

### Read Exodus 1

#### **Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. Exodus 1:8**

When I was in high school, I felt like I had finally found the profession that I'd like to do when I "grew up; I wanted to teach history. I loved the subject, and found it so fascinating to see the details behind the events of human history. I had a teacher who always worked to make it interesting for even the kids who clearly did not care. History is such an important factor in personal or national life, so that you can avoid mistakes of the past, and apply past situations to current ones.

Joseph was the biggest reason that Egypt was the power that we find in Exodus. If not for him, the nation would have starved and fallen into ruin. The Egyptians knew Joseph was and his people. But, then a new Pharaoh came to power. It's not that he didn't know who Joseph was. When it says he didn't know Joseph, I think the implication is that he didn't know all the Joseph had really done. He had heard vague stories of history, but he really didn't know the man. When this new Pharaoh looked around, all he saw was Israel as a large threat, even though they had lived peacefully there for many years. **What past lessons are you ignoring? We all have events in our lives that seem very similar to past situations we have been through. You may encounter repeated temptation to fall into a particular sin. You know the consequences, but will you go forward in the sin anyway? If you know Jesus as your Savior, you have no excuse that will allow you to ignore the past. I know that Jesus doesn't hold the past against me, but I still think upon it and remember who I was and what I did...and I remember that I don't want to be that person anymore. And Jesus doesn't want me to either. Learn from your past, and share your testimony as an example to others.**

### Read Exodus 2

**But he said, "Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and said, "Surely the matter has become known." Exodus 2:14**

When I was a child, I was a thief. If I saw something I wanted, there was little hesitation to take it. In second grade, a kid in my class had found a little robot in his cereal box. He brought it to school and kept it on his desk one day. I wanted it as soon as I saw it, so I took it when no one was looking. About 10 minutes before school was over, he told the teacher it was gone. We started looking around the classroom for it, and the teacher said no one was going home until we found it. I conveniently "found" it on a bookshelf in the back of the classroom and thought I was the hero. After giving it to the classmate, my teacher told me that she saw me take it and was very disappointed in me.

Moses had tried to do something in secret. Even though he was trying to protect an Israelite, killing the man hadn't been his intention. He had tried his best to hide it, but suddenly it had come to light. **Have you ever had a nervous stomach when you realized someone discovered your sin? It's not a pleasant feeling, and the first reaction is usually "Why did I do that?" When faced with temptation, one of the most effective deterrents is to remember how you will feel afterwards: guilty, worthless, and worried. When those feelings come up, you know you've done wrong, no matter how you try to justify it. Ask God to remind you of consequences when sin creeps up, that you'll be prepared.**

### Read Exodus 3

**God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Exodus 3:14**

People try many ways to describe God, and most all of them fail. To use an example from earth is always going to fall short, because the creation does not adequately describe the creator. When Moses asks for God's name, he is told to tell Israel that "I AM" has sent Moses. This comes from the Hebrew word hayah, which means "to be". In this case, it's a constant action of existence that only God can claim. So when He calls Himself, I AM, He is describing Himself in the most important way He can...God is. God is...holy, ever-present, omniscient, righteous, the list goes on.

I think His least understood attribute is holiness. When Moses enters into His presence at the burning bush, He's told the ground is holy ground. It's not holy because of the dirt, but due to the fact God is directly occupying the space. People forget that God is holy, meaning set apart and above us. People speak so flippantly about God. Yes, He is a friend to the Christian, and we can speak to Him as a Father. But, we must also recognize that He is God. I've certainly spoken to my earthly father in a way that would be disrespectful for my Heavenly one. **Who do you need God to be? Provider, Protector? His name is I AM. He is all-sufficient for your needs. Seek Him out today in prayer if you're already a believer in Christ. Seek newness in your relationship to Him, recognizing that He is set apart, and desires for you to be. When we're not different from the world, we are failing to follow the example of God. It's an unhittable example, yet one Christians are instructed to strive for, and bring us closer to God everyday as a result.**

#### Read Exodus 4

**The LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Exodus 4:11**

There's an awful lot in this chapter I'd like to discuss, but I'll go with this one. I've talked a little bit about my collecting of baseball cards as a kid. Every 6 months or so, I would buy a magazine that gave the prices of all the cards. Depending on the condition of the card, they would tell you the price. I would look up every single card I owned, and get excited to see one worth a few dollars. But, ultimately, if you tried to sell a card, it's only worth what someone will pay for it. In fact, once I read that very statement in the pricing magazine. They had gone to all this work to price these cards, and then said that the prices weren't guaranteed.

While it was difficult to put a value on baseball cards, it's much easier to put value on human life. ALL HUMAN LIFE IS PRECIOUS AND WORTHY OF LIVING. Our society is one that looks on handicaps with mixed emotions. When I was growing up, the cry was for buildings to be handicap accessible. Now, we hear about how genetic research and abortions should be used to eliminate people with handicaps. Someone is assigning value to human life; however there should be a disclaimer that these people are worth what someone will pay. Jesus paid with His life to redeem every human who has ever lived or is yet to live. So many with handicaps have inspired others and been used by God in mighty ways (look up Joni Erickson Tada in your spare time). **How do you put a value on human life? Do you make judgments about people who are in certain handicapped situations? That's easy to do, but God says He is the one in control of how people are made, so we must seek the lesson and importance of every life. Be patient with the handicapped and you will find them to be what I have found...a blessing. We show the love of Christ when we show that every person is of value and worth to their Creator God.**

#### Read Exodus 5

**They said to them, "May the LORD look upon you and judge you, for you have made us odious in Pharaoh's sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us." Exodus 5:21**

If you listened to everyone in the world who claims to speak for God, you'd swear God was a schizophrenic! Even if you just consider the words of Christian ministers, the messages don't always seem to line up. It's true that God has numerous attributes and truths that can be discussed from day to day, but these messages should never be in conflict with one another. Even on a day that one person preaches on God's judgment and another on God's love, it should be clear in both messages that God is not confined only to those options.

In this case, Moses clearly is told by God to go to Egypt and confront Pharaoh. Things become difficult (as God said they would), and Moses becomes discouraged. His discouragement rises, when people begin to say that they are calling on God to judge him for the hardships he's brought about. I believe the people who said this to Moses, were not close to the Lord. For if they had been, and sought out the Lord's purpose in Moses, they would have understood that Moses was taking God-ordained steps. **How would you react to a statement like Moses dealt with? Would you find yourself suddenly doubting the Lord's will for your life? As Christians, many of us have been excited about something we felt the Lord clearly lead us to do. But then, someone comes along and says that God is far from us. Consider two options: This person is right, and you were moved by personal emotions and ideas; this person is wrong, and you cannot allow difficulties to turn you from God's will for you. If you will be patient, and bathe new ideas and passions in prayer, you will know if they are from the Lord. And then you can move forward in confidence, not swayed by negative comments of those who are far from the Lord.**

Read Exodus 6

**'I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the LORD.' Exodus 6:8**

My son wanted to surprise me this morning. He is five, and I heard him in the kitchen. I went in figuring he wanted to eat breakfast. He had pushed a chair over so he could climb up and grab the cereal, and had taken the milk out of the fridge. He said he was going to make his own cereal. I watched him pour the cereal, the milk, and get his spoon. I had to cut some strawberries for him, but I'm sure he would have given that a try if he had thought of it! I've never seen him do this before, though maybe his mom has. Why do I care so much about whether he eats or not? Because I am the dad. I want to know that my children have gotten plenty to eat, and they're doing ok. No matter how many punishments I may give them in a given day, my concern for their welfare never changes. I could spank them one moment, and then run out of a burning house with them the next.

