

Leader Guide

# Encounter

BIBLE STUDY FOR ADULTS

June • July • August 2009



# Encounter Leader's Guide

## Using This Guide

The leader helps for each lesson correspond to the lessons in *Encounter* (student book). You will be able to identify the corresponding lessons by date and title. The sub-heads on each guide sheet are the same as those used in the lessons and reference the corresponding page number in the student book. The guide will provide activity suggestions and discussion tips. Use the questions and suggestions to further class discussion and to encourage the group toward action.

## Evaluating

Tell us what you think of this issue by completing and returning the evaluation form at the back of this resource.

**Writers:** Tom and Theresa Martin, Cindy Martin

**Editor:** Jim McGuire

Vol. 3, No. 4

June, July, August 2009

Cover photo: © istockphoto.com/wsfurlan

---

ENCOUNTER LEADER GUIDE is published quarterly by the Cumberland Presbyterian General Assembly Ministry Council, 8207 Traditional Place, Cordova, TN 38016. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to ENCOUNTER, 8207 Traditional Place, Cordova, TN 38016.

Price \$3.25 per quarter.

The lessons in this quarterly are developed from outlines prepared by the Committee on the Uniform Series, copyrighted by International Council of Religious Education.

# God Calls Moses

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To examine God's call to Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land; (2) to consider God's call to us to carry on his work in the world; and (3) to listen for and respond to God's call to serve others in God's name.

**Background Scripture:** Exodus 2:23–3:12; **Scripture Selection:** Exodus 3:1-12

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 118:24. *Hymns:* "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah," "Breathe on Me, Breath of God," "Lead, Kindly Light." *Devotional Reading:* Hebrews 3:1-13.

## Advance Preparation

Welcome to a new quarter of *Encounter*! As you prepare these lessons, remember that attendance may vary more than normal due to vacations: class members may be absent and visitors may be more frequent. Touch base with class members who are absent, even if you know they are on vacation. Follow up with visitors as well, even if they do not live in the area.

Read the background Scripture in a different version of the Bible than the one you usually read. Read it two or three times during the week, asking God to open your heart and mind to the message the scripture has for you and the class you lead.

Prepare a brief summary of the theme for the quarter to share with the class. You may want to use the information that is given on the inside front cover of the student book.

Research one or more stories about people who have escaped oppression and those who were instrumental in leading them out of such circumstances.

Provide magazines and newspapers that contain articles and photos of people who are working to end oppression. You will also need glue or tape, posterboard, and scissors.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 3)

Welcome participants as they arrive. Introduce any visitors and make them feel welcome. Invite class members to share joys and concerns. Ask for a volunteer to open the class with prayer, including those joys and concerns that were mentioned.

Briefly review the theme for the quarter. Then tell a story of people who have escaped oppression and of those who led the way. Invite the class to prepare a collage of pictures or stories from newspapers and magazines showing ways people have attempted to end oppression.

While class members work on the collage, engage them in conversation about oppression of which they are aware in your community. Then talk about ways class members can respond to these needs. Make specific plans for how you will become involved.

## God Hears the People's Cries (p. 3)

During WWII many Americans gathered to pray for peace in the center of town or some other public place. In this time when public prayer in many places is outlawed or discouraged, how can we show others that we believe in the power of prayer? Why do we need to pray?

## God Calls Moses (pp. 3-4)

Read Exodus 3:1-12 from the Contemporary English Version. Rewrite these verses as a contemporary story of God's call to Christians to end oppression in the world. What acts of oppression do you see in today's world? How do you express your concern? With whom are you working on these issues?

### **God Calls Ordinary People** (pp. 4-5)

Invite class members to turn to the person next to them and share a time when they experienced God's call. Encourage them to tell how they responded to the call. Remind them that God calls people to many different types of ministry and service. How did God's promise "I will be with you" affect your ability to accept God's call?

Allow 2-3 minutes for the partners to share before calling them back into the total group. Then ask them how the church can be more intentional in helping people to identify and accept God's call.

