

Living the Story

A Study through Scripture

Introduction:

Much of what we find in the early chapters of Exodus is familiar to us due to their being staples of many Sunday School curriculums. The Baby in the Basket. The Burning Bush. The Ten Plagues. The Crossing of the Red Sea. They are dramatic and spectacular stories that capture our attention.

In the midst of these stories we discover the Israelites celebrating for the first time the Passover in celebration of God's passing over them during the death of the firstborn of Egypt. What stands out to me about this story is that thousands of years later, the Jews continue to celebrate the Passover meal and Christians remember weekly the Lord's Supper, which has its roots in the Passover.

What is it about regularly celebrated observances that cause them to find their way into our faith development? I think the consistent reminder of God's working is one significant component of this. When we look at the book of Judges, we discover that the people often forgot God—those who best knew God or his judge died out—and subsequent generations failed to remember God's wondrous acts. Therefore, stopping to remind ourselves of God's actions points our minds toward him, not our own strength or accomplishments.

Another aspect of this may be that the importance of God's acts are given more prominence when we stop regularly (annually in this case) to remember them. We do not stop to take pictures of our children's twenty-third day of school or every Thursday, but who does not have a collection of photographs of their *first* days? The first day is important, so are those events in which we remember God's works.

Third, as we will see in the text, stopping to rehearse the acts of God or some other significant moment in our faith history allows us a moment to share this with our children. It is the living out of what we find in Deuteronomy 6. Several times in this area of scripture we are told of monuments (see Joshua 4.4-7) or significant events the Israelites are to remember and the people are consistently told: this is so you can tell your children about a moment in your spiritual history. The implication is that they will someday do the same for their children.

Finally, celebrating an event together develops a bond with others who have experienced the event with us. When we go with a few buddies to a major sporting event, we share an ongoing story of "Remember when we were at that Cowboys game..." Even though others may have watched the same game on television, there is something special about you and I having watched it in person, together. This carries over into our expectations of celebrating with those people again. I cannot wait until December when my group goes together to look at Christmas lights. I may do that with another group of people, but that memory and expectation of future events with my group has a special place in my heart.

The question for us, then, is how can we remember to celebrate within the context of our groups the great things God has done. While there are many ways to remember God, is there anything you can do specifically as a group?

Summary of the Text:

Spend a couple of minutes refreshing yourself on the contents of Exodus 1-11. The people are in Egypt as a result of Joseph's being sold into slavery, but then rising in power in Egypt. This rise to power allowed his family to join him there and eventually they multiplied to the point where they were becoming a concern for

LESSON #4

Date: 09/30/2012

Text: Exodus 12

The Story: Chapter 4

The Big Picture: Although we might often think the great moments of God's working are not easily forgotten. The history of the Israelites shows us this is not the case. What things do we need to do to intentionally remind ourselves of God at work in our lives and the lives of our children?

Materials Needed: none

the new Pharaoh. Moses is born during this trying time, but survives through his mother placing him in a waterproofed basket that floats down the river to the daughter of Pharaoh. After being raised in the palace, he eventually flees, but is called by God to go back to Egypt to rescue God's people. Obviously not keen on the idea of losing his work force, Pharaoh is understandably against the idea of the Hebrew people leaving, although 9 plagues against Pharaoh and his people and livestock soften him up. Ultimately, Pharaoh is convinced through the death of all of the first born—children and cattle—in Egypt. It is here we pick up the story in Exodus 12.

Chapter 11 of Exodus describes to Pharaoh the events that are about to transpire, then Chapter 12 begins a new time: literally. God tells Moses that “this month” will now be the first month for the people (12.2). The event that is about to happen is so dramatic, so norm changing, that you will count your days based on this moment.

The Lord goes on to give instructions to Moses (and the people) as to the exact meal they are to prepare in anticipation of this passing over (12.3-11). Notice that much of this instruction is shaped by the need for the Israelites to leave quickly. The very title of this book, Exodus, implies a hasty departure and the meal is done in such a way so as to position the Israelites to leave quickly.

Verses 12-13 tell of the destruction and judgment to come and then verse 14 goes back to describing the feasts the Israelites are to celebrate, which God says, are to be “a lasting ordinance” (v. 14, 17, 24), not simply a one-time thing right before they leave Egypt.

In verses 24-28 Moses commands the people to celebrate the Passover, even when they enter into the land they have been promised. It is within these verses that the people are instructed to pass on the significance of this event to their children. Why do we celebrate this meal? Because it is a reminder that Lord passed over us and spared us. In the coming years, it would also serve as a reminder of the fact that God not only did not kill the Israelites first born, but he also rescued his people from Egypt and gave them a land promised to their father Abraham.

Chapter 12 concludes with the first born being killed, Pharaoh releasing the people, and closes with some final instructions on how and who should observe the Passover.

Preparing for the Group Time:

The implication for us, I think, is that we should be a people who recognize God and his actions AND we celebrate the things he has done, especially with other members of our group—including our children.

When I first began to think about this lesson, I thought a lot about the Passover meal as it is celebrated today. Jews, but also some Christians by the way, celebrate the Passover, and if you have never been through a Passover Seder, I would highly recommend doing so. It is a powerful reminder of God's working, as well as a significant moment in faith development.