God is telling Moses here that in the midst of the difficulties they face, God will keep His promise of a new land, because He is God. God doesn't have to remind Himself to do things, but He simply does them as a result of who He is. **Are you failing to trust in God's provision for you? You know that the Bible says He'll meet your needs, but you still find yourself a little unsure. Even if you're in the midst of a great trial right now, perhaps even consequences over your sin, that does not mean He will neglect His basic watch care over you. Trials and even discipline are never for our destruction, but to raise us up to a closer relationship with Him. Ask God to give you a greater faith to trust Him. But, be prepared for the steps He will take to accomplish your prayer. They'll be difficult, but will become part of your testimony in your walk with Christ.**

Read Exodus 7

**So Moses and Aaron did even as the LORD had commanded. And he lifted up the staff and struck the water that was in the Nile, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, and**

**all the water that was in the Nile was turned to blood. 21 The fish that were in the Nile died, and the Nile became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. And the blood was through all the land of Egypt. 22 But the magicians of Egypt did the same with their secret arts; and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. Exodus 7:20-22**

The world tries to come up with alternatives to just about everything that God does. God says that marriage between a man and a woman is His plan, and a plan that will bless both spouses. But, the world says you can live together and be happy, and you have to try each other out before marriage anyway. As a result, people begin to discount God and His word because they feel that they have found a way that is equally fulfilling to the one that God has offered them. So instead of God's best, they settle for cheap imitations that never fully approach God's intentions.

Moses begins doing these signs in the midst of the Egyptians, but the magicians can do the same things. The difference is, that Moses was doing real signs by the power of God, and the magicians were doing false ones, either by illusion or satanic power. One way or the other, God's power was being shown as the dominant force. Every time God was discounted by the magicians, Pharaoh hardened his heart. This has been a point of difficulty for many as they read it. It's clear that his heart was hardened, or strong. This is because he was looking for an opportunity to discount God. So many people know that God has power over their lives, but they look for an instance where God seems to lack control. Maybe a difficulty at work or in their family causes them to believe God's not really around. So they harden their heart against God, believing that He doesn't really care what happens to them. **Have you hardened your heart against God? Perhaps you've had some tough times in your life recently. It seems like God is doing a lousy job of being God to you. But, perhaps this is the time, more than ever, that you need to seek Him. If you've never given your life to Jesus Christ, you can anticipate more disappointment in your life. God will use drastic means to get your attention. If you are a Christian, don't allow difficulties to cause you doubts about your God. You have access to the throne. Share your questions and your hurts with God, because He wants to hear from you.**

Read Exodus 8

**But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. Exodus 8:15**

Sometimes people who do not know the Lord on a personal level, become very concerned about Him when times are difficult. They will ask you to pray for them, and they may even pray for themselves. But, I believe it is not God's will to quickly remove difficulties from the lives of unbelievers. For many of them, it's the only time they give God any consideration. It says that even though Pharaoh had said he was done revolting against God, when God took away the hardship, he decided things weren't that bad. I believe it is in our best interest to endure the situations God brings, for as long as He brings them. We know that He works all things together for good to those who love Him. I know that in my most difficult circumstances, I've learned the most about really allowing Jesus to be my Lord.

When I was without a job for almost 6 months in seminary, there were times I wanted a job immediately, but I'm thankful He didn't give me one. I prayed for one, and was doing everything I could to get one. But, I did not look on Him in anger for the difficulty. I spent my spare time prayer walking for hours, and doing ministry for my church in visiting new residents to the area. I am confident I would have missed a lot of growth and blessings in my prayer life if that hard time had been removed. **Are you looking for relief or growth? If the circumstances in your life are causing you to become angry with God, ask Him to change your focus, and see the bigger picture. If you've**

**never given your life to Jesus, stop waiting, because your life cannot improve without Him. And if you're a Christian, ask him to forgive your poor attitude in the situation and to help you endure the Christian growing pains.**

Read Exodus 9

**Now the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, on man and on beast and on every plant of the field, throughout the land of Egypt." Exodus 9:22**

I am horrible at delegating. I know that one of the true marks of a leader is being able to delegate and get other people involved. So why don't I do it? Because people let me down. I've given ministry tasks to people before and been disappointed to either find the project undone or poorly done. So I often hear people ask if there is something they can do to help me, and I usually just say no. However, I'm learning that when I say no and do everything myself, when the project is too big for one man, I won't have anyone around to help me.

This situation in Egypt certainly wasn't too big for God that He needed help. But, for Moses to trust Him and rely on Him over the next several years of wilderness living, God allowed Moses to have a role in beginning the plagues. Why does God want us to pray? Why does God want us to give of our money, time, and talents to the kingdom? Why does God want us to share the Gospel with people? Doesn't it seem that He would be so much more effective just doing those things Himself? Of course He would, but then we would miss out on a blessing of service. As we serve our Lord, we become more invested in the kingdom beyond just what we received at salvation. So when you do nothing for the Lord either personally or at your church, you are choosing to do the bare minimum for the kingdom of God. He doesn't need us, but He's so wonderful to use us. **If you don't have a ministry area that you call your own, get one. Perhaps there is a personal ministry you can provide to neighbors. Maybe something in your church that's being neglected. Maybe you have an idea that's never been done before. Simply seek where God wants to use you.**

Read Exodus 10

**Then Pharaoh hurriedly called for Moses and Aaron, and he said, "I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. Exodus 10:16**

There is a difference between confession and repentance. There have been many times as a child that I apologized to my parents for something I did, and then told them I'd never do it again. But, I often got in trouble for the same things, meaning that I didn't keep my word to them. This is called confession. You tell someone you're sorry and that you won't do it again, but it never really goes beyond words. It's simply something that is said to avoid punishment and as a result of being caught. Repentance is what God desires from us because it's not just us telling God we're sorry, but then living our life in a way that is different than before. Not just saying we won't do something again, but then actually taking the steps to keep our word.