### **What If Moses Had Said No?** (p. 5)

Moses obviously didn't want to accept God's call to return to Egypt and lead the people out of slavery. In fact, he tried to say no to God. If you are comfortable doing so, relate a time when you have tried to say no to God. What happened? What impact do the actions of humans have on God's ultimate purpose? Are there ever times when God simply finds someone else to do the job?

### **Discerning God's Call** (pp. 5-6)

Encourage participants to describe ways in which they have heard God's call. Talk about how they recognized the call as being from God. It can be difficult to sort out what God is actually calling us to do! What role does the church have in helping people to discern their call? How do you respond to people who say that God is calling them to do something?

### **Personal Calls** (p. 6)

How does your congregation approach members about serving in various roles? How can congregations help people understand that God's call is often to areas other than ordained ministry? How do you respond when someone feels that God is calling them in a different direction than what they had previously experienced? What is God calling you to do? How will you respond?

### **Closing**

As the lesson comes to a close, reflect on what God is calling your class to do. Remember that the lesson started by talking about the oppression of the Israelites. What areas of oppression will you address personally and as a group? How will you make your congregation more aware of the issues associated with oppression?

Share the following prayer attributed to Francis of Assisi:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.*

*Where there is hatred, let me sow love.*

*Where there is injury, pardon.*

*Where there is doubt, faith.*

*Where there is despair, hope,*

*Where there is darkness, light and where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;*

*To be understood, as to understand;*

*To be loved, as to love;*

*For it is in giving that we receive.*

*It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;*

*And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.*



# Moses and Aaron Respond

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To delve into Moses' resistance to God's call and Aaron's acceptance of his role in leading the people; (2) to explore our feelings of inadequacy when we receive God's call; and (3) to accept responsibility for the tasks to which God calls us.

**Background Scripture:** Exodus 4:10-16, 27-31; **Scripture Selection:** Exodus 4:10-16, 27-31

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* May the Lord keep us in his steadfast, trustworthy care. May we feel so secure that we are willing to step out and serve God boldly. *Hymns:* "We Worship and Adore You," "This Little Light of Mine;" "O, Worship the King," "Standing on the Promises," "Rejoice in the Lord Always." *Devotional Reading:* Proverbs 1:20-33.

## Advance Preparation

Pray that God will lead and empower you as teacher and will bring others alongside you to help, even as Aaron was Moses' helper. Pray that the Lord will give you the words and actions to encourage those who feel inadequate or fearful.

Write each class member's name on a separate index card. Provide pens or pencils.

Think about the biggest and most common fears: public speaking, snakes, the dark, fear of failure, and fear of success. Consider ways Christians can work together to accomplish what may appear impossible, difficult, or challenging.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 8)

Use a few minutes to share class announcements, joys, and concerns. Allow time for class members to connect with each other in Christian fellowship. This time is an important part of the class for strengthening the church, the body of Christ. Learn more about each other's concerns and the opportunities to help one another, draws people closer together.

Introduce the lesson by telling class members about something of which you are afraid. Invite them to share a fear as well. Keep this time of sharing brief.

## Moses Resisted God's Call (p. 8)

Why do people say no to God's call to them? Is it the tendency of humans to think that someone else could do it—whatever *it* is—better than they could? What excuses do you give when God calls you to do something that is outside your comfort zone? Why is it hard to step up and say, "Yes I will. Yes I can with God's help"? How do you think God feels when we respond to his call with, "Surely you're not talking to me? I'm not good enough, smart enough, or strong enough"? What enables you to know if something you are asked to do really isn't your gift rather than just a hesitancy to use the gift?

## Encouragement Helps (pp. 8-9)

The Lord encouraged Moses, and as the years went by in the wilderness, the people looked to Moses to lead them. They trusted Moses as he relied on God and spoke God's words to them. Moses matured. He overcame his feelings of inadequacy as he learned to lean on God more and more. He realized he could do whatever God called him to do.

How can we as Christians encourage and help one another carry out the tasks God calls us to do? Why is there strength to be found in working together with like-minded people? What is God calling your church to do? How will you answer this call?