Celebrating a Passover may not work for your group. (For several reasons: the next traditional Passover date is March 25-April 2, a Passover Seder may be uncomfortable for some in your group, there is some preparation involved in getting ready for a Seder.) In addition, the exodus from Egypt, while significant for God's people, may not be the thing *your group* finds most significant.

So, the challenge for you is to determine what events in the life of faith of your group members and your group as a whole deserve to be regularly celebrated. This week's lesson may be a discussion about a future event, more than a celebration of that event, but please do not overlook the importance of this. I believe it is one of the most significant ways your group can encourage one another's spiritual growth.

How does this happen? I think first you discuss together those moments that are most significant in an individual's life of faith. For example, baptisms, weddings, the birth of a child are all times worthy of a blessing. I think you also discuss what group members need to help encourage their spiritual walk. Is it a weekend away as a time of Sabbath?

Is it a family who needs to be strengthened through a marriage retreat? Is it a meal together just simply to stop the rushing and slow down for a few moments? You might also discuss what events others have had in different groups in which they have been a part in the past. (I give you some examples below.)

Once you have determined what that event may be, plan and then follow through with actually having the event. It does no good to talk about it, but then not follow through with it.

Do not overlook serendipitous events. Not every event that I have found to be significant within a group was planned out in advance as a regular event. Our first Thanksgiving meal (see below) was simply meant to be a meal together, but turned into an event that “we always do together,” even after the first year.

Here are some examples of things I have been a part of, or have heard of, in the past that I felt like was a significant, ongoing event in the life of a group.

Thanksgiving Meal

One year our group decided to have a Thanksgiving meal together the Sunday before Thanksgiving. We went all out: turkey, dressing, pumpkin pies. Everyone chipped in for the meal and a family who had a huge dining room table (I admit, it helps!) hosted. We ate together, then spent the evening going around the table sharing with one another the things for which we were thankful from the past year. The next year when November rolled around, there was no going back, it had become “tradition.”

A few years later, our group added a “Thanksgiving in a Bag” component to our meal. The ingredients of a Thanksgiving meal were collected, placed in a bag(s) and then given to those who were in need. This provided an excellent way to celebrate, but also help those who were in need.

Baptism Stories

One group at a congregation of which I was a part ditched the curriculum when one of their children was baptized and instead, asked that child to share with the entire group why they came to that decision and who was instrumental in them making that commitment. They then all said a prayer of blessing for this child and his/her faith walk. The other children in the group were most influenced by this, so much so that one girl asked her brother, rather than her father, to baptize her based solely on the testimony he gave during this time of sharing.

Wedding Pictures

One group here at South Plains asks new members to the group (not the first week they attend—they give them a couple of weeks!) to bring their wedding pictures. The couple tells the story of how they met, their courtship, and then the wedding. What better way to celebrate the ways God has been at work in the lives of a couple than this? One couple even went so far as to have a wedding cake made for the snack time when it was their turn to share.

Christmas Lights

One group goes to look at Christmas lights together beginning or ending their evening with Christmas cookies (sometimes decorating them together) and hot chocolate. While on the surface this may seem less “celebrating the great things of God” than some of the other events listed, I think there are times when our celebration needs to be simply enjoying time with one another. Sharing an event together can be honoring God without necessarily asking the question: “What has God done?” He has enabled you as a group to enjoy time together, that is what he has done.

What things would you add to this list?

Your assignment, in summary, is to determine what event(s) celebrates God at work in the life of the group, then plan and execute that event together. Perhaps it will become a recurring event, but even the act of celebrating this once will be a blessing to your group. (NOTE: The questions are designed to work through a process of developing an event to celebrate together.)

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Text: Exodus 12

Lesson Outline:

If you asked them to do so last week, ask people to share how they observed life not going as they planned and how they reacted to that? Did being aware of the possibility help them better handle the unexpected twists?

Ask group members the following: "What regularly occurring events did you experience growing up that you looked forward to with family members or friends? What was most significant about these times for you?" Be prepared to offer your own answer as an example to get the ideas flowing, such as an annual dinner at the end of a school year or going with your father to "The Nutcracker" every December.

Read together Exodus 12.1-28.

Go through the discussion questions together.

Close your time together in prayer.

Discussion Questions:

What moments in your life would you define as "the beginning of time," that is, moments you refer back to as milestones or markers when talking about your life?

What do you know about the significance of the Passover for Jewish people, both in scripture and still today?

What moments do you have in your life that you revisit regularly to remind you about the power of God in this world and in your life?

In what ways can this group celebrate moments and events to remind you of God's working in each of your lives and in the life of the group?

In what ways can these things serve to instruct our "One Youngers" about how to better follow Jesus?

Spend a few minutes discussing what possible events you could do together to accomplish this. Now, do it!

For the Children:

The Passover, as well as many other moments in the life of the Israelite people, served as moments to share with their children the ways God was at work. It often appears that God used certain events intentionally to serve as an object lesson for the younger generation. For this reason, I think it is important to not only celebrate those events together, but also allow the children to be a part of bringing these events together.

Living the Story:

Your time of living the story will be the event you have decided to do together to help celebrate the working of God in our lives. That event may happen today, it may happen some time down the road. The point is that it is accomplished.

What's Next:

The congregational reading for this upcoming week (October 7) is Exodus 18-40. This is covered in *The Story* chapter 5.