Pharaoh made statements to Moses about sinning against God, but as soon as the plague was removed, he always went back to his old self. He was confessing what they wanted to hear, but he lacked repentance because there was no true change. **What do you find yourself doing in your relationship with God? Do you find yourself confessing things, and many times just confessing the same things over and over? That's not an effective life for Christ, because you're not moving forward as God would have for you. A life of repentance is honoring to God, because you're taking the steps to avoid the sin again. This may mean the removal of an item, person, or it may mean that**

**you avoid a particular area. If you're serious about leaving your sin behind, you must make a plan for it. Don't just hope you'll do better next time, because you won't.**

Read Exodus 11

**Now the LORD said to Moses, "One more plague I will bring on Pharaoh and on Egypt; after that he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out from here completely. Exodus 11:1**

God brought a total of 10 plagues on the nation of Egypt. Why did He do this? Well, He was keeping His promise to Abraham about Abraham's descendants being in captivity for 400 years, and God bringing them out. But, this was also a judgment on the nation of Egypt for their idolatry. In bringing each of the plagues God was destroying different aspects of the nation, and all the time the Pharaoh chose to stay angry instead of submitting himself to God. But, the final plague God brings, He knows will cause the Pharaoh to give up.

We need to remember that God is fully aware of everything. We learned recently that He is "I AM". There is nothing that you need in your life that He doesn't know about. There isn't a plan for your life that He is not fully prepared to carry out. However, we have free will. It's still about the choices that we make. It does not mean that God is incapable of accomplishing anything He wants, but that He loves us enough to allow us to make our own decisions. But, His desire is that when we make our decisions, that we base them on what He would see happen in our life. **How good are you at letting Jesus be your Lord? Do you find yourself bringing very few decisions before Him? Are you unsure of how to know when an idea is from Him or yourself? The Bible doesn't give us specifics on His will (i.e. take this job), but it does give us general statements. Look up "God" and "will" using a website like biblegateway.com You'll be surprised at all the statements God has made for us to accept as His will. For example, 1 Thess. 5:18 says it's God's will for you to give thanks in everything. Take a look, and see what the Lord's will is for your life. Understand His will, and you better understand His plan for you.**

Read Exodus 12

**'The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; 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. Exodus 12:13**

This has always been one of my favorite accounts in the Bible. First of all, God is showing that the battle belongs to the Lord. He will show Israel this truth again very soon. Secondly, this is a clear picture of Jesus Christ. They took an unblemished and perfect lamb and the blood protected them protected from judgment. As Christians, we are similarly covered by the blood of a perfect lamb, Jesus Christ, who died for our sins so we wouldn't have to. He conquered death by rising again so that death doesn't have to be the end. One thing I've always wondered: did any Israelites die in this plague? It doesn't say that any did, and Moses clearly gave the command to all the people. But, God didn't just provide salvation for Israel, but as a result of their obedience to the blood. They couldn't count on their heritage, but on their obedience.

I try to help children and adults understand this. No matter how many times you went to church as a kid, or even if your daddy was a deacon or a preacher, salvation has never been about what other do with Jesus, but what have you done with Him? **I've been using this illustration in my church, and I'd like you to think about it. If you were in a church, and we gave you a microphone to tell us about the moment Jesus became your Savior and Lord, would you have anything to say? Would**

**you talk about growing up in church, and that's it? That's no salvation, that's just going to Hell with a church membership. If you know, or are beginning to realize, that you're not sure of where you'll be when you die, you can know today! Call on his name (Romans 10:13) and ask for His forgiveness and Lordship in your life.**

Read Exodus 13

**Hence God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea; and the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt. Exodus 13:18**

I recently read about a Colorado National Guard unit who has paratroopers, who were accidentally dropped within the grounds of a prison. The soldiers were armed with rifles and rubber training bullets, but they had no altercations with the prisoners, and the prison guards were able to escort them off the premises. I remember thinking how fortunate these soldiers were. I've been on many National Guard training missions, and we were never armed. If we had ever been attacked during a training exercise, our hummers, uniforms and equipment would have been pretty useless.

I've always been struck by this detail in Exodus 13. The verse above says that Israel was in martial, or battle array. They had their weapons and looked prepared for a fight. However, it says that God led them where no fight would be found. God knew if they faced war, they would give up and try to return to Egypt. Appearances can certainly be deceiving. Many in church seem prepared to meet God one day. They pray, give to the church, and maybe even teach Sunday School. But, their personal life is in a shambles. They have no relationship to God, and simply are good at playing the game before other people. **Where do you stand with God? Are you a Christian who really doesn't take steps of faith? You find yourself often concerned about whether your needs are going to be met in a particular area? You need to get beyond playing church, and really walk with Jesus. Every day, you seek out His will and His peace, to allow you to live by faith and not by sight. Trusting Christ daily, makes your life pleasing to Him, and an example to others.**

Read Exodus 14

**"The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent." Exodus 14:14**

This is a great chapter in the Bible for teaching a lesson about faith. God led Israel to the place that they considered a trap. Egypt soon after Israel's departure realized how many laborers they had lost, and took off after them. Israel saw Egypt coming, and they immediately blame Moses for their impending death. However, Moses makes an awesome statement of assurance when he tells the people just to be quiet and watch the Lord fight for them. God had led them to that spot for a reason.

God has a complete plan for your life...it's not just patchwork. Exodus 14:1 says that God led them to that spot. God led Pharaoh and all Egypt to chase after the people. And then as Egypt arrived, God help them back while Israel escaped, and then used the divided sea to destroy Egypt. As a result of all of this, the people trusted the Lord even more, and other nations gave Israel breathing room in the face of what their God had done. **You may be wondering if God is working out some plan for you. I assure you God is not flying by the seat of His pants; the details have been worked out. You simply need to remain silent and trust Him. When He prompts you to move, do as He instructs. But, when you're unsure of what to do, always go off the last word the Lord gave you. When He wants you to do something different, He'll tell you.**

Read Exodus 15

**"Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in**

## **praises, working wonders? Exodus 15:11**

Every Christian does it. Some don't like to admit it, but it comes up in our minds. The question is: Am I right? Is Christianity really true, or is there another religion that is correct and we're the ones who are wrong? This is something we wrestle with because there are so many religions, and a person can begin to wonder. But, I realized a long time ago that the reason for so many religions isn't because they're all right. It's because Satan wants to give many options other than the one true God and has led men to blaspheme and ignore God in numerous ways. I've spoken with Muslims, Hindus, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and Wiccans. Do you know what they all have in common? None of them have joy when talking about their "god". They are so rules driven (except Wiccans who are simply all about themselves...and still not happy!) that they never talk about their God with a joyful tone.

That's the difference between worshipping the one true God, and worshipping an imagination of man. Your imagination will never answer you, while God is constantly seeking the opportunity to work in our lives. There is no one like Him! **So what do you do with your doubts? When you wonder if you're on the right track? Look back on all the things He has done for you. Remember all the things He's accomplished in your and through you. Ask Him to strengthen your faith...the Bible says faith comes from Him anyway (Romans 12:3). He gives us the faith to believe in Him. He truly is an awesome God.**

### Read Exodus 16

**"Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none ." Exodus 16:26**

As a Christian, I never understood Christians who don't regularly attend church. Some of them have real reasons, such as doctors and police officers who have to do their work everyday as a result of the curse of sin on this earth. But, what about the person who stays home because they didn't get all their work done that week? Farmers often say during harvest time, they can't come to church. What do you think early Israel did? They weren't accountants or chiropractors. They were farmers mostly. And yet, they observed the Lord's day and kept it holy. The fourth commandment says to "Remember the Sabbath". Remember means to work while remembering. On Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etc, you're working so that when Sunday comes, you can devote it to the Lord. The Bible says if there's something that must be done on Sunday (such as animals needing water), then do it. But, remember the day is one of remembrance and relationship with the Lord, and God designed it as rest for us.