### **God “Encouraged” Moses** (p. 9)

How many times have we heard the excuse, “I don’t know how to do that” or “I’ve never done that before”? My standard response is, “You’ll never learn to do it if you don’t try.” I imagine that God may have felt much the same as he listened to Moses. Moses chose doubt and fear instead of faith. He was faced with a life-changing decision. He was doing well tending the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro. He had a secure life, and now the Lord was calling him to change. Risk would mean radical change for him and his family and his people. Their lives would never again be the same. How could he say yes? But how could he say no?

God encouraged Moses by reminding him that it is God who gives gifts and abilities to people. In other words, God was saying to Moses, “I will give you what you need in order to serve in this way. Trust me. I will be with you.”

Identify people who may need encouragement. These people may include pastors, Sunday school teachers, mission workers, youth leaders, store clerks, medical professionals, single parents, etc. How can you offer encouragement? How will you implement your ideas?

### **God’s Anger** (pp. 9-10)

Invite class members to put themselves in God’s shoes for just a moment. Ask them how they would have responded to Moses’ continued refusal to accept God’s call. The scripture tells us that God became angry with Moses. How does the realization that God gets angry make you feel? How do you respond when confronted with someone’s anger? How do you manage your own anger?

The scriptures also tell us that God offered some solutions, despite being angry. Suggest that class members silently recall a time when they have been angry. After a few seconds, let them brainstorm solutions to their anger. Many times the same solution will work for a variety of situations.

### **Our Call** (pp. 10-11)

*Note: If visitors are present, adapt this activity so that everyone can participate.*

Distribute the index cards on which you previously wrote the names of class members. (Make sure that no one receives their own card.) Ask class members to reflect silently for a few moments about the strengths of the person whose name is on the card and then write one or two of those strengths on the card. Invite people to share the results aloud, or simply exchange cards as you deem appropriate.

*Think and pray about this question:* Are there people whom God is calling you to encourage or mentor so that they may reach their full potential in response to God’s call?

### **Community Call** (p. 11)

List ways people assist one another as local churches engage in ministries of outreach and transformation. Some examples might include Heifer Project International or a local program that gives homeless families a hand up. Then discuss ways your congregation is answering God’s call to a specific ministry. What else may God be calling your church to do? How will you answer that call?

### **Closing**

*Pray:* Lord, help us say yes when you call. Help us to take advantage of your love and courage and be bold for your sake. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

# Pharaoh Ignores God's Call

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To examine Pharaoh's refusal to obey God; (2) to explore issues of authority and obedience in our lives; and (3) to recognize and respect the ultimate authority of God.

**Background Scripture:** Exodus 5:1–6:1; **Scripture Selection:** Exodus 5:1-9, 22–6:1

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 10:16-18. *Hymns:* “Be Thou My Vision,” “Go Down, Moses,” “We Worship and Adore You,” “Lead on, O King Eternal,” “We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations,” “Hear Our Prayer, O Lord.” *Devotional Reading:* Psalm 10:1-14.

## Advance Preparation

Plan an overview of the lesson's theme: using authority and having respect for authority.

Bring in news stories and pictures of rulers who oppress or have oppressed their people and the reactions of the oppressed; for example Nelson Mandela (oppressed) or Idi Amin (oppressor). Or plan on sharing pictures of police officers, firefighters, military leaders, and other heroes. Include pictures of those who use authority in good ways and those who abuse authority. Display these photos in the class meeting area.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 13)

Greet each person by name as she or he arrives. Provide an opportunity for class members to share joys and concerns. Make announcements during this time as well.

Call attention to the photos you have displayed. Encourage class members to look for a connection between the photos. Then give an overview of the lesson from the perspective of authority and respecting authority.

## Absolute Authority (pp. 13-14)

*Absolute* may be defined as perfect, free from imperfection. An *absolute ruler* is completely free from constitutional or other restraints. *Absolute* is popularly used these days to mean complete agreement. Who holds absolute authority in our lives? Why?

