbath? What are the benefits of being reminded of the three principles that were discussed?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

The first four commandments deal with our relationship with God, and the remaining six commandments deal with our relationship with other people. This ordering of God first and then others is important. When you think about it, our relationship with God will determine the quality and extent of our relationships with other people. If that first relationship is healthy and centered on Jesus, then the grace, mercy, and love received in that relationship will carry over into relationships with other people.

- **How might your own relationship with God influence your relationships with other people?** *One example is forgiveness. If we have received forgiveness from God for our sins, we are likewise to forgive those who have sinned against us. (See Matt. 18:21-35; 1 John 4:11.)*
- **What might this look like in your own life moving forward?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HEART

You and I may not struggle with making statues or images of gods to give our attention and devotion, but we should be on guard for idolatry in its more subtle forms. An idol can be anything or anyone that we give first place in our lives. In fact, the most common idols are good things that we make ultimate things. The first two commandments remind us that God is a loving and jealous God who will tolerate no rivals to His throne. He must be first in our lives.

- **Why is it right for God to demand first place in our hearts?** *Put simply, God has that right because He is God. Not only that, but God is deserving of that place within our hearts. He is the Creator of all good things, even the Creator of joy itself, and putting Him first in our lives is the way things were intended to be.*
- **What are some ways you might identify personal idols in your own life?** *Like a doctor who asks diagnostic questions to determine what may be wrong, sometimes it is helpful to ask ourselves simple questions that might reveal the condition of our hearts. Those questions might be: "What do I feel I need in order for life to be good?" "What makes life worth living?" "Where do I turn for comfort?" etc.*



HANDS

God calls us to live in such a way that demonstrates to others that He is in first place in our lives. Part of doing that will involve wanting others to know and experience the joy that comes from having God as first place in their lives as well.

- **Why is personal idolatry a hindrance to our mission and message as Christians?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some ways you have been challenged to live differently because of this session?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session and the next, point out item #9 to the students, which contains an artistic poster of Moses holding the Ten Commandments and casting a shadow of the cross, which symbolizes the Christ Connection made in the sessions.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/storystart15)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

08

SESSION EIGHT

The Commandments (Part II)

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we examine the six commandments that focus on honoring God in our relationships. We will see that God calls us to honor Him by honoring our father and mother, by loving our neighbors as ourselves, and by cultivating a heart of contentment. One of the primary ways we show our love for God is by loving others who are made in His image.

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 20:12-17

THE POINT

The remaining six commandments reflect God’s desire for how people should relate to one another.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

In 2014, a reality TV series called “Utopia” premiered on Fox. The show’s premise was simple: Put fifteen diverse individuals in a rustic setting and watch them live together with, as the slogan said, “no leaders, no rules, no plumbing.” The show was a \$50 million failure, and that shouldn’t come as a surprise. Civil society cannot exist without rules and laws. We are created by God to need structure. We crave order because order is a reflection of God’s character. His orderly nature is seen in everything from the order of creation to His prescriptions for order in worship.

God’s orderly nature and how it applies to our lives is often misunderstood. Too many times, Christians see a contrast between the Old and New Testaments as if the Old is only law and the New is only grace. As we saw in the previous session, this is not the case. Exodus 19 shows that Israel was a delivered people living in covenant with God. God was not telling them to earn His favor through their obedience; He had already chosen and delivered them. In His commands, God was showing the people what it means to live in grace.

- **Imagine a society without leaders and rules. What would it be like? What would you like about it? What would be wrong with it?**
- **Would you want to live in a world where there are no rules or standards? Why or why not?**

Option 2

Divide students into groups. Provide each group with a sheet of paper and markers. Instruct them to create a list of all the rules their parents, teachers, and coaches have given them over the years. Examples include: treat others the way you want to be treated, chew with your mouth closed, keep your eyes on your own paper, don’t text and drive, respect your elders, be home by curfew, etc. After several minutes, invite one volunteer from each group to read their list aloud. As they read, instruct the other groups to cross off any of the rules on their list that have already been shared. Give the group with the most rules that no other group named a prize.

- **Read aloud Exodus 20:12-17. What shift in focus do you see between the first four commandments and the last six?**

Point out that the last six of the Ten Commandments relate directly to how we treat other people.

- **Why are these last six commandments especially important for Christians?**

Being faithful, trustworthy, and living a life of integrity by following these commandments allows those around us to see Jesus Christ in our lives.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

The remaining six commandments reflect God's desire for how people should relate to one another.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land

PLOT

People have often noticed a distinct line of division among the Ten Commandments. The first four commandments lay out a loving response to God for His deliverance and grace. The final six focus on our treatment of other people. God desires that His grace bring about not only a reconciled, intimate relationship with Him but also vibrant, healthy relationships with others.

In this session, we examine the six commandments that focus on honoring God in our relationships. We will see that God calls us to honor Him by honoring our father and mother, by loving our neighbors as ourselves, and by cultivating a heart of contentment. One of the primary ways we show our love for God is by loving others who are made in His image.

TIMELINE

THE COMMANDMENTS (PART II)

God gives Israel instructions on how to relate to others.

THE TABERNACLE

The tabernacle is built so that God may dwell among His people.

ATONEMENT SACRIFICES (PART I)

The burnt, grain, and fellowship offerings are explained.

WE HONOR GOD BY HONORING OUR PARENTS

God created the family as the center of human relationships. The Fifth Commandment focuses on these relationships and helps us understand why they are so important.

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. (Ex. 20:12)

God calls us to honor our parents in response to His redeeming love for us. The Hebrew word translated *honor* means to make weighty and carries a positive sense of giving respect in abundance. Because all human parents are sinful, they may be “worthy” of honor in varying degrees. But God does not call us to weigh our parents’ worthiness and then decide whether or not to honor them. He calls us to honor them as a way of honoring Him, of recognizing His authority in our lives.

How we relate to our parents also provides a foundation for all of our other relationships, especially our interactions with those in authority. Authority brings order to society, and God’s command to honor our father and mother sets a model for how we are to respond to other authorities in life.

- **Do you struggle to honor your parents? In what ways?** (p. 54, PSG)
- **How would your family life be different if you made the Fifth Commandment more of a priority?** (p. 54, PSG)

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Authority of Scripture

Since the Bible is the inspired Word of God, containing God’s special revelation to humanity, it is the ultimate standard of authority for those who follow Christ. Because it is truthful in everything it teaches, Scripture is humanity’s source for wisdom, instructing us on how to live life well to the glory of God. Submitting to the authority of Scripture means that we are to believe and obey God by believing and obeying His Word.

WE HONOR GOD BY HONORING OUR NEIGHBORS

Living in a way that honors God begins in the home, but it extends to other relationships as well. In fact, when Jesus was asked which commandment is the

greatest, He summed up the law by calling people to love God with all their heart, soul, and mind, and then to love their neighbors as themselves. Paul later spoke of the prohibitions against adultery, murder, stealing, and coveting as summed up by the command to love our neighbors as ourselves (Rom. 13:9-10).

But what does loving our neighbor look like? How do we relate to the people around us? In giving the law, God addressed particular ways that we are to respect and value His likeness reflected in every human being.

“You shall not murder.

“You shall not commit adultery.

“You shall not steal.

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.” (Ex. 20:13-17)

Let’s take a look at each of these commandments in turn:

Do Not Murder

This commandment is clear and concise. Murder is condemned as a sin because of the motive behind it and the way it disregards the inherent value of human life.

God prohibits murder because we are to love and value Him as the Creator of life and then recognize the worth of each life as a reflection of His glory. When we judge a person’s worth by our own assessment of their intellect or lack of ability, we judge them by what they are worth to us instead of by their inherent value as a reflection of the Creator. We make our own estimation of them superior to the value placed on them by God.

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

Though a generic term for killing is used here, the intent clearly is to speak of premeditated murder. Manslaughter as accidental homicide has already been considered (Deut. 4:42), and killing by government and other constituted authority was permitted as capital punishment (Deut. 13:5,9; Ex. 21:12,14-17) and in times of war (Deut. 7:2; 20:13,17). Murder is heinous because human beings are created in the image of God, and their murder, in effect, is a direct offense against God Himself (Gen. 9:5-6).

Do Not Commit Adultery

This is rooted in God’s original design for marriage. From the beginning, God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, and He created woman. Adam and Eve together reflected the image of God in their relationship of trust and love.

Adultery is the severing of the marriage bond through sexual immorality. It damages the family and destroys the sacred refuge God intends for homes to be.

Do Not Steal

The Eighth Commandment forbids stealing—taking something that does not belong to us. This command covers a wide range of dishonest practices birthed in a heart gripped by possessions instead of a heart that trusts in the One from whom all good things come.

Why are we prone to steal? Because we do not trust the provision of God. At its core, theft is a form self-worship. We steal because we prefer self-reliance rather than trusting in God.

Do Not Lie

The Ninth Commandment forbids us to bear false witness against our neighbors. Throughout the Old Testament, God expressed His hatred for lying and declared truthfulness to be a requirement for His people. Because He is a God who tells the truth, His people must also tell the truth—always.

We ought to be the kind of people who put away any sort of falsehood. Lying is manipulation for the purpose of exalting, protecting, or getting things for ourselves that we are not entitled to have. When we use lies to exalt ourselves, our lies fail to imitate God and His holy character.

Do Not Covet

The Tenth Commandment gets right to the heart of our chase for satisfaction. From the garden of Eden, we've seen the human trait of wanting what we cannot have and placing hope for ultimate satisfaction in people and things. If we are honest, we see it in our own lives too.

Coveting is not just an obsessive desire to have something. It is being convinced that we can truly delight in someone or something more than God and be fulfilled. It is self-worship by believing that placating our desires will satisfy us.

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

An important passage that reveals the uniqueness of the Tenth Commandment is Romans 7:9-10. Here the apostle Paul alludes to the perfection of the law and the imperfection in himself. Apart from the Tenth Commandment, all the other commandments can be obeyed ostensibly, outwardly. But the Tenth Commandment applies to the heart, a matter of attitude. This commandment thoroughly convinced Paul that he was a sinner.

TIMELINE

ATONEMENT SACRIFICES (PART II)

The sin and restitution offerings are explained.

MOSES' FAREWELL ADDRESS

Moses' final instructions to the children of Israel.