In Exodus 20 we will get a look at the ten commandments. God was preparing the people for one of them here in Exodus 16. God put food out for Israel everyday, except on the Sabbath (now the same as our Sunday). He wanted them to collect on the day before the Sabbath, remembering that it was coming up. They weren't even supposed to go out and collect their food on that day. **How do you treat Sunday's? Do you just go to church and call it good? Are you willing to sacrifice God's time for "more important things" like catching up on work that you should have already done? The Bible says the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). It's a gift, and you need to view it and use it as such.**

### Read Exodus 17

**So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. Exodus 17:11**

What do you think is the role of a minister in your church? Do you feel that they are the ones

responsible for the success or failure within their particular ministry areas (youth, music, etc.)? As a minister for ten years, I have seen this perception fueled by a misunderstanding of the role of a minister. It is NOT the minister's job to make the ministries a success. Just because you are paying him, does not mean that he is ultimately responsible for everything that happens. Ministers are simply leaders for God's people. Not to do the work FOR them, but WITH them. Ministers are called by God to set the vision and direction, and believers are called by God to follow these leaders.

Could God have won the victory over Amalek even if Moses didn't hold his hands up? Of course, but He was bringing people alongside Moses to prop him up. Joshua was fighting on the front lines and Aaron and Hur both held up the arms of their leader. Moses was setting the vision, but the people around him made it happen. **How are you supporting your ministers? Are you quitting a ministry area because it's time for someone else to have a turn? Too many people are acting as if their time in service is over. Have you been mentoring someone to take your position, because if not you may be leaving your church in a terrible position. Ask God, not yourself, spouse, or anyone else, how He wants to use you. When He says it's time for you to move on, then do so. But, support your local ministers in any way that you can.**

Read Exodus 18

**"Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people." Exodus 18:11**

Do you realize one of the most powerful ways you can share Jesus is with your testimony? So many think that they must have a million Bible verses memorized before ever stepping foot out to share the Gospel. I use 3-6 verses generally, but I carry a Bible or tract with me also. Sometimes people need a little help in understanding exactly what God's Word is saying. When you share about Jesus being your Savior and Lord, share with the person how your life has changed since making that decision. Talk about difficult circumstances that the Lord brought you through, and how it has changed your life for the better.

Moses did not go through a long discussion of who God was when he visited with Jethro. He simply told him what God had done and how the Lord had saved the people. As a result of that testimony, Jethro makes the above statement that he realized that there was truly only one God. **What is the testimony of your life? How do you react when things go really bad? Do people see in you a person who relies on God at all times? Or do you go and talk to your lost friends and family as frantic as they come to you? You must learn to rely on God, not only for your own life, but also for that of others who look to you and seek a life of peace and faith in the Lord.**

Read Exodus 19

**So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. Exodus 19:7**

I remember hand grenade training in the Army (what a way to start a devotional!). I had seen hand grenades on TV a thousand times. You pull the pin, and you throw it...not exactly rocket science and anyone who has watched a movie probably thinks they can throw one just fine. But, I remember the day I held on it all seemed a bit more serious. You need to hold the grenade in your hand with your thumb on the "spoon". You then pull the pin, and as long as the spoon is held down, it won't go off. You can even put the pin back in if you needed to. Hold it close to your body when doing this, so that if you lose your grip you can trap it against your body to regain your hold and throw it. If you point your non-throwing arm to the target when you throw, you're also more likely to hit your target. And a grenade has

a delay of 3-4 seconds, so if you're in close combat, you have to hold it a second or two before throwing it, or it might come right back at you. What is the point of all of this? Simply that if you tried to use a grenade without all of this knowledge, there's a good chance that down the road your own grenade will probably kill you.

There are many pastors, youth ministers and Sunday school teachers that are telling people some things about God, but not everything. Maybe they're not sharing the seriousness of sin, or the responsibility of service, or the true nature of God. Why are those things important? Because God writes about these things in the Bible. Just as Moses told *all* the words of God, Bible teachers must teach the entire Word of God to their students. **Is there a part of the Bible you're completely unfamiliar with? Ask your teachers to go over those areas. Do some study on your own. If you are ignorant of any part of the Word of God, you are missing blessings as you miss a greater understanding of the One who has saved you. Don't stay under a minister or teacher who holds back any part of the Bible...go somewhere else.**

Read Exodus 20

**"You shall have no other gods before Me Exodus 20:3**

When I was in elementary school, I remember a teacher had a list of classroom rules in her room. It said 1) The teacher is always right. 2) If the teacher is ever wrong, refer back to rule number one. Essentially there was just one rule was the point. I believe this is true with the ten commandments. Ultimately it's important that people know what they should (remember the Sabbath, honor your parents, etc) and should not do (do not murder, do not steal, etc.) When Jesus was later asked what the greatest commandment was, He said it was to love God with all of your being. That's really just a further explanation of the first commandment. If you place God absolutely first in your life, you will honor the Sabbath, you will not murder no matter what the advantage it might give. You also would not steal because nothing would be more important than God in your life, and you would not lie, knowing that James says the same mouth should not produce blessings and curses.

**How familiar are you with the commandments? Do you focus on one or two, and ignore a couple that you have willingly disobeyed. Focus on the first commandment, and ask God to show you how to prioritize your life around Him. I assure you, He will do it, and your walk with Christ will be different. If you have never accepted Christ, and just tried to live by the 10 commandments to get to Heaven, you should by now know that it is impossible. If you have broken one commandment, God will not let you into Heaven. And Romans 3:23 says you've broken one. Make God the focus of your life, and do it today. No other priorities or gods before Him.**

Read Exodus 21

**"If a man strikes his male or female slave with a rod and he dies at his hand, he shall be punished. Exodus 21:20**

Does the Bible make slavery ok? Some claim that it does, but one must realize the word is different than what America went through. Obviously the slave trade in America forced many into lives of servitude who never wanted it. But, think about Israel. They were all of the same race, and yet there were slaves. Being a slave in this time of history was generally voluntary. A person would volunteer as the slave of a wealthier person so that he and/or his family would have provision. However, despite volunteering that slave was bound to his master. But, a slave could not be held forever, because God will also set up the year of jubilee, which we will read about later.