Whom have you known who assumed a role of absolute authority? What was your response to that authority? What does the phrase, “Who died and made you king/queen” mean? Why do stepchildren sometimes exclaim, “I don’t have to obey you! You’re not my mother/father”?

How would you change this statement: In order to practice honorable authority, a relationship must be established and grounded in respect. How does such a statement apply to Pharaoh's refusal to recognize the authority of the Lord?

## Pharaoh's Motives (p. 14)

Review the information provided in the student book. Pharaoh did not want to release the Israelites; they were free labor. But even more important was the power that Pharaoh felt from having control of so many people and the importance that it gave him.

By increasing the Israelite's workload, Pharaoh wanted to make sure that they would be so focused on their labor that they would be too tired to listen to Moses and Aaron. Similar strategies have been used in prison camps. How does heavy work distract people from their misery? What does unfair labor have to do with employee morale? What is the role of a workers' union in dealing with unfair labor practices? Where do you see unfair labor practices today?

**Authority with Love** (pp. 14-15)

Encourage participants to comment about the phrase *authority with love*. What does it mean to you? Where and by whom do you see this philosophy being used? What are the pros and cons of employing this method of authority?

**Limited Authority** (p. 15)

Talk about the people who have limited authority over you. How does it feel knowing that someone can exercise power over you in certain situations? When might such a situation be comforting?

**Authority of Trust** (p. 15)

Currently the United States is experiencing the worst recession in more than fifty years. One of the reasons for this situation is the abuse of trust that was placed in people and institutions of authority. We have been conditioned to trust trained experts, but have discovered that sometimes doing so may not be in our best interest. What are our responsibilities when we enlist the assistance of an expert, be it a doctor, lawyer, investment counselor, or a repair person?

**God's Authority** (pp. 15-16)

Humans may fight against God's authority. We often try to assume positions of power and believe we can control our lives. When and how has God convinced you that God is in control? How does it make you feel to realize that God is in control? When have you fought God's authority? Why?

**Above the Law** (p. 16)

We frequently hear news accounts about famous or wealthy people who do not receive the same treatment under the law as do those who are neither famous nor wealthy. Why do you think such inequities exist? What is our responsibility, as Christians, toward the inequities in our legal system? How can you work to improve the current system for those who do not have power or wealth?

**Just an Illusion** (p. 16)

Ask class members to think of times when they have had to stand against injustice. What areas of injustice can you identify in your community? How will you stand against it? What will it take to rectify the injustice?

**Your Authority** (p. 16)

Suggest that class participants think about the people over whom they have (or have had) limited authority. Ask them to reflect silently about how they have exercised that authority. How does God's example affect the way you exercise your authority?

**Freedom** (p. 16)

People value their freedom and fight for the freedom of others. Yet we may remain enslaved to power and material things. Remember that submitting to God's authority will free us from everything that threatens to enslave us.

**Closing**

Invite a volunteer to close in prayer, or lead in the following prayer: Lord, help us see and overcome injustice. Help us to practice mercy and kindness and to walk humbly with you. Amen.



# God Calls the People out of Egypt

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To tell about the miraculous escape of the Israelites from the Egyptians; (2) to describe ways God provides safety for God's people in every age; and (3) to trust God in times of trouble and to help others in their difficulties.

**Background Scripture:** Exodus 13:17-14:30; **Scripture Selection:** Exodus 14:15-24, 30

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Lift up your hearts. O Lord, open our eyes that we may behold wonderful things. Lord, open our lips so that we give witness to your mighty deeds as we praise you. May we glorify you in all that we say and all that we do. *Hymns:* "Now Thank We All Our God," "Come, We That Love the Lord," "The Battle Is the Lord's!" "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken." *Devotional Reading:* Exodus 15:1-13.

## Advance Preparation

Pray for God's guidance as you prepare to teach and as you share the lesson.