- **What commandment do students tend to ignore the most when it comes to relating to other people?** (*p. 56, PSG*)
- **How would the world be different if more Christians lived according to the last six commandments?** (*p. 56, PSG*)

CHRIST CONNECTION

So what does Jesus have to do with these commandments? In short, a lot. Consider the following:

When we are fulfilling the command to honor and obey our parents, we are imitating Jesus. If Jesus could set aside His glory and make Himself subject to authority, who are we to not? Obedience to parents displays Christlike humility and love.

When it comes to the command to not murder, Jesus takes it a step further by addressing the heart behind murder—hatred. He was concerned with how we feel about others, knowing that a heinous act such as murder is overflow from a heart that is harboring hate and anger against someone.

When it comes to the command to not commit adultery, once again Jesus addresses the heart behind the act—lust. Jesus opposes adultery and the lustful heart because the marriage covenant is an earthly picture of Jesus' relationship with His church. Jesus is the faithful, loving Bridegroom who has entered into an intimate bond with the people He has redeemed, and when a man and a woman enter into the covenant relationship of marriage, they are to visually represent the faithfulness that Christ has to His people.

When it comes to the command to not steal, Jesus puts possessions in their proper place by reminding us what really matters (Matt. 6:19-24).

When it comes to the command to not lie, Jesus reminds us that through the power of the gospel we can be remade to love truth more than we love ourselves.

And when it comes to the command to not covet, Jesus teaches us that through the power of the Spirit, contentment can be ours. Only through Christ can we put our selfishness to death and be content with God's plan and provision for our lives.

As always, Christ has everything to do with the Ten Commandments. Instead of thinking about the commands as a list of don'ts, we are encouraged to think about them as an expression of how Christ transforms us to live as citizens of His kingdom.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How is honoring your parents' authority more than merely obeying them?** *Obedience with a poor attitude is not true honor. One can show disrespectful obedience, but that is not what God desires. God doesn't just want our actions to be right, but our hearts as well. We should show an attitude of respect to those who have authority over us.*
- **Why does Jesus connect murder to a hateful heart? What are some ways we express hatefulness with our words?** *Hate and anger, taking place within a heart, are what lead to the sinful act of murder. Hate and anger are the root, where murder is the fruit of that. However, there are other ways we express hatefulness without committing murder. Sometimes we express it by tearing others down, calling them names, shaming them on social media, and so forth.*
- **What are some examples of stealing non-monetary items that seem commonplace today? How should a Christian respond to these things?** *Answers might include things like homework, music, video games, etc.*
- **What types of lies are seen as being acceptable today? How should Christians think about lying?** *Stretching the truth, white lies, participating in gossip, etc. Christians should take what the Bible has to say about lying seriously. Honesty and truth-telling is a primary indicator of the heart change that has taken place in Christians. Because Christians have the truth of the gospel and a new identity in Christ, they should be truthful with everyone.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Stealing is not just robbing a bank or shoplifting in a store. There are many forms of theft, and all of them are a sin before God. All of them, of course, come from a covetous heart. What begins as a simple desire within our hearts and minds turns into something we demand and can't live without. James 4:1-3 shows us the process of temptation and sin, telling us that each man is drawn by his own renegade desires.

- **What is the connection between stealing and coveting? How is idolatry at work in the heart of the person who steals?** *When a simple desire turns rogue and into a demand, a heart idol is born within us. Thus, if someone plagiarizes a paper, stealing content and claiming that it is his or her own, then that person evidently idolizes a good grade or the praise of others more than they care about truth and honesty.*
- **Do you agree that it is more blessed to give than to receive? Why or why not?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HEART

Unlike many of the other commandments, the nature of coveting is one that cannot be seen on the outside. Much like the First Commandment, which commands us to worship God, coveting is something primarily in the heart. However, you can see the fruits of this sin within people's lives, often being the source that leads to other sins.

- **How does a coveting heart reveal discontentment with God?** *God is the One who provides for us and supplies all of our needs. Knowing that everything we have comes from His hand, it would reveal discontentment with Him to covet things He has not given us.*
- **What are some comparable modern day objects from the ones mentioned in Exodus 20:17 that tempt us to covet today?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

How we relate to others impacts our witness to those around us. If we treat others poorly and with disrespect while claiming to be Christians, our witness to them will likely be a negative one. If our relationships, instead, are characterized by love and respect, then our witness will likely be better received. Our Christian beliefs ought to positively impact our relationships, and our relationships should positively contribute to our witness to those around us.

- **How might our mission as Christ's ambassadors be hindered by dishonoring our parents, stealing, coveting, and so forth?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What might your friends conclude about your walk with Christ if they observe a heart that is content within you?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #9 to the students, which contains an artistic poster of Moses holding the Ten Commandments and casting a shadow of the cross, which symbolizes the Christ Connection made in the sessions.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/storystart15)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

09

SESSION NINE

Building the Tabernacle

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will see the beginning of a pattern come into focus as we consider the tabernacle that the Israelites constructed at Mount Sinai. We will see the divine design of God's plan for the tabernacle, and how He used His people to build it. Then, we will see that the tabernacle pointed to how God would work in the future. According to the New Testament writers, God sent His Son to earth, God in flesh, to "tabernacle" with us. Further, as the people in whom God's presence dwells, believers today serve as mini tabernacles, manifesting His presence in the world.

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 25:1-9; 39:32-43; 40:34-38

THE POINT

God desires to dwell among His people.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

God's glory was with the Israelites every moment of their journey. Today, the Holy Spirit lives within the hearts of believers, but there are times you may experience His presence in an even stronger way. Just as Moses looked different when He had been in the presence of the Lord, your life will look different when you spend time with Him.

Many people would say that they want to experience the Lord, but don't really know how or even where to find Him. In the Old Testament, God's presence resided in the tabernacle.

- **What are the ways we experience the presence of God today?**

God is near to His people. His glory is all around us. We need to take notice of it and choose to spend more time with Him. Our lives will be forever changed by His presence.

Option 2

Divide students into teams and give each the task of building a place of worship out of whatever materials they have been given. Provide such things as a stack of index cards, straws and tape, Legos®, or other building materials to each group. Allow teams to present their creations and describe the elements they included.

- **Did you enjoy not having any detailed instructions? Why or why not?**
- **What would have happened had you been given very specific instructions for the building process?**

Without any guidelines, there could be as many different styles for a place of worship as there are people to build them. In today's session, we reach the place where the people build the tabernacle that is to house the presence of God. The Lord was very specific about every single detail of the tabernacle, and we will see why.

Option: Display the Leader Pack image of the tabernacle (Item #10) and explain that at this point in the story, God's people have been traveling for a while. They are trusting in God's direction and provision daily. Now the Lord has instructed Moses to build a tabernacle so that His presence will have a home among the people. It is designed by God and is able to be taken down and put back up as the Israelites travel from place to place.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God desires to dwell among His people.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land
- **Bezalel and Oholiab:** Commissioned and gifted by God to be the lead artists and craftsmen of the wilderness Tabernacle.

PLOT

Following our study of the Commandments, our story picks up on another important event in the biblical storyline—the construction of the tabernacle. While being a somewhat familiar story, the construction of the tabernacle, and its place of meaning and importance in the life of an Israelite, could hardly be overstated. It is a story that not only teaches us many things about God and His willingness to dwell among His people in a special way, but also teaches us something about ourselves and how we encounter God in light of the sin in our hearts.

TIMELINE

THE TABERNACLE

The tabernacle is built so that God may dwell among His people.

ATONEMENT SACRIFICES (PART I)

The burnt, grain, and fellowship offerings are explained.

ATONEMENT SACRIFICES (PART II)

The sin and restitution offerings are explained.

GOD PLANS THE TABERNACLE

The previous two studies in Exodus 20 have focused on the “two tables” of the law: in the first table, God declared how He wanted Israel to express love for Him by putting Him first and reflecting His character; in the second table, He told how He wanted them to love their neighbors and seek good for one another.

While Moses was alone with God, God showed him what was next on the divine agenda. God asked for a tabernacle—a sacred tent—to be constructed as the place where His presence would be manifested. This would make it possible for a holy God to dwell among His people.

In this place, Israel’s sinfulness would be addressed (through animal sacrifices) as well as their status as God’s holy, set-apart people. Up to this point, the Lord had not mentioned a place for worship. Thus, His words must have puzzled Moses at first. Here is the opening of Exodus 25:

The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me. And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats’ hair, tanned rams’ skins, goatskins, acacia wood, oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece.” (Ex. 25:1-7)

These instructions were about gathering the raw materials that would be used for the construction project. The Lord began by emphasizing that these gifts were to be voluntary. They were an offering given by those who were willing. Thus, at the beginning of the tabernacle section of Exodus we find a reminder that, although God deserves our worship, He wants people to come to Him willingly, not grudgingly.

The precious metals mentioned would be designated for specific parts of the tabernacle and its furnishings. God explained to Moses what all these fabulous materials would be used for. Exodus 25 continues:

And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it. (Ex. 25:8-9)

The term translated “sanctuary” means “holy place,” and has as a component of the Hebrew term meaning “set apart” or “holy.” Like the “holy ground” at the

burning bush, the tabernacle and its furnishings were sacred not because of any inherent value but because God's presence was to be there. (See Ex. 3:5.)

Note the phrase, “so that I may dwell among them.” The Israelites understood—as we do—that God's presence is everywhere (that He is omnipresent). Yet God chooses to manifest His presence, open to the senses, among human beings in specific times and places. The tabernacle in the wilderness would become just such a place.

In a way, the tabernacle was merely a spectacularly odd tent with some very expensive furniture placed inside and out. What made it a sanctuary was that “the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Ex. 40:34). Never again would the tent and its furniture be thought of as ordinary; they were forever connected with the presence of Yahweh.

