

LESSONS FROM EXODUS

BY GARY HOWELL

*Five lessons from Exodus through
the eyes of a pastor and counselor.*

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Passover: the History of Easter

How God moves us from comfort that enslaves us to growth.

EXODUS 12: 21-27

Easter is a time when we are called to do more than just celebrate, we are called to remember the backstory to Easter that every small Jewish child would have known.

Remembering how the angel of death passed over the homes of all who had the lamb's blood on the doorposts, thus they celebrated Passover.

These events in Israel's history brought freedom and dependence on Jehovah. They serve as the great foreshadowing of the Lamb that would surrender Himself to be slain for the remission of sins and freedom to all who believe.

For years, my wife and I have had our own little ritual. On the night before Easter we watch the old movie "The Ten Commandments". We still find ourselves moved by God's love for His children as He took them on a journey to freedom.

I want to go with you on a quest through the Exodus story for nuggets that we can learn from for our journey. The journey of this Christian walk that we are all on was never meant to be static (stationary, without movement) but one of movement, not just motion.

Yet human nature is such that when we reach a place where we experience some success or things are relatively easy, we get comfortable, and movement takes a back seat.

At the famine's peak, Jacob sent his sons to Egypt because he heard there was grain

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there. (Genesis 42) This journey ended with all of Jacob's family going to Egypt and eventually staying, becoming complacent and comfortable.

The same thing can happen to us.

We get cozy and comfortable in a place, position, or situation, and we get stuck. But just like the children of Israel, the thing that initially brought comfort and peace now enslaves us.

Yet God has interesting ways of changing the narrative of a story. "Now there arose in Egypt a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph." (Exodus 1:8)

God has a way of implementing situations that move us from the place of static comfort to potential movement and growth.

So embrace those tough moments - those uncomfortable changes - and know God is preparing you for a new season of the journey.

Reflection Questions:

1. Think about what you read about God in Exodus 12. What do you learn about who God is from this passage?
2. Ask yourself, "If what I learned about Him is true, how does that implicate my life today?"
3. What are some tough moments or uncomfortable changes you've been experiencing?
4. Are there any ways you've become comfortable or complacent to repent from?
5. What new season of your journey might God be using today's tough moments or uncomfortable changes to prepare you for?
6. Journal or pray, expressing your dependence on Him for this new season in your journey with Him.

What Legacy Will You Leave?

Two legacies from the Exodus story.

EXODUS 1:8–2:1

The Hebrews' journey from Egypt to the promised land has produced a legacy for the Jewish people.

It is celebrated today by their sacred feasts: The Feast of Passover, The Feast of Unleavened Bread, and The Feast of Tabernacles.

A legacy is something of substance or importance handed down from the past.

In chapter 1 of Exodus we find the new Pharaoh of Egypt gravely concerned with growth of the Hebrew population. He initiated a program (a methodical massacre of Jews) stating that all Hebrew boys born were to be killed. The girls were allowed to live.

The Pharaoh charged Egyptian midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, to carry this out. In Exodus 1:17 we read, "But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them."

We are told in the following verses that God blessed the midwives for their actions. Shiphrah and Puah left an unknown, uncelebrated legacy for all those Hebrew boys that were spared because of their actions.

Take a moment to think about the legacy you have been left. Stop and think of people in your past whose actions have blessed you and left an impact on you. Write down their names and how they taught, inspired, and blessed you, then thank God for them.

A second legacy comes in chapter two, verses 1-2, "Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son..."

It is worthy to note that at that time, to draw attention to their lineage was rather

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meaningless; prior to this the only mention of any substance concerning Levi was Jacob's hesitancy to give him the "blessing" because he was a man of swords, blood, and death (Genesis 49:5).

It wasn't until later God told Moses to separate the Levites from the rest of Israel so they would be the Priests. To be a Levite didn't make Moses significant; Moses rather made being a Levite significant.

Moses passed a legacy down to the nation of Israel due to his faithfulness in listening to God.

You and I are creating a legacy. What will that look like? Let's be faithful and allow God to craft a legacy from our lives.