Prepare the meeting area. Make sure it is comfortable and welcoming. Does the room need freshening or cleaning? Could the chairs be arranged in a different way? Could the pictures or other decorations be arranged more attractively? Does anything need to be changed to facilitate communication? If possible, prepare the room before class meets.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 18)

Greet each person by name and welcome them to the class. An important part of being a teacher is to build Christian relationships. Invite participants to share their plans for the coming week. Take time to share class announcements and concerns. Sharing joys and concerns may help class members build friendships and bear one another's burdens as they pray for each other.

## So What Happened? (p. 18)

Suggest that participants imagine themselves as one of the Israelites. God had led them out of Egypt to freedom. They saw the evidence of God's presence constantly through the pillar of cloud or the pillar of fire. Now as they are camped by the sea, Pharaoh's army changes his mind and comes after them. How do you feel? What do you do? What do you say to Moses? to God?

Invite participants to recall a time when they felt like they were all alone and surrounded by enemies. Where did they look for help? When has someone acted as protector for you? When have you been a protector for someone? Who was it? Why did you do it? How did it turn out?

## The Lord Acts (pp. 18-19)

When the Israelites cried out to God for help, they did not see any possible way of rescue. How often do you wait until the situation seems hopeless before turning to God? Think of a time in your own life when God worked through a seemingly hopeless situation to bring about God's purpose. How can you be more intentional about looking for God's purpose in and through events?

## Pharaoh's Part (p. 19)

Ask class members to consider why God continued to harden Pharaoh's heart toward the Israelites. Who are the Pharaohs in our day and time? Name individuals or entities who hold others in oppression today. How do you see God at work in these situations?

### **Losing Control** (pp. 19-20)

Share this story: Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic ruled with an iron grip until his overthrow in 2000. By the time he called for elections, the country was crippled by sanctions; many Serbs were living in desperate poverty. Montenegro, the only republic still with Serbia, was threatening to break away, and there was an atmosphere of fear and instability across the federation.

When Milosevic refused to recognize the election victory of the opposition leader, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets, and a national strike was declared. One by one, key allies dropped their support. Confidence grew among the rebels, and ten days after the election protesters stormed the parliament and the state TV station. Many policemen took off their helmets and joined the protestors. Milosevic's empire had crumbled.

Milosevic pled not guilty to all counts. He claimed that he was defending the Serbian people against terror. He was found dead in his cell in 2006. At the time of his death, Milosevic faced charges of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes committed during the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

What parallels do you see between Pharaoh and Milosevic? What have you been determined to pursue despite the cost? Why?

### **God Rules** (p. 20)

Share the following story from the "Stories of Faith" blog, collected by Clark Eberly:

There is a lot of evidence around us as to God's guidance, assistance, and protection. In fact, many people have had experiences that wonderfully attest to God's help. It's just that people don't often tell you about these things unless you ask them.

A long time ago, I asked an acquaintance whether she had ever had an experience of this nature. She told me an amazing story about walking alone one evening in a quiet, residential area. As she walked, there were no cars visible on the street ahead of her or behind, and there was no one on the sidewalk except her.

Just before she was about to step off the curb to cross the street, she distinctly felt someone behind her! Startled, she stopped and quickly turned around. There was no one to be seen. However at the same moment, a car came rushing by at a very high rate of speed. It passed by just inches from the curb. She felt certain that if she had not stopped to turn around, she would have been seriously injured or quite possibly would have lost her life.

When has something happened to you that may have seemed coincidental but would have been impossible without God's intervention? Invite class members to share personal stories of faith and deliverance.

### **The People Believed** (pp. 20-21)

Many times God's people wonder where God is in a given situation: the premature death of a loved one, the devastation of a storm, etc. Sometimes we don't ever fully understand how God uses these situations, but we must trust. God used the events in the life of the Israelites escape from Egypt to bring them closer to God, to bring glory to God's self. Where do you see God at work in your life and in the life of your congregation?

### **Closing**

Thought and prayer for the week: Lord, may we be aware of the ways you protect us. Help us protect others as you give us ways and means. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Encourage participants to return next week and to invite a friend to join them. Follow up with anyone who was been absent with a phone call or a visit.

# God Calls People to Covenant

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To hear again the story of how the Ten Commandments were given to God's people; (2) to understand the nature and function of covenants in human society; and (3) to take seriously the agreements we make with God and with other people.