- **Do you think having really specific instructions makes it easier or more difficult to obey God? Why?** (*p. 60, PSG*)

GOD BUILDS THE TABERNACLE

For the tabernacle, everything worked out perfectly. After the raw materials were gathered, two master craftsmen—Bezalel and Oholiab, as well as those working under them—set about constructing the tent and all the furnishings. The inspired biblical writer noted that their skills were God-given (Ex. 36:1). The Scriptures also provide exact details about each aspect of the construction:

- The tent (36:8-38)
- The ark (37:1-9)
- The bread table, the lamp stand, the incense altar, and the oil for the altar (37:10-29)
- The basin and altar for sacrifice (38:1-8)
- The courtyard curtains (38:9-20)
- The garments for the high priest, Aaron, and his sons (39:1-31)

The Scriptures also provide an exact “materials inventory” for the tabernacle (38:21-31). The weight of the precious metals is staggering: more than a ton of gold, more than three tons of silver, and more than two tons of bronze were required. After the materials inventory, we find these words in Exodus 39:

Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished, and the people of Israel did according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses; so they did. Then they brought the tabernacle to Moses. (Ex. 39:32-33a)

The following points are important to notice in these verses:

- God expects His work to be accomplished through His people: “the people of Israel did...”

- It is indeed possible for a God-ordained task to be completed, and completed well: "...the tabernacle ... was finished."
- Human beings, at least on some occasions, are able with His help to obey Him willingly and completely: "...all that the LORD had commanded..."
- God uses human leaders as divine instruments. Bezalel and the others completed the work, and ultimately it had to pass human inspection: "... they brought the tabernacle to Moses."

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

As Exodus 39 continues, we read about the completion of the various parts of the project. The list begins with the tent itself and then the furnishings for the most holy place as well as for the holy place, that is, the items inside the tent, which ordinary Israelites would never see (Ex. 39:33b-38). Next, we read about the furnishings for the courtyard, that is, the items outside the tent. Special attention is also given to the vestments for the high priest and his sons. Again, nothing was accidental (Ex. 39:39-41). Thus, on one hand, the tabernacle was the place where God's redeemed and therefore holy people could encounter His presence with great confidence and joy. On the other hand, the tabernacle was a place to remind the people that they were sinful. The atonement sacrifices offered there constantly reminded the people of their need for God's provision for their sins.

GOD DWELLS WITHIN THE TABERNACLE

God had manifested His presence earlier (and temporarily) to the Israelites through a "pillar of cloud." A cloud was visible over the tent outside the Israelite camp where Moses and the Lord talked (Ex. 13:21; 33:7-11). But now something new and fantastic happened. God visibly showed up in the heart of the camp, above the tabernacle, as Exodus 40 indicates:

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. (Ex. 40:34-35)

Twice in these verses "the glory of the LORD" is emphasized. The term translated "glory" carries ideas both of "weightiness" and "brightness." With reference to the God of Israel, glory refers to the overwhelming manifestation of His presence.

Thus, Moses—even after God appeared in the cloud over his tent outside the camp—had pleaded, "Please show me your glory" (Ex. 33:18). God had replied with a partial display of His glory to Moses (Ex. 33:19-23). Now, however, at last all the Israelites experienced the manifest presence of God, appearing in such a brightness that "Moses was not able to enter."

TIMELINE

MOSES' FAREWELL ADDRESS

Moses' final instructions to the children of Israel.

Beginning Spring 2016

SCOUTING THE PROMISED LAND

The spies deliver their report.

Ultimately, the brilliance subsided so that the priests could fulfill their responsibilities inside the “tent of meeting” where they encountered God. The cloud, however, remained above the tabernacle as permanent evidence of God’s presence in the Israelite camp. The entire Book of Exodus concludes with this summary:

Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys. (Ex. 40:36-38)

CHRIST CONNECTION

The tabernacle section of Exodus clearly demonstrated that God wanted to be with His people, and He wanted them to know that He was with them. The same is true today. The greatest evidence of this truth is the incarnation: God Himself took on human form. Jesus was (and is) the preeminent tabernacle where God has displayed Himself to humanity.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Christ as Priest

As our Great High Priest, Jesus accomplishes the work of reconciling us to God. He is the One whose perfect righteousness is presented to the Father for our justification. He is the One who intercedes for us before the Father (Heb. 7:25; 9:24) and prays for us to remain faithful (Luke 22:31; John 17).

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Why do you think God wanted the offerings to be voluntary? What should this say about our own offerings?** *Giving out of a joyful heart makes much of God since the giving is a mere expression of a heart that is delighting in Him. Giving from a begrudging heart, on the other hand, doesn't express much delight in Him.*
- **Just as God used some human leaders to accomplish His will in constructing the tabernacle, what might be some tasks we are called to fulfill as "divine instruments" of God's will?** *Answers to this question will vary, but might include acts of obedience such as following through in baptism, serving the church, caring for those in need, and so forth.*
- **When Jesus died on the cross, the veil in the temple that protected people from being in direct contact with God was torn in two from top to bottom (Mark 15:38). What did that symbolize?** *Today as believers we have total access to God through the blood of Jesus.*
- **If God is always with us and we have access to Him, then why don't we continually "experience" Him?** *Emphasize that students have many opportunities to experience the presence and the glory of God. Discuss the opportunities at your church for students to come together and experience God. Consider sharing a time when you have recently experienced God's presence, encouraging students to share as well.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of
Redemption
through His Son,
Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story
meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

It is a remarkable thing to consider that the God of this universe, the Creator of heaven and earth, desires to dwell among us. This is true not only before the fall occurred in Genesis 3, but even now in the midst of human sin and rebellion. God graciously accommodates us, redeemed sinners, making it possible for us to enter into His presence with full confidence.

- **Imagine you were an Israelite who saw God's presence displayed in the brilliance that filled the tabernacle and the cloud above it. How would this have affected your understanding of God's character? Of His greatness?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How might the thought of God's desire to dwell among His people impact the way you battle sin in your life?** *Recalling to mind the truth that God is present with His people and dwells within them can be a source of encouragement to turn away from the fleeting pleasures of sin, knowing that the permanent presence of God is infinitely more enjoyable.*



HEART

The apostle Paul took up the language associated with a temple to remind early Christians that they were indwelt by God's Spirit; therefore, they were God's temple and manifested His presence to others in the world. (See 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Eph. 2:21-22.)

- **In what ways do you see God's glory in your life?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How can you demonstrate the presence of God to those around you as a living tabernacle?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

This story of the tabernacle's construction is a great reminder that God creates people with various gifts to be used for His kingdom and for the good and joy of others. Thus, one doesn't necessarily need to go into full-time vocational ministry in order to make much of Christ with his or her life—both Bezalel and Oholiab were able to glorify God by being the artists and craftsmen God created them to be. This should be encouraging as you think about your own giftedness and what you will do one day as a profession.

- **Why is it wrong to think that some gifts/professions are sacred and some are secular?** *Some people mistakenly believe that being a pastor or missionary is more God-honoring than being a Christian lawyer or social worker. However, that is not the case, as God has seen fit that all work should be done for His glory and for the good of others (obviously excluding jobs that are explicitly immoral and/or illegal).*
- **If you are interested in the arts in some way (graphic design, painting, sculpture, illustration, acting, etc.), how does this encourage you to pursue that craft for the glory of God?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #10 to the students, which contains a picture of the tabernacle and helpful information regarding several of its furnishings.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Options (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/storystart15)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



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10

SESSION TEN

Atonement Sacrifices (Part 1)

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we focus on the first three kinds of sacrifices described in Leviticus: the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the fellowship offering. The burnt offering was for the removal of the people's guilt before God; the grain offering restored Israel to serve God and neighbor; and the peace offering was for reconciliation between God and His people. Because of Christ's ultimate sacrifice, we celebrate the removal of our guilt before God, the freedom to serve God on His mission, and the restoration of our relationship with God.

SCRIPTURE

Leviticus 1:3-9; 2:1-3; 3:1-5

THE POINT

Atonement is needed for removal of guilt, restoration of service, and reconciliation with God.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

When Marcus Luttrell joined the Navy in 1999, he knew he wanted to be a SEAL—the best of the best in the U.S. military. He reached that goal in 2001. Just a few years later, in June of 2005, Luttrell was sent on a mission to kill or capture a notorious terrorist leader. Along with three other SEALs, he found himself in an ambush vastly outnumbered by enemy combatants. Twenty-four hours later, he was the only member of his team still alive. Behind enemy lines and outnumbered nearly 200 to one, Luttrell barely managed to escape thanks to being taken in by a Pashtun tribe who put him into hiding. While a large enemy force searched for Marcus, news of what happened reached his fellow soldiers at the base.

The Navy SEALs immediately mounted a rescue operation. Sixteen special forces soldiers left to rescue Luttrell, yet not one returned alive. They all gave their lives in order to rescue him. This desperate battle to save a comrade led to the largest loss of special forces troops in a single event in the history of Naval Special Warfare. Eventually, Marcus was rescued and returned home safely.

- **What sacrificial act did these special forces team members make for their country as well as for Marcus?**
- **Would you have been willing to do the same? Why or why not?**
- **When someone gives his or her life to save another, we often refer to this as the ultimate sacrifice. In what way did Jesus make the ultimate sacrifice for us?**

The men who volunteered to rescue Marcus did so knowing that they may have to give their lives so someone else could live. They gave their lives in order to allow someone else to return safely home, which is exactly what Marcus did.¹

The same could be said about Jesus when He embarked on His rescue mission for us. He gave His life in order to rescue us from the enemy. As He gave His life, it released us from the slavery of sin and enabled us to serve Him. The beauty of Jesus' rescue is that we can now live for Him!

Option 2

Invite students to call out names of movies where one of the characters risks his or her life to save others. (for example: *Armageddon*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Captain America*, *The Avengers*, *Lone Survivor*)

- **What made these people willing to sacrifice their lives for someone else?**
- **What did their actions say about their character and their love for people?**
- **Does sacrificing for others always involve being willing to give your life for them? Explain.**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Atonement is needed for removal of guilt, restoration of service, and reconciliation with God.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land
- **Aaron:** older brother of Moses; chosen by God to serve as Moses' spokesman and later to become Israel's first high priest

PLOT

As we saw in the previous session, the tabernacle in the wilderness was the place where God's presence was manifested among His people. Although it was extravagant, the tabernacle was not a showplace to be admired for its beauty. It was a place for serious work to be done. The large bronze altar at the entrance was the place where slaughtered animals would be sacrificed as burnt offerings.

After the account of the tabernacle's construction and God's glory filling the tent (Exodus 40), Scripture gives us a detailed account of the various animal sacrifices to be offered there (Leviticus 1–7). The Lord laid out specific instructions for this complicated system of sacrifices. Each of these five sacrifices served a slightly different purpose, but together they provide a biblical picture of atonement.