Do you consider yourself a slave of God? Are there things that you do as a result of "volunteering" for the Christian life? Certainly our lives are not our own, and the Bible says we've been bought with a price. As a result, the person you should most strive to please is the Lord. He has every right over you, but doesn't want you to serve feeling like a slave, but serving as a servant who is to be rewarded. **Is there something you're doing for the Lord that has become difficult? Has the joy that you once had for a ministry turned joyless? Perhaps teaching Sunday School, children's ministries, or something else. Thank God for the opportunity to serve Him, and seek the strength to obey Him.**

Read Exodus 22

**"If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest. Exodus 22:25**

In this chapter we find much compassion from God. He is often called a God of judgment in the Old Testament and a God of love in the New Testament. But here He shows Himself equally in both. In our day you find that there are cash advance places in every city, sometimes multiple locations. They loan money at interest rates that should be defined as "predatory" and poorer people dig themselves into a hole by borrowing money they can't repay. This is evil in God's sight. God calls for his people to be a people of compassion. To return that which belongs to others and to not make the lowest level of restitution, but that which is more than fair.

So often we dismiss the things that belong to others. We borrow tools and treat them more harshly than we would our own. We "borrow" things from others for so long that we should change the exchange to "we stole" from others. God wants even our daily business transactions to be those that would honor God. He is not just your Lord at church, but His presence in your life should adjust everything that you do. How are you between Sundays's? Do you consider how your actions affect others? Do you make business decisions and ignore people decisions? Do you look at what you can get from people, or what you can give? Recognize that you are still seen as a person at work, and people want to see what drives you. If you claim to be a Christian, see that God is at work in your willingness to honor Him through your daily transactions.

Read Exodus 23

**"You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you also were strangers in the land of Egypt. Exodus 23:9**

There are so many times in your life that you are a stranger. Maybe your first Sunday in a new church. Perhaps you go to a party that a friend invites you to, and then your friend is the only person you know. When I was in the National Guard, our artillery unit was divided into sections that did different jobs. Our unit goal was to launch artillery, but there was a section that surveyed for a good location, and a section of observers who verified the impact of our rounds, etc. My section was fire support, and we had a tradition in that section...to call each other by first name. We still called officers by the rank and last name, and usually you call a fellow soldier by their last name in the Army. When someone new joined our section from basic or another unit, we would go to them as a section and introduce ourselves by first name. It made the weekends more enjoyable because you had a relationship with the people you worked with, and strangers became comfortable in the section very quickly.

There are lots of places you can apply this command from the Lord. Remember what it was like on your first Sunday at your current church? If you've been there since infancy that may be hard, so imagine how a newcomer might feel. Or remember your first day at your workplace, or the day you brought your first child home. **God brings you in contact with people who need assurance and**

**compassion. Put yourself in their place and show them the love of God. Perhaps you may win a lost person to the Lord by your conduct. Or you may change perceptions of Christians to a non-believer because of your care for them. Ask the Lord to make you mindful of strangers and their difficulties. Ask Him to make you compassionate and in doing so, that you might be able to win these people to the Lord.**

Read Exodus 24

**Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. Exodus 24:4**

If you need something built, don't come to me. I took shop class in 8th grade, and it was a disaster. I really liked the band saw, and I'd cut anything you wanted. In fact, cutting wood wasn't difficult for me, but putting it together sure was. I tried to build a small "bookshelf" that would have been maybe three feet high, three feet wide, and have one shelf in it. But, my measurements were always wrong. My shelf wouldn't fit, and I'd have to cut pieces over, and I'm confident I wasted 47% of that small school's wood budget. I finally tried just building a box, but couldn't figure that one out either.

You may or may not be a Handy Manny (parents of small kids get this) with wood, but how are you with spiritual things? Really when Moses built these twelve pillars, it was primarily the stacking of stones on each other, but it was designed to be a monument and a remembrance. Is there anything that you have built spiritually in remembrance of what the Lord has done for you? I've been building a personal journal since 2004, when I began seminary. It is full of the testimony of God's power in my personal life and my family's. It's not a testimony to myself, but to Him. Every time I read through it, I don't think "Wow Heath, good job on that one." I realize those victories belong to the Lord. There are some things I can take credit for in my journal, but they're not good things. **How about you? How do you remember what God has done in your life? Do you ever think back in your prayer time and thank Him for things you didn't catch onto the first time? If you're not a thankful person before the Lord, He may allow you to take credit for some things that you don't want credit for. He'll do this in order that you make Him the focus of your days and of your praise.**

Read Exodus 25

**"Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution. Exodus 25:2**

I believe God has an expectation that we will serve Him through our possession, but He did not put that requirement on this process of building His sanctuary. I will help you understand this by sharing a personal pet peeve of mine. I dislike hearing people asked to serve in the church who reply, "if you can't find anyone else, then I'll do it." That's not an answer that instills confidence in me regarding their service. I'd rather find no one than someone half hearted. Maybe I should be willing to let them come in with a bad attitude and allow God to change it. But, ultimately our attitude is our own making. Even when God brings a situation to improve our faith attitude, it doesn't guarantee that we will take the growth steps He desires of us.

In this process, God only wanted those who were moved to contribute. Did God care if His sanctuary was overlaid with gold? Not really. If wool had been more valuable, that's what He would have chosen. He wants to be able to call on us to give up that which is most valuable, and to see us say yes. He didn't allow a half-hearted or coerced gift to become part of his dwelling place amongst Israel. **What is your greatest possession? If God called you to give it up, would you? Let's make it real. Imagine that God required (which He doesn't) you to give Him your most treasured possession before you**

**could accept Jesus as Savior and Lord. Would you hesitate, or do so willingly? Jesus asked this of the rich young ruler who said He loved God (I obeyed all the commandments), but loved his things more. Take stock today of what is most valuable to you. If it's not your salvation, you need to take stock again.**

Read Exodus 26

**"You shall hang up the veil under the clasps, and shall bring in the ark of the testimony there within the veil; and the veil shall serve for you as a partition between the holy place and the holy of holies. Exodus 26:33**

I remember when I was a freshman in high school, my dad and I were at the mall around Christmas. While walking through a sporting goods store, I stopped as a Nike jacket caught my eye. I normally wouldn't do that, because I never wanted to be a nag and beg my parents for stuff. Dad asked if I liked the jacket, and I said yes until I saw the \$50 price tag (a lot for a jacket in 1993). We walked on and I didn't think much about it. A few days later, I was snooping for Christmas presents, and found a bag in my parent's closet with the jacket! I couldn't believe it. So I had to keep quiet, and then open it on Christmas morning. Even though I knew what I was getting, I was still so excited because it was something I really wanted.