**Background Scripture:** Deuteronomy 5:1-27; **Scripture Selection:** Deuteronomy 5:1-9, 11-13, 16-21

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Moses called the people together and said: Listen to what God says: I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me. Honor me in all you do. *Hymns:* "Faith of Our Fathers!" "How Great Thou Art." *Devotional Reading:* Matthew 22:34-40.

## Advance Preparation

Pray for God's guidance as you prepare to teach and as you lead discussion of the lesson.

Read the Background Scripture and the lesson comments in this guide as well as the student book.

Arrive in the meeting area early so that you can make sure the space is clean and in order.

Arrange the chairs in rows of two, like the seats on a bus. After the opening activity, rearrange the chairs if that is more comfortable.

Provide a modern-language translation of the Bible, pens, and paper.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 23)

As class members arrive, invite them to take a seat on the bus. Ask them to imagine that they are riding through a lawless city. Encourage the travelers to talk with their traveling companion, the one sitting next to them, about how they feel in this environment. How would it feel to ride through a city where everyone obeys God's law? What are the likely results when we have the freedom to act without the constraints of law?

## It's the Law! (p. 23)

Picture a lawyer's office filled with legal books. Lawyers consult those books for precedents to quote as they argue their cases. They may say things like, "In the case of McAllister vs. Jones, this decision was made by the appellate court." Moses quoted God's laws for the second time in Deuteronomy 5. (Compare with Exodus 20.) Why do you think he felt it necessary to quote them again?

Why is it important to remember the past? What can we learn from history? What influence should the past have on the decisions we make in the present?

## God's Law (p. 23)

Read the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5 from a modern-language translation. Here is one version you might use: "Listen up, people! Pay attention and live like this: Remember God is the one who delivered us. Keep God as your only God first in all things at all times. Watch your mouth; when you speak the name of the Lord, do it with reverence. Keep the Sabbath holy. Work six days and rest the seventh. Respect your parents. Do not murder, commit adultery, steal, or lie. Do not lust after anything that your neighbor has."

Suggest that class members write the Ten Commandments in words that are easy to understand and remember. How few words can they use to get the message across? Allow three to five minutes for them to work individually or in teams of two. At the end of the time, invite people to share their work.

## Keep It Simple (p. 24)

In the previous activity, participants looked at ways of simplifying the Ten Commandments. Why is

it important to keep laws simple? What happens when they become complicated? How can we help those around us to understand the basics of living as God wants us to live? In what ways will you teach the two commandments that Jesus indicated were the most important? Why do you think he separated those from the others?

### **Detailed Rules** (p. 24)

Invite participants to play a game. They must stand on one foot. If the other foot touches the floor, they are disqualified unless they raise the opposite hand at the same time the foot touches. On the first turn, they are to move two steps to the right. On the second turn they are to move three steps back and one step to the left, but only after turning counterclockwise while marching in place for five counts. Anyone who was disqualified, may reenter the game on the third count of the marching in place.

Are participants thoroughly confused? Invite them to return to their seats and then talk about the experience. Why was it difficult to play the game? What would have made it easier? Why are rules necessary? What happens when rules become too detailed?

### **No Rules** (p. 25)

When people go into a new experience, they usually want to know what the parameters or rules are. Rules are put in place so that everyone will know the expectations and function accordingly. What would happen if we did not have any rules or laws? What is the difference between rules and laws?

Think about the rules in your church/family/community. Sometimes rules are “understood” rather than being written, which can make it difficult for people who are new to the group. Invite class member to think for a moment about any unwritten rules in your congregation. How can you make sure that everyone knows and understands the rules? Why is this important for the functioning of the group?

### **Rules as Covenant** (p. 25)

Invite participants to discuss the differences between a contract and a covenant. Contracts are binding according to the laws of our government. A *covenant* establishes a relationship of trust between the parties. We may have covenant agreements about behavior at youth events or about participation with others in ecumenical settings. We trust the other parties to abide by the covenant into which they have entered. Contracts usually specify a time frame; covenants may also be for a determined period of time. However, a covenant with God is meant to be good for all eternity. Reflect on the comments made in the student book regarding God as the third party in the covenant of the law.