In this session, we focus on the first three kinds of sacrifices: the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the fellowship offering. The burnt offering was for the removal of the people's guilt before God; the grain offering restored Israel to serve God and neighbor; and the peace offering was for reconciliation between God and His people. Because of Christ's ultimate sacrifice, we celebrate the removal of our guilt before God, the freedom to serve God on His mission, and the restoration of our relationship with God.

THE BURNT OFFERING

The first kind of animal sacrifice that God specified to be presented to Him was called the burnt offering. Perhaps its name was derived from the fact that it was the only offering that was completely burned up, leaving nothing.

Here is the way the Lord instructed Moses to present this offering in Leviticus 1:

If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD. He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. Then he shall kill the bull before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and throw the blood against the sides of the altar that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. Then he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it into pieces, and the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. And Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head, and the fat, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar; but its entrails and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. (Lev. 1:3-9)

The details for this offering seem bizarre. Most of us have never been around slaughtered animals; we are used to packaged meat in the supermarket aisle. But the Israelites were largely herdsmen. They were used to participating in the process of preparing animals for human consumption. Yet the requirements for the burnt offering were something the Israelites must have found quite distinctive.

Based on the previous verses, answer the following questions (*p. 66, PSG*):

- **Where was the animal to come from?** The animal was to come “from the herd” (1:3) and was therefore personal. A wild animal trapped by someone would be neither personal nor expensive.
- **What kind of animal was it to be?** A bull, ram, male goat, and birds were acceptable (1:5,10,14). Also, each animal had to be physically perfect. It must be “without blemish,” and therefore more costly than other similar animals (1:3).
- **Where was the animal to be offered?** At the required place, “the entrance of the tent of meeting” (1:3).
- **How was the offerer to identify with the animal?** The person making the offering was to “lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering” (1:4). The offerer was continually involved in the process of the offering, even though only the priests carried out certain functions (1:9).

ATONEMENT SACRIFICES (PART I)

The burnt, grain, and fellowship offerings are explained.

ATONEMENT SACRIFICES (PART II)

The sin and restitution offerings are explained.

MOSES' FAREWELL ADDRESS

Moses' final instructions to the children of Israel.

- **How would the Lord respond to the offering?** The offering would be “a pleasing aroma to the LORD” (1:9). This implies that the Lord would find this sacrifice acceptable. The apostle Paul later used this language to refer to Jesus’ crucifixion as “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph. 5:2).

The burnt offering resulted in atonement for the offerer. This was a voluntary act of worship to atone for unintended sins. It was meant to express devotion and complete surrender to the Lord.

Share the following definition of *atonement*: To cover or cancel one’s sins. Atonement is motivated by the love of God. It occurs through the shedding of blood. The Old Testament shedding of animal blood pictured repentance, turning to God, and God’s forgiveness. It had to be repeated annually.²

Israelites could make the atonement offering at any time, but on one day of the year atonement came into sharper focus. This was the Day of Atonement (“Yom Kippur” in Hebrew), a solemn day every autumn described in detail in Leviticus 16; 23:26-32; and Numbers 29:7-11. This was the only time during the year when Israel’s high priest was allowed to enter the most holy place of the tabernacle (and later, the temple), where the Ark of the Covenant was. There, he would carry the blood of a specially slaughtered bull and “in front of the mercy seat ... sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times” (Lev. 16:14). On this day and through these rituals he would make atonement “for the people of Israel once in the year because of all their sins” (Lev. 16:34).

THE GRAIN OFFERING

The second offering God specified to Moses in Leviticus involved grain (or bread or flour). Its name was derived from the fact that it was the only offering that did not involve the death of an animal but rather grain from the earth, which was hand ground into “meal” or flour.

Here is the way the Lord instructed Moses to present this offering according to Leviticus 2:

When anyone brings a grain offering as an offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour. He shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it and bring it to Aaron’s sons the priests. And he shall take from it a handful of the fine flour and oil, with all of its frankincense, and the priest shall burn this as its memorial portion on the altar, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. But the rest of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the LORD’s food offerings. (Lev. 2:1-3)

As with the burnt offering, so with the grain offering: It was costly for the offerer, both in the ingredients and in the preparation. The Lord expected (and required) the very best from His people. However, unlike the burnt offering, which was

to be wholly consumed by fire, only a portion was burned up. Like the burnt offering, the part that was burned became “a pleasing aroma to the LORD.”

The purposes for this offering are not directly stated, yet we can make the following observations:

- The portion of the grain offering which was burned on the altar was the Lord’s “memorial portion” (2:2). This suggests that the offerer was asking God to remember him with favor.
- When the various grains began to be harvested, such as barley or wheat, the “firstfruits” were to be offered as a special grain offering (2:14-16). This suggests that thanksgiving to God for the harvest of the earth was part of the purpose (Num. 15:18-20).
- The grain offering, however, was offered voluntarily at other times. And because grain was the basis of the everyday diet of Israelites, it reminded people that everyday life was a gift from God.

Because people ate grain daily (in the form of flour baked into bread), the grain offering reminded the worshiper that their everyday life depended on God’s provision. Their ability to serve God—or even restoration to service after sin or sickness had disrupted service to Him—was demonstrated in this offering.

THE FELLOWSHIP OFFERING

Of all the sacrifices God specified in Leviticus, only the fellowship offering could be eaten by the offerer. This provides an important insight into what the sacrifice symbolized: reconciliation to God so that a person may enjoy fellowship with Him.

This offering has also been called the peace offering in English, because the Hebrew term for the offering is closely related to the Hebrew term for peace or wholeness. The offerer was to present before the priest a spotless cow, sheep, or goat.

Here is the way the Lord instructed Moses to present this offering according to Leviticus 3:

If his offering is a sacrifice of peace offering, if he offers an animal from the herd, male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the LORD. And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering and kill it at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and Aaron’s sons the priests shall throw the blood against the sides of the altar. And from the sacrifice of the peace offering, as a food offering to the LORD, he shall offer the fat covering the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. Then Aaron’s sons shall burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering, which is on the wood on the fire; it is a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. (Lev. 3:1-5)

TIMELINE

Beginning Spring 2016

SCOUTING THE PROMISED LAND
The spies deliver their report.

THE BRONZE SERPENT
The people look and are healed.

Unlike the burnt offering, only the fat and certain internal organs were burned. The offerer could eat the (cooked) meat of this sacrifice, but only on the day of the sacrifice or the next day (7:16-18). In other words, it was a kind of fellowship meal between God, the priests, and the offerer. The animal offered in sacrifice and then eaten symbolized that there was now a right relationship with God. (In most cultures, those who share a meal together do so only if a certain level of friendship is present; in this instance God was, as it were, inviting the worshiper to enjoy a friendship meal with Him.)

CHRIST CONNECTION

The New Testament writer of Hebrews, fully aware of the Old Testament sacrifices, explained how they were merely a shadow and a prefiguring of Christ's atoning death on the cross. The author explained it this way in Hebrews 9:

He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. (Heb. 9:12)

The writer went to great lengths throughout Hebrews 9 to explain how Christ's death fulfilled the symbolism of Israel's rituals. He offered His own blood on behalf of others, not needing the blood of another because He had no sin. He entered the heavenly "holy places" rather than the earthly copy of the most holy place. (See last week's study.) He obtained "eternal redemption" rather than a temporary atonement. He removed our guilt forever through the blood offering of Himself to God: "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. ... Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin" (Heb. 10:14,18).

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Christ as Sacrifice

There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Heb. 10:4), Christ's sacrifice on the cross was able to remove our sin "once and for all."

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Why is guilt a universal emotion? How can the feeling of guilt help us look outward to Christ instead of inward to ourselves?** *We all experience guilt because we have also experienced our consciences condemn us when we have sinned. However, instead of driving us further into ourselves in either despair or self-pity, the feeling of guilt directs our attention outward to Christ, knowing that in Him we can be free of guilt through His gift of salvation.*
- **As with the grain offering, what are some ways we can express our gratitude to God today?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are ways we express a restored relationship with others today?** *Restored relationships begin with seeing others as being image bearers of God, having the same value and deserving of the same respect we wish for ourselves. That can be expressed by getting to know them, showing acts of service toward them, removing any misconceptions and prejudices we may have regarding them, etc.*
- **Why do you think it was important for these offerings to be "costly?" What did the cost of the offering communicate about the seriousness of sin?** *The costly part of these sacrifices shows us the weightiness of sin, for if they were not costly, then sin wouldn't seem that big of a deal. Although the free gift of grace and salvation are not dependent upon any good works of ours, it is still costly grace since it cost the Son of God His life and requires us to put aside the deeds of the flesh in the act of discipleship.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Because of the once and for all sacrifice of Christ, we don't have to offer sacrifices to atone for ourselves. The offerings we make today aren't to appease our conscience or gain favor with God; instead, they're offerings made from gratitude and faith in response to His salvation.

- **What are some poor offerings that we often offer up to God in response to His great gift of salvation?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How can a proper understanding of Jesus' sacrifice help motivate us to giving God our best in these areas?** *By recognizing what Christ has done for us in reconciling us back to God, we should be inclined to respond in such a way that expresses that gratitude in every area of life.*



HEART

The story that Leviticus tells of the different sacrifices can easily make today's reader squeamish. We are not accustomed to talking about killing animals, having them skinned, dismembered, and burned on altars. It is a sobering picture, one that sheds light on two essential things: the severity of our sin and our need for a Savior.

- **How do you think these sacrifices would have made the person offering them feel in regard to his or her sin?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What would it say about our sin if no sacrifice or Savior was needed?** *In essence, it would say that our sin is nothing to be taken seriously since God is evidently able to overlook it or sweep it under the rug.*



HANDS

In Romans 12:1-2, the apostle Paul advised believers to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice." All the animal sacrifices of the Israelites involved killing the animal—only for the grain offering was there no death. Thus, just as the grain offering was presented to God and then benefited others, so it is with believers. Jesus' followers are alive, presented to God, and then are able to serve others through the use of their unique spiritual gifts (12:3-8).

- **Why should Christ's sacrifice for us drive our desire to live for Him?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some spiritual gifts God has given you, and how can you use them to serve others?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #11 to the students, which contains an informational chart regarding the sacrifices of the Old Testament.