Reflection Questions:

1. Think about what you read about God in Exodus chapter 1. What do you learn about who God is from this passage?
2. Ask yourself, "If what I learned about Him is true, how does that implicate my life today?"
3. Who has left you a legacy? What did they do? Stop and thank the Lord for His goodness, expressed through these people.
4. How can you be faithful to the Lord with the legacy you've been left by others?
5. What kind of legacy do you want to leave?
6. What kind of legacy are you actually leaving?
7. Ask the Lord to guide and help you leave a legacy that points to Him.

Running from Sin: Moses' Dark Past

The aristocratic murderer that would one day lead God's people.

EXODUS 2:11-15

Reading Exodus reminds me why I love the Scriptures so much, especially in the way it reveals the narrative of the people of the Bible.

They are not presented as some mythical, larger-than-life personalities or a composite of every excellent and admirable trait possible in a human. Instead, God reveals them as rough, raw, imperfect, and tangibly real people with all the same desires, faults, and failures that humans are still capable of today.

Your story is not
just for you; it's
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who follow.

As I tell those I counsel, "Your story is not just for you; it's also for those who follow." So it is with our glimpse of Moses today. May we learn something from this part of his story.

In the prime of his life as a member of the aristocracy of Egypt, Moses made one rash decision that changed the trajectory of his life. Seeing an Egyptian guard beating one of the Hebrews, he overreacts and kills the Egyptian guard. When he realized another Hebrew had witnessed his crime, he knew it was time to flee.

"When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian, and there he sat down by a well." (Exodus 2:15)

One poor choice took him from a seat in the palace to a seat on a rock in the middle of a hot Midian desert. Moses fell prey to book one, lesson one in the Seven Areas of Life Training (SALT) - "You are not God."

Even if his rash behavior had somewhat of a good intention, his playing god opened him up to severe consequences.

Like most people (myself included), Moses tried to run from his problems.

I think the text is clear, Moses wasn't running from God (although that may have been the net effect); he was running from Pharaoh and the mess of his sin.

Running from your problems and messes is never the path to a satisfactory solution. God used 40 years of humbling in the Midian desert to prepare Moses for his next big assignment.

When we recognize we are running from our messes, we need to humble ourselves and surrender the control that took us to our Midian.

"Sometimes when things are falling apart, they may actually be falling into place."
(Unknown author)

Reflection Questions:

1. Have you ever ended up in "Midian" through poor choices or playing god in others' lives?
2. While you sat on the "rock" how did Jesus respond to you? (Read Luke 15:11-32 if you're not sure.)
3. Are there any areas of your life where you are running from the need to humble yourself and surrender control? What are you afraid might happen if you do?
4. Write three things you know about who God is, what He is like, and how He treats His people.
5. Does this change how you feel about relinquishing control to Him?
6. If you're not ready to give up the control that got you to Midian, ask the Lord to help you.

A God Passionate for Us

God was jealous for the Egyptians; He is jealous for you.

EXODUS 7-11

The subject of idolatry is as critical and relevant today as it was in pre-exodus Egypt.

To give a little backdrop to the story, we move to the 34th chapter of the book of Exodus, where we read in verse 14, “Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”

It is essential here to interject that God is not jealous *of* you but *for* you. He knows what He has for you, now and in the future (Jeremiah 29:11-13), and His love insists that He calls us to a place of removing other gods, idols, and anything or anyone that has been placed before Jehovah God. This is the subtle background to the often-read story in Exodus chapters 7-11, which contains the account of the plagues on Egypt.

We often read these accounts and determine that God used these plagues to leverage Pharaoh into complying with Moses’ demand to “let my people go.” But they were much more than a series of random events to disrupt Egypt’s economic state and comfort level.