Just as I saw the gift of that jacket early, I see the early gift of this veil for me as a Christian. As I read about the curtains being made, I realized that I was reading about a very special curtain, called the veil that hung between the Holy of Holies and the rest of the temple. I've skipped Exodus 26 in the past, because I thought of it as boring. Now I realize the significance that exists right in the middle of what so many skip. When Jesus died, He tore this same veil. It separated the place that only the priests could enter and speak to God. Christians today don't realize what a privilege it is to pray to God or they would do it more. Reading this, I realize what an honor we have to be able to communicate directly with God. Not because of our goodness, but as result of accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord. It was He who tore the veil and gave you access to the Father. **How do you treat your prayer time? Do you view it as something you have to do, or something you get to do? Ask God to excite you over your prayer time. Before you pray, think about those things that you want to offer up. When you begin, ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to pray, and thank Him for the requests He has met. These changes will breathe new life into your prayers.**

Read Exodus 27

**"You shall make it hollow with planks; as it was shown to you in the mountain, so they shall make it. Exodus 27:8**

A music minister told me about a conversation he had with someone about his worship team practices. He mentioned this to a church member who replied, "You can't practice worship." My friend said, "You'd practice if you were going to play before an earthly king, so why not before the Heavenly One?" I remember at our church in Mississippi, we would play on Wednesday nights as a band to familiarize ourselves with the order of worship for Sunday mornings. It was a time we could make sure the words on the screen were all correct, and that we knew where the worship leader wanted to go with the songs. Then on Sunday mornings, we felt very free to play, and make adjustments if the worship leader felt led to do so, because we had practiced and were comfortable with the songs.

As you look here in Exodus 27 there are a lot of intricate details regarding the altar and the court of the tabernacle. Why would God give such details? If He hadn't, then different parts of these items would look different, almost as if in conflict. In the case of the altar, God had even shown them on the mountain what it was supposed to look like. This was as much of an obedience issue as any of God's

commands. Perhaps there are other easier ways some of these projects could be done. Would Israel choose to follow the instructions exactly, or take liberties by doing some things their own way? God wants the same from you. He has laid out how to treat your spouse, serve your church or raise your children. **Are you truly following His instructions, or taking creative liberties? There's nothing wrong with coming up with creative ways to serve your God, as long as the emphasis remains on serving Him. Is there something God has been convicting you of because of your unwillingness to obey? Are you making excuses for your prayerlessness or perhaps a lack of stewardship? Seek out exactly what God wants in these areas of your life. Read Scripture and listen to the very words that God has commanded you even today.**

Read Exodus 28

**"The stones shall be according to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, according to their names; they shall be like the engravings of a seal, each according to his name for the twelve tribes. Exodus 28:21**

During my time working with youth, I had many opportunities to fill the pulpit for an absent pastor. On one particular occasion I filled in for a man who absolutely preached the Word of God. However, often the vocabulary he used, made his messages sound more academic than applicable. So I preached a simple sermon on getting rid of guilt through repentance. Afterwards a friend came and asked if I had heard the comment of an elderly woman near him. I said I hadn't, and he replied, "She said that was the first sermon she had heard and understood in a long time." That hurt me to think someone was sitting in church, Sunday after Sunday, and wanting to hear from the Lord, but having no understanding.

Ministers have to remember that we are here to reach and teach people. Ultimately our service is to the Lord, but He holds ministers accountable for the lives of the people he oversees. God made this clear to the temple priests. They put on a large breastplate that had a stone for every tribe of Israel, the people that made up the children of God. Every time that priest came to serve, he was putting on a reminder that his service was to the Lord and for the people. **Do you feel that you are wasting your Sundays? Do you desire to hear from the Lord, but find little application in the messages to help you align your life with Christ? Are you listening to the sermon attempting to make connections with your daily life choices? Many pastors do a great job of teaching the Bible, but fewer take the next step of applying it to your life. Hopefully you have a pastor who helps you apply God's Word, but no matter what you are ultimately responsible for life changes. At church, and in your personal times with God, always seek to answer the question "What is God trying to teach me through this?"**

Read Exodus 29

**"You shall slaughter the ram, and take some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the lobes of his sons' right ears and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet, and sprinkle the rest of the blood around on the altar. Exodus 29:20**

This is certainly a difficult chapter to understand without a little thought. I'm sure there are many ideas on it, but I'm going to offer up an understanding about the blood. We will learn later in Hebrews that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin. Every time an animal sacrifice was made, the blood was being used as a reminder that a permanent offering was coming, Jesus Christ. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

We certainly see this idea of the cleansing power of the blood here. It says the blood was put on the ear, thumbs and big toes, and then the rest of the blood was sprinkled around the altar. This was highly

symbolic. The blood in this case seems to be cleansing what the priests heard by placing some on their ear. Also, the thumb is one of the most vital fingers on the hand, so the blood was covering their service to the Lord. And the blood was on their toe, to cover them in where they went and what they did. Perhaps it was even an allusion to the tabernacle being holy ground. **While this was a very elaborate process of getting ready to meet God, what is your process like? Do you skip Bible reading and prayer on Sunday mornings, because you think you'll get your fill at church? Do you find yourself not really thinking about spiritual things until you arrive at church? We need to understand that coming before God is a big deal, especially when we come into His house. I don't believe we need the steps these priests took, but we do need a seriousness in how we approach our Lord.**

Read Exodus 30

**"You shall not offer any strange incense on this altar, or burnt offering or meal offering; and you shall not pour out a drink offering on it. Exodus 30:9**

This is really a fascinating chapter that deals possibly with an age of accountability and the reason that we'll later see God angry with David when he takes a census of his fighting men in 1 Chronicles 21. But, I think the warning against "strange incense" is important to note for us as Christians. We will later see a reference to strange fire being offered up by Aaron's sons and a king who attempted to do the job of the priests. God is communicating there is a right and a wrong way to do things. Take the Lord's Supper for instance. It's a remembrance of the sacrifice of Jesus when we eat the bread and the juice. There's nothing magical that happens there, but it is a time for us to examine ourselves. So is it a big deal if instead of passing plates, we toss bread and throw cans of juice to everyone? Yes, because there is a manner in which the Lord's Supper should be given and taken.

The incense was closely tied to prayer. We'll even see in Revelation that the prayers of the saints are tied to incense (Rev. 8:4). The caution is the manner in which we pray. I know there are times I have prayed more seriously than others, and I've noticed a difference in my personal life in those times. When I am serious before the Lord, my prayer times impact my life. When I approach Him casually I feel empty after my prayers. **How do you feel when you pray? How about after? Do you dislike prayer because you don't have any assurance that your prayers are even heard? Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your prayers. It will change your prayer life, and you will lift up those things that God considers most important. Open your life to Him in all areas, before you ask Him to open blessings to you. Make Him first in your prayer life.**

Read Exodus 31

**"And behold, I Myself have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all who are skillful I have put skill, that they may make all that I have commanded you: Exodus 31:6**

The Bible is clear that God gives to every believer, a spiritual gift. It may be teaching, encouragement, giving or a host of others. But, the question often comes up, does everyone, including the lost, have God-given abilities? Was Michael Jordan a great basketball player because that's how he devoted himself, or because God gave him the ability to do so? The Bible is clear that God weaves us together (Psalm 139:13), so that would mean that any ability or deficiency we have, comes from the Lord as He created us as a complete person. I remember when I would hear Jordan say he had a God-given ability, and I wondered how you could call it God given when you don't use it to honor God? God has been teaching me a lesson through the Scripture. God has a plan for every life. That plan is based on the person coming to know Christ and following God (2 Peter 3:9). As a result, God makes us with all the

skills and talents necessary to carry out His plan. However, when someone fails to acknowledge Christ in their life, the skills and talents can be used in a way to glorify self. And I think this can be any skill.