SOURCES

1. "Marcus Luttrell," MarcusLuttrell.com [online], [accessed 10 June 2015]. Available from the Internet: www.marcusluttrell.com.
2. "Atonement," *Holman Student Bible Dictionary* (Holman Bible Publishers: Nashville, TN, 1993), p. 36.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/storystart15)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at
GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

11

SESSION ELEVEN

Atonement Sacrifices (Part II)

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we continue our study of Leviticus by examining the sin offering and the restitution offering, two mandatory offerings that would allow God's children to live in harmony with Him and with one another. The sin offering represented the purification of the people before God. The restitution offering served to "repair" the damage caused by sin and cleanse the offender's conscience. These offerings pointed forward to Jesus Christ, whose work purifies our hearts, cleanses our consciences, and frees us to do good deeds for His glory.

SCRIPTURE

Leviticus 5:1-19; Hebrews 9:13-14; 13:11-12

THE POINT

Atonement is needed for purification and cleansing.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

- **When you drop food on the floor, do you go by the “three second rule”? Why or why not?**
- **Why do we want our food and drink to be pure?**

Think about the last glass of water you drank or the last plate of food you ate at a restaurant. You counted on that drink and food to be pure. However, it may not have been as pure as you expected. Food contamination makes millions of people sick every year.

Share some of the following impurity levels in foods and how they might cause foodborne illness.¹

- Chocolate can average 60 or more insect fragments per 100 grams and 1 or more rodent hairs per 100 grams.
 - Ice Cream can be the host for salmonella and staphylococcus bacteria.
 - Strawberries contain an average mold count of 45-55% or more.
 - Popcorn can contain one or more rodent pellets in selected subsamples.
 - Cheese is pasteurized to make it safe—but unpasteurized cheese may contain the pathogenic bacteria listeria which can cause miscarriages in pregnant women.
- **It may be OK for our food and water to have some impurities—to be less than pure. But is that statement true for our Christian lives? Why or why not?**

The ancient Israelites may not have known about bacteria, but they were well acquainted with the idea of “clean” and “unclean,” or “pure” and “contaminated.” The Lord was interested in preserving the purity of His people because He wanted their hearts to reflect His heart. These stringent categories of “clean” and “unclean” helped get across God’s desire for purity.

Option 2

Before the session, gather the following items: clear pitcher filled with water, red food coloring, small cup of bleach, eyedropper, spoon. As students arrive, invite them to share some sins they’ve been guilty of in the past. Be sure to share a few sins you’ve been guilty of as well. As you share, add a few drops of food coloring to the water. State that in the same way food coloring contaminates water, sin contaminates our relationship with God and with others.

- **When have you wished you could “undo” a sin? Is that even possible? Explain.**

Slowly stir in the bleach until the water becomes clear again. Point out that while there’s nothing we can do to remove the stain of sin in our lives, the blood of Christ makes it possible for us to be forgiven and made pure.

* Note: Be sure to test the red water/bleach activity before using it in your session.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Atonement is needed for purification and cleansing.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land
- **Aaron:** older brother of Moses; chosen by God to serve as Moses' spokesman and later to become Israel's first high priest.

PLOT

Our journey into the sacrifices of the Old Testament—their meaning, purpose, and differences, etc.—continues as we look at two more: the sin offering and the restitution offering. It is important at this point in the story to be reminded that readers of the Bible today can't chalk these sacrifices up as being primitive practices of an ancient people group, but instead recognize that the biblical writers were giving us a glimpse into the perfect future sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. These offerings pointed forward to Jesus Christ, whose work purifies our hearts, cleanses our consciences, and frees us to do good deeds for His glory.

**ATONEMENT
SACRIFICES
(PART II)***The sin and
restitution offerings
are explained.***MOSES'
FAREWELL
ADDRESS***Moses' final
instructions to the
children of Israel.*

THE SIN OFFERING

When it came to certain situations, there were cases where an Israelite might sin and only later become aware that he or she had violated God's law. What was to be done once they realized they had sinned? Because of the seriousness of sin, even unintentional sin defiled a person. It still had to be dealt with so that the sinner could be cleansed. As severe as this might seem to us, even today we understand the saying, "Ignorance of the law is no excuse." It is presumed that people of a jurisdiction know the laws that apply; otherwise, ignorance would be a foolproof excuse.

For Israelites, the sin offering became the way for certain unintentional sins to be remedied. It was God's solution for providing purification for those who were unclean. When talking about the sin offering, our story in Leviticus shows us how guilt was symbolically transferred from the unclean person to the clean sacrifice through the act of touching the animal being offered. It was only through this physical contact that atonement and restoration would take place.

When someone sins in any of these ways: If he has seen, heard, or known about something he has witnessed, and did not respond to a public call to testify, he is responsible for his sin. Or if someone touches anything unclean—a carcass of an unclean wild animal, or unclean livestock, or an unclean swarming creature—without being aware of it, he is unclean and guilty. Or if he touches human uncleanness—any uncleanness by which one can become defiled—without being aware of it, but later recognizes it, he is guilty. Or if someone swears rashly to do what is good or evil—concerning anything a person may speak rashly in an oath—without being aware of it, but later recognizes it, he incurs guilt in such an instance. If someone incurs guilt in one of these cases, he is to confess he has committed that sin. He must bring his restitution for the sin he has committed to the LORD: a female lamb or goat from the flock as a sin offering. In this way the priest will make atonement on his behalf for his sin. (Lev. 5:1-6; For a complete reading of the text, also see verses 7-19.)

As with the fellowship offering, so with the sin offering: part of the sacrifice was to be burned; part was to be eaten, but only by the priests, not by the offerer (Lev. 6:25-29). There was to be a ceremony in which the offender laid hands on the sacrificial animal (4:4,15,24,29). There was a prescribed ritual for dealing with the blood of any animal slaughtered as a sin offering (4:6-7,16-18,25; 5:9). The offering was specifically and repeatedly called an "atonement" (4:20,26,31; 5:6,10,13; 6:30).

The blood was literally applied as a picture of purification. Those who had become unclean were pronounced ritually clean as a result of the sin offering. Another essential Israelite ritual was the annual Day of Atonement ceremony, detailed in Leviticus 16. Included in the regulations was the requirement that the high priest was to “enter the most holy place in this way: with a young bull for a sin offering” (Lev. 16:3).

- **What do you do when you realize you’ve sinned? Do you try to hide your sin from God or do you admit you’ve made a mistake and repent? If you deny it, does that make you any less guilty? Explain.** (p. 72, PSG)

Though we don’t have to offer sacrifices anymore, acknowledging sin and making things right is still important to God today.

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

“Leviticus 16 describes the ritual of the Day of Atonement, a way of removing the impact of sin and uncleanness. First, the priest made a sacrifice for himself, so that he was prepared to do the same for the community. Then two goats were brought, and one was chosen for sacrifice. It was offered as a purification offering, and the blood was used to cleanse the sanctuary of any sin and uncleanness. The priest then took the other goat, the scapegoat, and confessed the sin of the people with his hands over the goat, symbolically passing the sin of the people to the goat. Then the goat was taken into the wilderness, a significant symbol of the removal of the sins of the people. This central ritual assumed that ancient Israel would encounter sin and uncleanness. Since God is perfectly holy, the Lord could not dwell among sin and that which is unclean. This ritual then provided a means of removing sin and uncleanness so that God could continue to dwell among the people and to be present in the sanctuary to give them life.”²

THE RESTITUTION OFFERING

Our consciences hurt when we’ve hurt another. It’s human nature to try to set things straight when we know we’ve messed up. The Israelite people felt the same way. God’s answer to this need was the restitution offering. In some English Bibles, this sacrifice has been variously translated the guilt offering, the trespass offering, or the reparation offering.

The restitution offering was the fifth (and final) offering that Yahweh specified. It shared some features with the sin offering. Like the sin offering, it was concerned with the remedy for unintentional sins, but it focused on repairing the damage done to others because they had been deprived of what was rightfully theirs. Here is how Leviticus 5 describes the restitution offering:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses: “If someone offends by sinning unintentionally in regard to any of the LORD’s holy things, he must

bring his restitution offering to the LORD: an unblemished ram from the flock (based on your assessment of its value in silver shekels, according to the sanctuary shekel) as a restitution offering. He must make restitution for his sin regarding any holy thing, adding a fifth of its value to it, and give it to the priest. Then the priest will make atonement on his behalf with the ram of the restitution offering, and he will be forgiven. If someone sins and without knowing it violates any of the LORD's commands concerning anything prohibited, he bears the consequences of his guilt. He must bring an unblemished ram from the flock according to your assessment of its value as a restitution offering to the priest. Then the priest will make atonement on his behalf for the error he has committed unintentionally, and he will be forgiven. It is a restitution offering; he is indeed guilty before the LORD." (Lev. 5:14-19)

The restitution offering was God's way of making things right, especially when a "dollar amount" could be attached to the damage done.

- **Do you seek to make things right when you realize you've hurt someone? Why is this important?** (p. 73, PSG)
- **How do we get right with God when we sin today?** (p. 73, PSG)

Getting right with God is essential. When your sin affects other people, you have to make things right with them, as well.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Various Theories of the Atonement

Moral Influence Theory: According to this theory, Christ's sacrifice should be seen as a demonstration of God's love, a display that produces a change of attitude within humanity. This theory is part but not all of what Christ accomplished on the cross since it leaves out God's wrath against sinners and His requirement of satisfaction for sin. Still, it does remind us that the cross is the greatest example of God's love, and this love must provoke gratitude and praise on our behalf.

Governmental Theory: According to this theory, the cross of Christ is the ultimate demonstration of God's hatred for sin. Understanding the seriousness with which God takes sin, humanity is motivated to cease from sinning. While this view portrays Christ as suffering for us, it does not lift Him up as a substitutionary sacrifice for our sin.

Ransom Theory: According to this theory, Christ's atonement was a cosmic victory over sin, Satan, and death. The ransom theory at its best, however, does not see the ransom as being owed to Satan, but as being offered to God.

Satisfaction Theory: According to this theory, the atonement of Christ satisfies every requirement for God to be able to forgive the failures of humanity. God has not been given the proper honor He is due; in His death, Jesus compensated for the failure to give honor by willingly going to the cross as the God-man to pay the price for humanity's sins.

TIMELINE

Beginning Spring 2016

SCOUTING THE PROMISED LAND

The spies deliver their report.

THE BRONZE SERPENT

The people look and are healed.