### **Covenant of the Law** (pp. 25-26)

When you think about breaking a law, a major motivating factor for not doing so is likely the punishment that would accompany your actions. However, God wants us to keep the covenant of his laws because we love God. While we know that we can never live up to God’s expectations, God offers us grace and mercy. Invite comments as to how we can offer grace and mercy to others.

### **Our Agreements** (p. 26)

Many in our society have become so focused on personal gain that they fail to consider how their actions may affect others. My sister contracted with someone to renovate her house. He broke the contract at several points and has left her living in the midst of a mess, with the work not yet completed more than a year later. Where does mercy and grace fit into this situation? How might this situation have been different if the agreement had been made as a covenant?

### **Closing**

Make announcements and provide an opportunity for the sharing of prayer concerns. Ask a volunteer to close the session with prayer.

# God Calls People to Remember

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To review the account of the first Passover celebration as found in Deuteronomy; (2) to understand the significance of occasions that call for commemoration and praise; and (3) to plan and carry out the celebration of a significant event in the life of the community of faith.

**Background Scripture:** Deuteronomy 16:1-8; **Scripture Selection:** Deuteronomy 16:1-8

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. The Lord is God and he has given us light. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart. (Based on Psalms 118:24–119:2.) *Hymns:* “Bind Us Together,” “This Is the Day,” “I Sing the Mighty Power of God,” “Step by Step.” *Devotional Reading:* 1 Corinthians 5:1-8.

## Advance Preparation

Pray that God will lead you and the students into new understandings of the day’s lesson.

The Passover celebration suggested in “Meaning to Everything” will require most of the lesson time. Adjust your plans accordingly. See the activity below for the list of items needed. Set the table and prepare the foods in advance. You can find booklets explaining the Passover seder meal at a bookstore or online.

Gather pictures of religious celebrations, such as Passover, Communion, Christmas, and Easter. If you have access to a menorah, bring it. If you choose not to use the Passover celebration, consider showing a video of such a celebration.

Secure photos of your church celebrating its anniversary and history.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 28)

As people arrive, ask them to share something that their family does that involves people of all generations. They may think of family reunions, holiday gatherings, etc. Ask: Why are these times important for your family? What would be lost without such times?

When everyone has gathered, take time to share joys and concerns, make announcements, etc. Lead in an opening prayer, remembering those things that were shared.

## God’s Command (p. 28)

God meant for the Israelites to follow his instructions “to the letter.” They were to do exactly what God said, in the exact order God said. Even when we get detailed instructions, we will often skip a step or two along the way. When is it necessary for us to follow directions this closely?

Successful living requires attention to living step-by-step according to God’s instructions. In many and specific ways, God instructed the people of Israel: Remember what I say. Observe the commandments I give you. Follow these steps and you will live as my people should.

## Meaning to Everything (pp. 28-29)

To help class members identify with the Passover celebration, plan a simplified version for your class time. Make the table festive and beautiful, using your best table cloth, dishes, etc. Include candles and candle holders as well.

You will need: Matzah or pita bread; Haggadah (booklets explaining the meal for each person); hardboiled eggs; apples, nuts, and grape juice for charoset; fresh parsley; horseradish; roasted lamb shank bone; grape juice; cup for Elijah; small bowls of salted water.

Place before the seder leader a cup for the ceremonial grape juice that will be drunk four times during the meal, and a seder plate containing a roasted lamb shank bone, karpas (a green herb or vegetable, usually parsley), a roasted (hard boiled) egg, charoset (a paste-like mixture of apples, nuts, and wine), and maror (a bitter herb, usually horseradish). Arrange three matzahs on the table in front of the leader.

Set out the grape juice. You'll need enough to serve four glasses to everyone present. Put at each guest's place the following: a haggadah (Passover prayer book), a wine glass, matzah, maror, charoset, salt water, karpas and a hard-boiled egg. Set out a special goblet to be filled with juice for the prophet Elijah. Use the haggadah to help you understand the various parts of the meal.