God said He gave skill to any who have it. God made some of these men in Exodus 31 able to craft wood. So I think that today some have skill to work with computers, or engines or to be very good at handling money. There are lots of people who try to tell you how to make money, like Jim Kramer, and that's it. But, then there are skilled men like Larry Burkett and Dave Ramsey who teach others how to make money, AND honor God with it. **Identifying your spiritual gifts may be difficult, and we'll get to that in time. However, it's pretty easy to know where you're skilled. Are you using it in some way for the Lord? Maybe you are musically skilled or you're very good with computers or graphics. These are skills that can bless your church. You might even be looking for new ways to serve. Ask God in your personal prayer time, if there is a skill or ability that He wants you to use in glorifying Him. You may be surprised at something new God has for you to do.**

Read Exodus 32

**"I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf." Exodus 32:24**

When I worked at an insurance company, they selected some of us for a mock interview process to help train new managers on how to interview. We were told to give honest and real answers and allow these new managers the opportunity to find out what they needed to know. Over time, some of these mock interviews turned into real ones with these new managers actually offering jobs after the interviews. I knew I would need something new when I moved after college, so I thought I'd go ahead and treat it as serious as possible. The interview went well, and then the manager asked me "How do you keep track of the things you need to do?" I knew the answer I wanted to give "I keep a Calendar that has tasks and times to keep me doing what I'm supposed to do." But, I knew I had to be accountable and honest. I pulled out my wallet, and opened it to reveal about 5 post-it notes inside. It really was a good system for me, but this manager was not impressed. Lying might have opened up a new opportunity for me, but I knew I had to be honest.

Sometimes we know that the real answer to a difficult question may bring us trouble or ridicule, but we must be honest and accountable as followers of Jesus. When Aaron is asked about the golden calf, he gives one of the most laughable answers in the Bible. He should have admitted his fear of the people, and lack of faith in waiting for God to finish with Moses. But, he chose to avoid accountability by claiming the situation was out of his hands. **As humans, we seem very willing to keep control of most situations, until something goes wrong. Then suddenly God failed, or someone else failed, and we rarely point the blame at ourselves. Many problems in families, churches and workplaces could be avoided if people would take accountability for their actions. There may be an event in your life right now that you must be accountable to. It may be easier to lie, but you'll honor God in your honesty. Ask God to give you the boldness to be accountable, even when it's hard. It may be the greatest witness you can give to an unbeliever who sees your actions.**

Read Exodus 33

**Then he said to Him, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. Exodus 33:15**

A South Korean pastor came to the United States to tour some of nation's mega churches (churches over 1,000 members). He saw several of them, and was asked by one of his escorts what he thought about the churches he had seen. The pastor said "It's amazing what the American churches can

do...without God." Pretty bold statement to make while you're still in the country with these pastors, but I think he's absolutely right. It's not an indictment against mega churches, but against many American churches. In the midst of trying to serve the Lord, these churches get so involved in programs that they cease to move with God, but simply move on their own.

Have you ever been in a situation that you looked back and realized God wasn't in it? You may have thought He was, but it was your own desires that drove your decisions. Maybe it was a relationship, or a major purchase, or a new job decision. You need to be very sure that the Lord is leading you in your decisions. **How do you know if the Lord is in it or not? Be patient. So many people lack the patience to pray something through. I don't believe God takes months to answer every prayer, but we need to be sure that we've allowed God to lead us. Also, evaluate what godly people around you say. If they think you're on the right or wrong track, take it into account. Ultimately, they cannot know God's full plan for you, but these are a few ways you can make sure that you don't separate yourself from God's presence, especially if that's not your goal.**

Read Exodus 34

**And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. Exodus 34:28**

My pastor in Mississippi told us about the time his car died on him. He wanted to get a new one, and a friend offered to let him borrow a car so he didn't make a hasty decision. However, the pastor made a hasty decision and went to a dealer to buy a brand new car. He got a no frills Impala that was a good car, but not a great one. He had that car for a few days, when a man in his church said he heard about the pastor's car dying. The man had a totally loaded Buick, low miles, excellent condition and not very old. The man offered to sell it for much less than it was worth, and for less than he had bought the Impala. But the pastor was locked into his new purchase and had to say no. And every time he got into that Impala, he remembered what could have been if he had let God work.

The first time I realized what was going on here in Exodus 34 was with my children in our family worship time. When we were reading this story, I saw that Moses had to rewrite the 10 Commandments to replace the originals that he smashed. God did not do it for Him, but simply repeated the words. Think about what God's tablets must have looked like. They were perfectly carved, probably looking more like a work of art than a set of rules. But, then Moses breaks them because of the disobedience of the people. So now, Moses has to rewrite the words. They probably didn't look as nice as the tablets God made. It took longer, and Moses certainly wasn't as precise as God. They were a reminder of the incident in which the people were breaking some of the very commandments that had just been brought down the mountain. **What things in your life are reminders of your disobedience? It doesn't mean God doesn't care for you...He gave the people another copy. But, allow these things to be lessons in your life. Share the failure with others. It can be painful, but people will remember a real-life lesson more than a make believe case study from Sunday School. They can learn from our mistakes, and hopefully we will too.**

Read Exodus 35

**'Let every skillful man among you come, and make all that the LORD has commanded: Exodus 35:10**

When I was in college, I worked at SEARS and sold all sorts of lawn and garden and hardware items. Once I sold a treadmill to a lady who lived about 50 miles away. She couldn't afford for SEARS to ship it to her and assemble it (about \$150), so she asked if I would come and do it for about \$75. I agreed and drove it to her house. I was there forever! I had never put a treadmill together before. I didn't read

the directions from the very start, and then when I did use them, I realized I didn't have all the tools. Thankfully I found them in my dad's truck I had brought. So what would have taken a SEARS deliveryman about an hour took me 2 1/2! If I had looked at the plans for the treadmill from the start I would know exactly what I needed, and wouldn't have spent time disassembling parts that I did incorrectly.

Here in Exodus 35 we see the work will now begin on the tabernacle and its furnishings. God gave all the instructions and then expected the work to start. Sometimes we start something when we've not given it the full consideration. God sets a great model for us to look at the entire plan, before we begin. It doesn't mean that we cannot commit to something that God has not fully revealed to us, but we must wait for Him to reveal the full plan before we act foolishly. **What do you do with the plans that God gives you? Do you begin moving before He has finished talking? It is wiser to make sure that you have fully understood what God is telling you. Talk with godly people you can trust to gain insight into a situation. Look at God's Word to see what God has told to people in the past and how it applies to you. Maybe it's a new ministry or something for your family. Be sure you understand your role in God's plan.**

Read Exodus 36

**So Moses issued a command, and a proclamation was circulated throughout the camp, saying, "Let no man or woman any longer perform work for the contributions of the sanctuary." Thus the people were restrained from bringing any more. Exodus 36:6**

I think every pastor reads this chapter with a sigh. God has set out the complete picture of the sanctuary and it's time for the work to begin. The only offerings they were using were those that people's hearts were stirred to give, with nothing out of compulsion. However, the leaders go to Moses to tell him people are still giving gifts and it's way too much. So Moses commands the people to stop, and it says they were restrained from bringing any more. Not relieved, but restrained.