THE PARTING OF THE JORDAN

God calls Joshua to lead His people.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The New Testament writer of the Book of Hebrews clearly knew the passage from Leviticus about the sin offering on the Day of Atonement. He believed it prefigured Jesus' bloody death outside the gates of Jerusalem:

For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the most holy place by the high priest as a sin offering are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the gate, so that He might sanctify the people by His own blood. (Heb. 13:11-12)

The death of Jesus is like the sin offering on the Day of Atonement in these ways:

- The blood brought about cleansing.
- The sacrifice was “outside the camp.”

The death of Jesus was unlike the sin offering in these ways:

- “We have an altar” (Heb. 13:10) from which we may eat, unlike the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement from which none, not even priests, could eat. We have a higher privilege than the Israelite priests did.
- Jesus' blood truly brought about the sanctification—setting apart as pure and holy—of His people. The sprinkled blood of the sin offering cleansed from sin and ritual uncleanness only symbolically.

In addition, the author of Hebrews specifically dealt with the issue of how Jesus' death relates to the conscience of a sinner who trusts in Christ:

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow, sprinkling those who are defiled, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of the Messiah, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:13-14)

Thus, in Hebrews 9:14, the author exclaimed “how much more” is accomplished through “the blood of the Messiah”:

- The Israelites presented unblemished animals; Christ was the only human ever “without blemish” and therefore fit to be our substitution in atonement.
- Christ was both the sacrifice and the high priest (because he “offered Himself”).
- Christ was fully accepted by God as a once-for-all sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:14).
- Through Jesus' death, believers have consciences that are completely and forever cleansed, unlike the Israelite restitution offering, which dealt only with immediate defilement of the offender's conscience.
- Because of this cleansing, believers have been set free “to serve the living God.”
- Good works cannot save. Salvation in Christ brings people into joyful service to God. In Hebrews 9:13-14, the author showed that all three Persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; or God, the Messiah, and eternal Spirit) have brought about our full salvation.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **When it came to the sin offering, Leviticus tells us the role of confession on the part of the offerer. Why do you think a heart-felt confession is important?**
Confession is important because through it, we are agreeing with God that we have sinned against Him and are deserving of punishment. Not only that, but through confession we are also recognizing that we need God's grace and mercy to forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- **How does the sin offering challenge the way we think about our own purity?**
Answers to this question will vary.
- **Apart from Jesus, what are some ways people try to alleviate a guilty conscience?**
Some people try to perform good works, such as helping the needy or volunteering to serve their community. While those are good things to do, they cannot be done with the mind-set that anything we can do can take away the guilt of sin.
- **How does a cleansed conscience empower us to serve God? How does an unclean conscience hinder our mission?**
Answers to this question will vary.

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Everyone is aware of their inner conscience—that inner impression that certain behaviors and thoughts within their lives are wrong. However, too often people try to address the conscience with self-help techniques. If they have a speech problem, they focus on using certain words (and avoiding others). If it is an anger problem, they look for ways to control their temper. However, the problem with these strategies is that they never get to the root of the issue—namely, that it is a heart problem.

- **Have you ever just tried harder when addressing moral shortcomings in your life? How did that work out? Why is it important to address the heart when dealing with behavior?** *More than likely, attempts of trying harder to correct bad behavior failed because only the behavior was addressed, and not the heart. Our hearts are at the root of all we do, which is why we need a new heart from Christ in order to live as He commands us to.*
- **Why is it so important that your words, decisions, and actions be different than those who aren't living for Christ?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HEART

Purity of heart has always been of great importance for God. Jesus went to great lengths to emphasize purity of heart in His teachings. For example, it was not only the act of adultery that was evil, it was also the lustful heart behind the act (Matt. 5:28). Purity matters to God, and therefore it should matter to God's people. Like God Himself, Christians should be set apart from the rest of the world, demonstrating the purity that has been freely received through the moral perfection of Christ on their behalf.

- **Think about the words you've used today when talking with your parents, friends, teachers, and others. How would you (or others) rate the condition of your heart based on your words?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **When you consider the decisions you've made over the past 24 hours, would Jesus be pleased? Why or why not?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

Purification and restitution always lead to evangelization. If we have been the recipients of these gifts through the sacrificial death of Christ on our behalf, we should likewise proclaim to others how purification of sins is found in the atoning death of Christ alone for their sins.

- **What evidence do your thoughts, words, and actions give to others that you are a Christian?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How can you make sure your words and actions are a reflection of Christ this week? In what ways can this be a testimony to the purification and restitution you've received from Christ?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #11 to the students, which contains an informational chart regarding the sacrifices of the Old Testament.

SOURCES

1. "Defect Levels Handbook," U.S. Food and Drug Administration [online], [accessed 11 June 2015]. Available from the Internet: www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation.
2. *Holman Illustrated Study Bible* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 145.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/storystart15)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



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GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject



12

SESSION TWELVE

Moses' Farewell Address

SESSION SUMMARY

In this study, we will take a closer look at Moses' final instructions to the children of Israel. In his farewell address, Moses explained how God had given them the law for their own good, and he also claimed that the requirement of the law was total perfection. Obedience to God's law would bring blessing, but disobedience would bring God's curse. As believers, we recognize the law as a good gift of God, but we rely on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to save us from the penalty for our disobedience.

SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 10:12-22; 11:1,26-28

THE POINT

God's law is a gift, but it cannot save.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Many television shows and movies tell stories about seeking justice for those who have broken the law. From the Westerns of years ago to sci-fi of today, we long for the good guys to win and the bad guys to get what's coming to them.

- **What is your favorite movie that shows the “good guys” bringing the “bad guys” to justice?**
- **What circumstances might cause us to see the law as difficult (or bad) instead of good?**

Option 2

Write some ridiculous rules for your class on a large sheet of paper or on the board, such as: you must stand on one foot to talk; only people with blue eyes can sit down; you must raise both hands to ask a question; and so on. Make sure to enforce the rules for at least five minutes. Take note of students who disobey the rules and those who try to find creative ways to twist the rules.

- **Do you like following rules? Why or why not?**
- **Do you think most students are lawbreakers? Explain.**

Add to the following list of laws/rules that students might violate: skipping school, breaking curfew, texting and driving, shoplifting, using illegal drugs, cheating, speeding, etc.

State that there are some laws we like and some we don't; however, we don't get to pick and choose which ones to obey. We are to obey all of them.

When you think of laws in the Bible, what are some that come to mind? How many of the Ten Commandments can you recite? Lead students to call out as many as possible from memory.

- **Why are the Ten Commandments in the Bible?**

God gave us the commandments and other laws to guide and protect us.

- **Which of the commandments do you think is the most important? Why?**
- **Which is the most difficult for you to keep? Why?**

The first and most important commandment is to love God with everything (Mark 12:28-30).

- **Is it possible to love God with all you are without being in a relationship with Jesus?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God's law is a gift, but it cannot save.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land

PLOT

This session draws our attention to the purposes of God's law, revealed to the Israelites by Moses. It came from the perfect Lawgiver, thus it was perfect—unlike contemporary legal codes. Yet like today's laws, Old Testament law involved both a blessing and a curse.

The books of Moses include extensive narrative about Israel's wilderness wanderings. At last, there was a new generation. They were on the verge of entering the promised land under Joshua. Many, perhaps, were wondering: What is the importance of all these laws? Why does God expect us to follow so many rules?

In this study, we will take a closer look at Moses' final instructions to the children of Israel. In his farewell address, Moses explained how God had given them the law for their own good, and he also claimed that the requirement of the law was total perfection. Obedience to God's law would bring blessing, but disobedience would bring God's curse. As believers, we recognize the law as a good gift of God, but we rely on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to save us from the penalty for our disobedience.

MOSES' FAREWELL ADDRESS*Moses' final instructions to the children of Israel.**Beginning Spring 2016***SCOUTING THE PROMISED LAND***The spies deliver their report.*

THE LAW IS FOR OUR GOOD

Deuteronomy can be translated “second law.” The book is essentially Moses’ farewell instruction manual for Israel, after he had led them for 40 years and was about to die. An example of this “second law” is that Deuteronomy 5 repeats the original Ten Commandments of Exodus 20.

The following passage from Deuteronomy 10 is part of Moses’ longer discourse:

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you except to fear the LORD your God by walking in all His ways, to love Him, and to worship the LORD your God with all your heart and all your soul? Keep the LORD’s commands and statutes I am giving you today, for your own good. The heavens, indeed the highest heavens, belong to the LORD your God, as does the earth and everything in it. Yet the LORD was devoted to your fathers and loved them. He chose their descendants after them—He chose you out of all the peoples, as it is today. Therefore, circumcise your hearts and don’t be stiff-necked any longer. For the LORD your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty, and awesome God, showing no partiality and taking no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner, giving him food and clothing. You also must love the foreigner, since you were foreigners in the land of Egypt. You are to fear Yahweh your God and worship Him. Remain faithful to Him and take oaths in His name. He is your praise and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome works your eyes have seen. Your fathers went down to Egypt, 70 people in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of the sky. (Deut. 10:12-22)

In this passage we can see that Moses indicated a number of truths about the law. First, the law reveals the greatness and goodness of God. Notice how Moses spoke about God in these verses:

- He is the God of heaven and earth, as the Creator of all there is (10:14). Therefore, He has ownership rights over His creatures.
- He is the God who chose a people out of His great love (10:15). The theme of God’s salvation flowing from His love is one of the great themes of Scripture.
- He is “the God of gods and Lord of lords” (10:17). Therefore, whatever other powerful supernatural beings or human rulers there may be, He is greater.
- He is the God of justice, especially for those often subject to injustice, such as orphans, widows, and foreigners (10:18).
- He is the God who has redeemed (10:22).

In addition, we see specific guidelines on what the Lord meant when He asked His redeemed people to love Him “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5). Here are the ways that the law guided Israel’s understanding of what it means to love God:

- **Fear the Lord** (10:12,20). God expects His people to be in awe of Him and to respect Him. Such fear includes commitment to please Him and a dread of disappointing Him in any way.
- **Walk in all His ways** (10:12,13). God’s people do not get to pick and choose which of His laws to follow. All are to be kept, not only out of regard for Him but “for your own good.”
- **Worship the Lord** (10:12,20). The first of the Ten Commandments was “Do not have other gods besides Me” (5:7). God has exclusive rights on His people’s worship.
- **Circumcise your hearts** (10:16). This instruction is a reminder that physical circumcision was of only limited value, as Paul also emphasized in Romans 2:25-29. A changed heart is required, and heart circumcision suggests removing the stubbornness that keeps the heart from loving God right. (See also 30:6, where God is the One who circumcises the heart.)