God was systematically destroying the belief system attached to the plethora of gods that Egypt worshiped. Let me give you some examples: plague #1- Nile turned to blood was a direct assault on “Hapi,” the god of the Nile who they worshiped for its life-giving water; plague #2- the invasion of frogs was a shot at “Heket” the frog god of fertility; plague #3- the swarms of gnats (some translate it lice) everywhere and in everything was a dismissal of their god “Khepri” the god of insects, and, specifically the dung beetle and its continual movement of hard work; Plague #5- the death of the Egyptian livestock (while the Hebrew livestock was spared) was aimed at the livestock god

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“Hathor” worshiped for its provision and economic status.

I could list every plague and its corresponding god and Jehovah’s desire to poke holes in every false god, but I think the point has been made.

Here are two takeaways from this story:

1- It is always a good and productive exercise to do a survey of anything we have allowed to have a place in front of God in our life. He still wants to destroy any false gods of importance that we have accumulated.

2- Pray for our brothers and sisters in other countries and on mission fields as they battle the false gods of the people they serve, gods who promise peace and life but are empty and powerless. May those they minister to come to know Jesus!

Reflection Questions:

1. Take a moment and reflect on the idea that the God of the Universe values His relationship with His people so much that He is “jealous” for you.
2. Confess and repent of any idols that you have allowed to become more important to you than Him.
3. The Egyptian’s gods couldn’t save them from the plagues, just as our false gods always fail us. Think about the ways the Lord’s faithfulness overshadows our cultural “gods” such as politics, economics and ego.
4. How can you plan to pray for someone who doesn’t yet know Jesus to turn from the things that they think will save them and allow Jesus to be their Lord and Savior?

Embracing Gratitude

Learning from Israel's mistakes

EXODUS 16:1-12

It is simple, but profound. When you back up and look at Exodus from a macro-view, it is so easy to see ourselves, our attitudes, our selfishness, and our proclivity to become dissatisfied with the daily repetitive nature of our journey.

We, who have similar behaviors as the children of Israel, should think twice before we cast our stones at their actions and angst towards God for the situations they find themselves in and then take note of what not to do, which is to dismiss living in gratitude.

In less than two chapters, we watch as the Hebrew nation trusted God for His deliverance through the Red Sea (Exodus 14) but then (in chapter 16) we find them complaining to Moses about having no food and dying in the wilderness:

“In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. They said, ‘If only we had died by the LORD’S hand in Egypt, there we had pots of meat and ate all we wanted,’ but you have brought us out here to starve this entire assembly to death.”
Exodus 16:2-3

The absence of continual gratitude seems to always lead to self-pity and complaining. However, embracing gratitude allows us to:

1. Change our “state”. State is how you think, feel and believe in real-time. When gratitude invades my state, positivity and hope find a breeding ground fertile for further generating thankful thoughts.

The absence of continual gratitude seems to always lead to self-pity and complaining.

2. Change the nature of the relationship. When gratitude fills my thinking, I now look to God with a grateful attitude that won't allow me to complain or be negative.
3. Change a self-centered, self-absorbed attitude that sets a precedent for our initial responses to future difficult circumstances.
4. Change the trajectory of our spirituality - in the first few verses of Philippians 2, we see that by removing that self-centered, all-about-me thinking, I can now alter the way I see God and others.

The lessons from Exodus are more than just historical accounts and interesting stories. They serve as a reminder, a teacher, and an example of how we can design our lives for the journey ahead.

Reflection Questions:

1. Take a moment and reflect on what you have to be grateful for.
2. What can you do to remind yourself to dwell on what you are thankful for more regularly?
3. What is the circumstance that most often causes you to dismiss living in gratitude and capitulate to self-pity or complaining? How can you prepare yourself to handle that situation with gratitude next time?
4. What is the Lord leading you to do to prepare for the journey ahead?

Congratulations on Completing These Studies!

We pray it's been a blessing to you.

For over 30 years, Gary has been committed to helping others on their journey to achieving a breakthrough and experiencing peace, hope, purpose, and joy.

Gary is a pastor, counselor, coach, and author.

He is a lover of God, family, people, and all things positive. As a firm believer in the power of story, Gary shares his story as well as the stories of others in his book, *A Little White Casket*, in order to help readers accept the grief and loss of the present, confront the truth of the past and reframe towards the future. *A Little White Casket* is available on Amazon.



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