This is the heart attitude that every Christian should have in giving. When we are making precise calculations on what we should give to the church, our hearts aren't right. One lady gave a monthly offering of \$6.66 to the church because she was mad about something. The Bible is clear that we have a responsibility to support the church and the ministers. However, many people still have a wrong attitude about their gifts, and view them as a bill. In almost 7 years of ministry I have never experienced, or heard, of a church that had to tell people to stop giving, because they were getting too much. **So what is God asking of you? He is asking for a willingness to do what he leads you to do. If you are moved to support a missionary, do it at that time. If you wait, you'll find another use for your money and rob both parties of a blessing. Don't give mission or special offerings out of your normal offering. Cut something out for a month and give to missions or special offerings. These are not just ways to get more money out of people. These are ministry dollars. You can tell a lot about a person by where they spend their money. Are you devoting your money to yourself, or to the help of others? It doesn't mean that we ignore our own needs, and even wants at times, but that when God moves us, we accept His leading and wait for Him to restrain us.**

Read Exodus 37

**He made two golden rings for it under its molding, on its two sides—on opposite sides—as holders for poles with which to carry it. Exodus 37:27**

My seminary had been planning a new building before I began attending. And while I was a student there, we finally had a new building and location just before my final year. They were trying to cut

moving costs where they could, and the school determined they could save almost \$200,000 if we moved ourselves, and had students and professors do that work. As a student, I certainly would have been glad to help do it. Dr. Allison, the school founder, said no. "Have you ever seen seminary students and professors move anything?" He said the amount of damage that would be done to furnishings and equipment would probably be close to half the cost of moving, so they decided to go with a professional mover. I think in the long run, Dr. Allison was right.

You'll notice that most of the items in the tabernacle had these rings on the side where poles could be placed through. That's because the tabernacle would be taken down and put back up a lot, and God wanted them to always take their time in moving certain articles, and have an easy way to do so. Otherwise, over time they would probably begin to look beat up and damaged. They had to take the tabernacle down every time that God moved and set it up when He stopped. The priests had a way to efficiently move everything when God began to move, and not have to come up with a last minute moving plan. **When God moves are you ready? I had some godly advice given to me about God's plan for our lives: "Always go off the last words that the Lord gave you." Some worry if they haven't heard the next steps in God's plan for them. In that case, simply continue doing the last thing He gave you. However, be prepared for the moment that He gives you the next step in His plans for you. Never be so comfortable that if God tried to move you, you would say no. Your life is His.**

Read Exodus 38

**The hundred talents of silver were for casting the sockets of the sanctuary and the sockets of the veil; one hundred sockets for the hundred talents, a talent for a socket. Exodus 38:27**

Is it wrong for a church to look nice? Should a church simply be a building that exists to function and with no aesthetic purposes to it? Dr. Adrian Rogers was a hero of mine for many years and spoke to this question. He pastored Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, TN for many years, a church of over 20,000. On several occasions about why the church spent money to build a huge beautiful building, instead of using that money to feed the poor. Dr. Rogers responded "If I had all the money in the world, and I used it to give everyone in the world a snack, they would just end up being hungry again." The building that Bellevue built, while beautiful, provided space and a place for people to come and be filled with the bread of life that would fill them for eternity.

God's first tabernacle, despite being out in the desert, was really designed as a beautiful sanctuary. And the silver and gold that were given by the Israelites were used in a special way. The builders didn't take the gold and silver to Home Depot and trade it for supplies. They turned the offerings into supplies. The silver and gold articles were fashioned from this wealth that was given by the people. From the description over the last several chapters, the tabernacle was a beautiful place to be. It was a sanctuary in many ways from the desert that surrounded them. **What do you give that leaves an impression on your church? Is there any evidence in your church of the sacrifices and offerings you have provided? Is there a Sunday School class with a teacher because of you? Is there a person or people in the church who know Christ because of you? Is the church meeting or falling short of budget because of you? What evidence is there of your service to the church? Can it only be said of you that you hold a pew down during the service? Or is there a greater impression that you have made as part of the body of Christ in your local church? If you can't identify your contributions to your church, I ask that you reconsider your service and give completely of yourself to the church God has led you to.**

Read Exodus 39

**They also made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates all around on the hem of the robe, Exodus 39:25**

This mentions the often talked about bells of the priests. We have seen the tabernacle that was built by Israel over the last few chapters. Of course, there was a place called the Holy of Holies where the ark sat. It was on the mercy seat of the ark, that God would come down to meet with the high priest. As a priest, you did not come into the presence of the Lord lightly. You had to purify yourself from sin, known and unknown, for a time. If not, God would strike the priest dead for bringing sin into that holy place. The bells were to allow those outside of the Holy of Holies to hear the priest and know if he was still moving around. If not, they would know he was dead. So they tied a rope to the ankle of the priest, so that he could be pulled out in the event that God took his life.

As a pastor, I can't imagine how scared I would have been to be a priest at this time. God is still the same God, but they were dealing with Him while waiting for the blood of Christ to come. I would have been scared, not of death, but at offending a holy God who deserved for me to come to Him in a worthy manner. **How do you come to God in His house of worship? Do you prepare yourself before coming to church? Not just outwardly, but in your inward motivations and thoughts? There are some who walk in the church building and should immediately drop to their knees in repentance. Make sure that you reverence your God. You may have the ability to come to Him through the blood of Jesus, but that does not mean you have the right to come in any manner you see fit. Be open about your sin. Confess it to Him, and choose to live differently. Otherwise, be prepared to feel very empty in church.**

Read Exodus 40

**Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Exodus 40:35**

I've been trying to think this morning. When was a time that I was in a church and I really felt God's presence heavy in a church service? I was on a mission trip with students from my last church, and the speaker had really given a convicting message. Kids responded all over the room and I found myself still talking and praying with kids well after the service was over. They kept the lights low and some kids left, but many stayed to pray and some still to sing. It's rare that I've been in a worship service that people were not dying to get out of the sanctuary as fast as they could. Not because to escape conviction, but to return to their apathy.

Moses was unable to enter the tabernacle after they set it up, because the glory of the Lord had filled it. This did not mean that people were never allowed in, but here we see God's presence fall quickly. Why did this happen? Because they had done everything correctly, and God blessed their obedience. If churches were obedient to the Word of God and what it says about how a church should be, we could experience God's presence in a real way. **When is the last time you experienced God's presence in a worship service? Do you realize that your ability to experience His presence is contingent on your obedience to Him? If you're not obedient, you will not experience Him in a close and personal way. You can help change the attitude of your church. Approach God as you should and be an example to others.**