The list could go on, but the point is that not only does the law reveal God’s greatness and goodness, but also provides for us specifics about how to express our love for Him and others. The law was a great blessing to have.

- **What does your love for God have to do with your obedience to God?** (*p. 78, PSG*)
- **Does God only love us if we obey Him? Explain.** (*p. 78, PSG*)

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

As Christians, we believe Jesus fulfilled all of the law in our place, and yet we recognize there are different kinds of laws in the Old Testament. For centuries, Christians have divided the laws into three categories: civil laws (dealing with the people of Israel within their theocratic context), ceremonial laws (the rules and regulations of temple observance and the sacrificial system), and moral laws (the laws explained in the Ten Commandments and the principles that transcend cultures). These categories are not explained in the Bible, and many believe them to be somewhat arbitrary in their distinction. They do, however, help us recognize the different kinds of laws and how some principles may apply differently in different contexts.

THE LAW REQUIRES PERFECTION

As noted throughout these sessions, God gave the law to people whom He had already redeemed. The commands of God were never, ever, intended by God as a way to earn salvation. In fact, the laws about sacrifice were given to guide Israel in what to do when people broke the law. The law was meant as a blessing for the good of God’s people.

But what if the Israelite people misunderstood? What if they came to think that the way they related to God was essentially a matter of law-keeping? Even worse, what if they came to think that by doing the works of the law, they earned favor with God or even merited salvation? It is not surprising that many Israelites made this mistake. Unquestionably, as sinful humans we suppose that by our own deeds we earn divine favor. As can be easily observed, most of the world's religious activities can be understood as an attempt to work one's way to God.

The apostle Paul addressed this problem as he found it in his day, a time when many (self) righteous Jews found themselves in bondage to the law. For example, he noted, "For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, because it is written: Everyone who does not continue doing everything written in the book of the law is cursed" (Gal. 3:10). Paul was quoting from Deuteronomy 27:26. But he might just as well have quoted Deuteronomy 11:1:

Therefore, love the LORD your God and always keep His mandate and His statutes, ordinances, and commands.

Here Moses noted the strictness of the law. Notice the term "always." The demands of the law were relentless. There was no time off for good behavior. The essence of living under the demands of the law is that it requires perfection. And because no one is capable of perfectly obeying the law, all have broken it. In fact, by knowing the strict demands of the law, human beings actually become more and more aware of how far short of perfection they have come.

The apostle James gave us another way of looking at this when he claimed that failing to keep even one of God's Commandments—just one—would make us guilty of breaking it all (2:10). Disobedience is failure to love. If love is the beginning of the law and the purpose of the law, then disobeying even one Command is enough to bring it all crashing down around us. The demand is total perfection. Jesus didn't shy away from this truth either. Far from loosening the restrictions or making the law easier to digest, He commanded us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5).

Earlier, we saw how the law of God shines light on the character of God. The law shows us many things about the God who has saved us. One of the things it shows us is His absolute, stunning holiness. There is no trace of sin or evil in Him. There is no stain of rebellion or wrongdoing. He is holy love. It's no wonder, then, that the law of God immediately shows us our sinfulness because it accurately reflects God's holiness.

TIMELINE

THE BRONZE SERPENT

The people look and are healed.

THE PARTING OF THE JORDAN

*God calls Joshua to lead His people.
God calls Joshua to lead His people.*

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

Rahab helps the Israelites in their conquest of Jericho.

CHRIST CONNECTION

There is no question that each of us is inclined to disobedience—we've all broken the law at some point. We are rebels against God and therefore justly under His curse. However, in the fullness of time, Jesus came and took the curse for us. As Paul explained, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13).

All who are in Christ are set free from the eternal condemnation that the law decreed against us. We are liberated by faith in the One who took the curse on our behalf. We don't have to fear the curse, because "no condemnation now exists for those in Christ Jesus, because the Spirit's law of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:1-2).

Yet in this life, "we make it our aim to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the tribunal of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or worthless" (2 Cor. 5:9-10). Or, as James noted, "Speak and act as those who will be judged by the law of freedom" (Jas. 2:12).

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God Is Holy

God's holiness refers to His uniqueness in being separate from all He has created. The Hebrew word for holy means "separate" or "set apart." God's holiness also refers to His absolute purity. God is unstained by the evil of the world. His goodness is perfect, and the moral code we find in the Scriptures is a reflection of His holy nature. As people made in God's image, we are called to holiness.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Why do you think many people focus on God's law apart from His goodness? What is the danger of doing that?** *By focusing on God's law only, we fall into the mind-set that God is merely trying to put a bunch of rules and regulations on our life. However, by focusing on His goodness also, we realize that God isn't trying to minimize our joy or happiness, but is rather in fact trying to maximize it, knowing that His law is for our good and joy in the end.*
- **What are some examples where rules and laws are given for our good and protection?** *Answers might include rules within the home, such as common chores and curfews, or civil laws like speed limits and shoplifting.*
- **How does understanding God's moral laws help you understand His character? How should understanding His character in this way shape the way you treat others?** *By understanding God's law as an extension of His holiness and moral perfection, we should also see that following God's law, especially as it relates to others, is a means of showing love for our neighbor.*
- **How has this session challenged the way you understand God's commands in your own life?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Rules get a bad rap sometimes. We tend to think of regulations as unnecessarily confining and restricting. But rightly understood, rules do not oppose freedom; they make freedom possible. A home without any rules would mean that the loudest, strongest-willed child would rule the roost, leaving everyone else to no longer have the freedom of a happy, well-balanced home. God's people need guidelines for their life.

- **Have you ever had the impression that God's commands are restrictive and burdensome? Why or why not?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Why is it important to see God's commands as flowing from His character?** *God is holy, and therefore we must see His Commands as being an extension of His holy character.*



HEART

In Deuteronomy 10:1 we see two words that are very important. The first is *love* the Lord your God. We know from Jesus' words that obedience is the sign of love. In other words, the way we express our love for God is to obey Him without begrudging or with a bad attitude. And that leads us to the other scary word—*always*. We are to always keep His mandate and statutes, ordinances, and commands. God demands total obedience from a loving heart.

- **What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word *obedience*? Why does obedience have such a negative connotation?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How does understanding the demands of the law help increase our desire and gratitude for grace?** *Part of what the law accomplishes is showing us that we have failed to live up to God's holy standard. Our response to this reality should be neither an attempt to work harder at keeping God's law, nor complete despair in failing to keep it. Instead, it should cultivate within us an appreciation that Christ has kept the law for us through faith in Him.*



HANDS

Once we realize that God's commands are for our good and joy, and that they reflect the moral character of God Himself, the way we treat and approach His commands in our everyday life should change. And once we do that, people around us will see that instead of treating them as burdensome and constraining, we seek to live according to them so that we might emulate God's holiness in our own lives.

- **How can following God's commands show your love for Him?** *Answers to this will vary.*
- **How can others be challenged when they see the difference being obedient to God makes in our lives?** *They may be challenged by seeing us live differently than the world around us, challenged by seeing us reflect the holiness of God in our lives, or challenged as a living testimony that even though we seek to live according to God's commands, we are still sinners in need of God's grace in Christ.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #3 to the students, which contains a biblical timeline of all the events and people they have encountered throughout this quarter.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/storystart15)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject



13

SESSION THIRTEEN

God With Us

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we see that the meaning of Christmas is not in lights and presents and all the trappings of commercialism. Scripture teaches that the meaning of Christmas is revealed in the story of God loving us enough to invade our world, live among us, and reveal Himself to us through Jesus Christ. The beauty of Christmas is the incarnation of Christ.

SCRIPTURE

John 1:14-18

THE POINT

Christmas isn't about holiday decorations and gifts, but about God coming to dwell among His people.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Create a list of major events in history, or use the events below. Instruct students to stand if they think the event you call out falls into the B.C. (before Christ) time period and to sit if it happened A.D. (Anno Domini/Latin for "year of our Lord").

- Sinking of the Titanic (A.D. 1912)
- Building of Egypt's pyramids (c. 2300 B.C.)
- Signing of the Magna Carta (A.D. 1215)
- Founding of Rome (753 B.C.)
- Beginning of Alexander the Great's conquests (354 B.C.)
- Romans conquer Jerusalem (A.D. 70)

Point out that computers, calendars, birth certificates, receipts, and postmarks all reflect the fact that everything that ever happened on earth either occurred before or after the birth of Christ. No other birth has resulted in a dating system used throughout the world.

• **Why do you think the birth of Jesus was so important that it split history into two parts?**

Share that this session will focus on the real significance of Christmas. By examining the uniqueness of Christ, we'll better understand what a wonderful gift God gave us.

Option 2

Provide hymnals or play Christmas hymns for the class. Instruct students to point out phrases that describe the reality that Jesus took on flesh when He came to Earth.

- **O Come, All Ye Faithful** (v. 3)
Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning, Jesus, to Thee be all glory giv'n; Word of the Father, *now in flesh appearing!*
- **Angels, from the Realms of Glory** (v. 2)
Shepherds, in the fields abiding, Watching o'er your flocks by night, *God with man is now residing*, Yonder shines the infant Light.
- **Hark! The Herald Angels Sing** (v. 2)
Christ, by highest heav'n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord: Late in time, behold Him come, Offspring of a virgin's womb. *Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail th' incarnate Deity!* Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Immanuel.

Emphasize that Jesus is both completely God and completely man, and He is completely needed in order for us to become children of God.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Christmas isn't about holiday decorations and gifts, but about God coming to dwell among His people.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus - the second person of the Trinity.**

PLOT

As Christians, we believe the incarnation of Christ was necessary for sinners to be allowed entrance back into intimate fellowship with God. The Christmas season is more than sentimentality and feelings of good will. For those of us who have gained access to God's presence through Christ (Heb. 4:14-16), the Christmas season serves as a reminder to go out into the world, even to difficult places, and shine the light of Christ.

In this session, we see that the meaning of Christmas is not in lights and presents and all the trappings of commercialism. Scripture teaches that the meaning of Christmas is revealed in the story of God loving us enough to invade our world, live among us, and reveal Himself to us through Jesus Christ. The beauty of Christmas is the incarnation of Christ.

TIMELINE

Beginning Spring 2016

SCOUTING THE PROMISED LAND
The spies deliver their report.

THE BRONZE SERPENT
The people look and are healed.

GOD DWELLS WITH HIS PEOPLE

The word incarnation means “in flesh.” For Christians, the word is more than a technical term. It brings us comfort and joy because it reminds us of the moment the grace of God became personified through the birth of Jesus Christ. In the incarnation, God invaded our world so that He could save sinners who were unable to save themselves. Watch how John describes the scene:

The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John testified concerning Him and exclaimed, “This was the One of whom I said, ‘The One coming after me has surpassed me, because He existed before me.’”) (John 1:14-15)

John used the Greek word *logos* (translated as “the Word”) to describe Jesus. By claiming that the Word was “with God” and “was God” (see v. 1), he was making major claims about Jesus, identifying Him as eternally God, essentially God, and equal with God. But here we arrive at an even more stunning claim. In John 1:14, he claims that the Word of God “became flesh.” He took on our humanity .

Laying all his cards on the table, John is clearly communicating that God’s entrance into our world was not a mere passing through. God was coming to live here. He was taking up residence. This image recalls the Old Testament tabernacle, which God set up as a place where the priest would enter on behalf of the people once a year—a place where sinners meet with God and a place that symbolized God’s desire to dwell with His people.

John also informed his readers that they observed “the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” This phrase expresses the unique quality of Jesus. He is the Father’s only Son, who is absolutely full of grace and truth. Simply put, Jesus is in a class all by Himself.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Jesus’ Deity

Within the person of Jesus Christ, there are two natures—the divine nature and the human nature. Scripture teaches that Jesus is fully divine and fully human. His divinity is on display in passages that describe Him as being equal with God (John 1:1-18; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-3). The New Testament also points to the deity of Christ by showing how He possesses attributes that God alone possesses (Mic. 5:2; John 1:4), how He performs works that only God performs (Mark 2:5-12; John 10:28; 17:2), and how He Himself claims to be the Son of God (John 8:58; 10:30; 17:5; Matt. 26:63-64).

GOD GIVES GRACE AND TRUTH

What does it benefit us to affirm that Jesus is the Son of God? John gives us the answer in the verses that follow: grace after grace.

Indeed, we have all received grace after grace from His fullness, for the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:16-17)

Our salvation is an extension of the grace of God's incarnation. God is continuously giving us grace after grace, meaning, we can never out-sin the amount of grace He supplies us with. When we fully grasp the beauty of God's grace, we don't see His forgiveness as a license to sin (see Romans 6), but rather as an open-door policy with a loving Father who holds us to the highest standards and showers us with the deepest love.

God deals with us in this way because we are no longer under the Law of Moses. Instead, we experience grace and truth through Jesus Christ. The law was necessary to show God's perfect standard. Since He is perfect, He cannot lower His standard of perfection for anyone. His pure demands must be met perfectly. The truth of the law is revealed in Leviticus 11:44 where God says, "For I am Yahweh your God, so you must consecrate yourselves and be holy because I am holy."

Through the incarnation, Jesus entered into our fallen world in order to place Himself under the Law of Moses (Gal. 4:4-5). He did this to meet God's requirements for humanity. His perfect life was the payment He submitted as a substitution for sinners on the cross (Mark 10:45). The evidence of His payment being accepted by God is His literal, physical, and visible resurrection from the grave (Rom. 4:24-25).

Now, to those alone who by faith embrace His work, justification is granted by God Himself (Rom. 5:1-5) and the rap sheet of our sins has been eternally wiped clean by the blood of Jesus (Eph. 1:7). We are for all eternity, in the eyes of God, seen as "not guilty."

- **How does our inability to keep God's laws demonstrate our need for grace?** (p. 85, PSG)
- **Is merely consenting to the truth about Jesus enough for salvation? Why or why not?** (p. 85, PSG)

It's not enough to just believe the truth about Jesus. We must choose to accept His offer of salvation.

JESUS REVEALS GOD TO US

John said that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us—full of grace and truth. And what was the result of this amazing incarnation? This is what he wrote in verse 18:

No one has ever seen God. The One and Only Son—the One who is at the Father’s side—He has revealed Him. (John 1:18)

In Exodus 33:20, God said that no human being can see God’s face and live. But in that same narrative, we read about Moses getting a glimpse of God.

John’s statement in verse 18 highlights two important truths: there is a unique relationship between God the Father and God the Son (Jesus), and the depth of this unique relationships allows Jesus to reveal the Father to humanity. Put another way: Through Jesus, we see God Himself.

Let’s look at the unique relationship Jesus has with God the Father. The Greek word for “the One and Only” means “one of a kind.” The relationship between God the Father and Son is unlike any relationship God has with any other human.

As a reminder, the nature of their relationship is identified in John’s opening verse where he says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The unique reality of the relationship between the Father and Son is summed up by the fact they are both equally God (alongside God the Holy Spirit). (See also 1 Cor. 2:10.)

This fact then allows Jesus Christ to show God the Father to humanity. Through the incarnation, God made His work visible through Jesus’ actions. Knowing this, believers are to make it their mission to share the truth of the incarnation with others who are asking to see God. Jesus’ disciple, Philip, asked Jesus this very question in John 14:8, and Jesus responded by saying that if they saw Him they saw the Father. As the body of Christ, we must make Him known in the communities where God has placed us, sharing with others about the person and work of Christ during His time on earth and also to His present work in our lives.

TIMELINE

THE PARTING OF THE JORDAN

God calls Joshua to lead His people.

THE BATTLE OF JERICO

Rahab helps the Israelites in their conquest of Jericho.

CONQUEST OF AI

How one man’s sin can negatively affect everyone around him.

CHRIST CONNECTION

As you enter into this Christmas season, be reminded that the God who rescued Israel and delivered them from slavery in Egypt, the God who delivered the law through Moses, the God who dwelt among His people in the tabernacle, is the same God who came to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

When the holiday decorations and exchanging of gifts become a distraction, be reminded that Christmas is all about the truth that God loved us to the point of becoming like us in order to rescue us. And let the incarnation of Jesus inspire you and empower you to spend time with others this Christmas season, seeking to be a living witness to the truth that God cares and that God gets involved. We don't worship a distant deity who only speaks from afar; we worship a Savior who planted His feet in the dirt of this world and brought redemption through His death and resurrection.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How is Jesus different from other religious leaders?** *Lots of answers can be given, including 1) Jesus rose from the dead and is alive and well, unlike any other religious leader, 2) Jesus came not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for us, unlike other religious leaders who seek to have others serve them, etc.*
- **Why is believing Jesus is completely God and completely man so important?** *Jesus had to be God in order to save us, because only someone who was truly God could bear the full penalty of our sin. In a similar way, Jesus had to be fully man and live completely under the law in order to truly fulfill a life of obedience in our place.*
- **What does Jesus reveal to us about the Father?** *Jesus reveals to us the character of the Father, such as His love, mercy, grace, goodness, compassion, etc. He also reveals to us the will of God as well.*
- **What are some things you can do this Christmas season to focus more exclusively on Christ and the true meaning of what this season represents?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

The verses we covered mention John the Baptist (v. 15), the most sought-after minister during this time in Israel. He was the talk of the town, followed by large crowds who listened to his teaching and went into the Jordan River to be baptized. Yet he recognized that he was in no position to rob Jesus of His glory. In humility, he directed the eyes of the public to Jesus. He wanted Jesus to get the glory.

- **How has God revealed Himself to you recently?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some things that might keep people today from recognizing Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HEART

In the incarnation, God “took up residence” on this earth. In our salvation, God takes up residence in our hearts (Rom. 8:9-13; Eph. 1:13-14). He empowers us to say no to the desires of our flesh and yes to that which pleases God. However, since we live in unredeemed flesh (Rom. 7:7-25) and still commit sinful acts, God the Holy Spirit reveals His presence in our hearts by convicting us and leading us back to the cross of Christ to confess our sins, repent, and receive forgiveness (1 John 1:8-10).

- **What is one way you can express your gratitude to Jesus for being your Savior?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How should the incarnation impact the way we respond to sin within our lives?** *We should be motivated to fight sin in our lives knowing that God loved us to the point of becoming like us in the incarnation.*



HANDS

There’s no greater way to show our neighbors that God has not forsaken them than to be present with them. “Take up residence.” The principle of incarnation means we love people enough to bear with them, to be patient as we show them the love of Christ. We are open about God’s ongoing work in our lives, and we offer the Savior to the people around us—that He might work in their lives too.

- **If someone’s only picture of who God is came from the way you live, what kind of picture would they get?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How does your life declare the glory of God to those around you?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/storystart15)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



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STUDY PLAN

YEAR 1

Fall 2015

God the Creator (Genesis 1-11)
God the Covenant-Maker
(Genesis 12-50)

Winter 2016

God the Redeemer
(Exodus)
God the Lawgiver
(Exodus, Leviticus,
Deuteronomy)

Spring 2016

God the Savior
(Numbers, Joshua)
God the Judge (Judges,
Ruth, 1 Samuel)

Summer 2016

God the King (1-2 Samuel)
God All Wise (1 Kings, Job,
Ecclesiastes, Psalms, Proverbs)

YEAR 2

Fall 2016

God the Revealer
(1-2 Kings, Isaiah)
God the Pursuer (Major
and Minor Prophets,
1-2 Chronicles)

Winter 2017

God the Sustainer
(Daniel, Ezra)
God the Provider (Esther,
Nehemiah, Malachi)

Spring 2017

God the Son (Gospels)
God Among Us (Gospels)

Summer 2017

Jesus the Storyteller
(Synoptic Gospels)
Jesus the Miracle-Worker
(Gospels)

YEAR 3

Fall 2017

Jesus the Savior (Gospels)
Jesus the Risen King
(Gospels, Acts)

Winter 2018

The Spirit Who
Empowers (Acts)
The God Who Sends (Acts)

Spring 2018

The God Who Directs His
People (Epistles)
The God Who Changes
Us (Epistles)

Summer 2018

God's Prisoner (Acts, Epistles)
The God Who Makes All
Things New (Epistles,
Revelation)