### **Celebration Events** (p. 29)

Briefly review the events that led to the celebration of Purim. Suggest that class members identify people who seem to have been in a place of service "for such a time as this." Some who come to mind are Joan of Arc, Martin Luther, Finis Ewing, and Martin Luther King, Jr. How do we remember these people?

### **Our Celebrations** (pp. 29-30)

Celebrations are important in the lives of families. What occasions does your family celebrate? Which ones might be unique to your family? I knew of a family who celebrated "un-birthdays" during the summer because all of their birthdays were near Christmas. How can you make family celebrations more memorable?

### **Community Celebrations** (p. 30)

Celebrations are also important for communities—whether those communities are towns, cities, churches, or other groups. Why is it important for communities to celebrate together? What events do your communities celebrate? Why? How is your church involved in such celebrations? What is the most meaningful annual celebration in your church?

### **New Celebrations** (p. 31)

Consider starting a new celebration in one or more of your communities. It doesn't have to be elaborate, or even a special date—just meaningful to the people in the community. For example, people from the churches of Nashville Presbytery meet every year on a Sunday afternoon in mid-September for a picnic at the Birthplace Shrine in Montgomery Bell State Park. They fellowship together by playing games, visiting with friends, eating, and then worshipping.

It is important for class members to gather as a group just for fellowship. If your class does not currently do so, encourage them to plan such a time for the near future.

### **Why Celebrate?** (p. 31)

Encourage class members to tell why they celebrate various events or dates. In addition to helping us remember the person or event associated with a celebration, these times offer a way to share the reason for the tradition with younger generations. What do you want your children and grandchildren to remember about your family celebrations? church or community celebrations?

### **Closing**

*Pray:* Lord, help us to remember and celebrate your presence with us. May we live so that our joy in you is evident. Amen.



# God Calls People to Special Service

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To retell the details of the dedication of Aaron's family for special service to God and community; (2) to understand the principles of ordination and consecration for service; and (3) to recognize persons who have been called for service to the faith community.

**Background Scripture:** Leviticus 8:1-13; **Scripture Selection:** Leviticus 8:1-13.

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Romans 11:34-36. *Hymns:* "Jesus Calls Us," "Where He Leads Me," "I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go," "Have Thine Own Way, Lord!" *Devotional Reading:* Romans 11:33-12:2.

## Advance Preparation

Read prayerfully the Scripture for this lesson as well as the lesson comments and questions in the student book. Thank God for the opportunity to be a teacher, to lead your class into new ways of looking at old texts.

List on an erasable board or newsprint the names of ordained offices (deacon, elder, minister of word and sacrament) and other special callings (teacher, administrator, giver of hospitality, etc.). Reflect on the callings of each class member as they have thus far been manifested. Contact class members and ask them to reflect on their own calling.

Bring a graduation cap (or other symbol of graduation), a Bible.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 33)

Greet class members as they arrive, giving special attention to any visitors. Introduce visitors to the group. Give an opportunity for participants to share prayer concerns and joys with the group. Ask a volunteer to pray or call on someone whom you asked in advance. Be prepared to offer the prayer if nobody volunteers.

Call attention to the graduation cap and ask what memories it brings to mind. Graduation may bring many memories and feelings of transition and uncertainty as well as excitement. Encourage participants to explore some of those feelings. Ask: How did you decide what to do next? In what ways did you seek God's guidance?

## Holy Times (pp. 33-34)

Many people limit God's call to serve to those who are called to ordained ministry. However, God calls us to many areas of service. God may call a person to be a doctor or a teacher or a musician. Just because we may not use our gifts exclusively in the church doesn't mean we are not being faithful to God's call. Invite participants to tell how they have experienced God's call. Talk about ways of helping others identify God's call for their lives.

## New Times (pp. 34-35)

Ask participants to imagine themselves in Aaron's position as he was set apart to serve as high priest. Aaron received special clothing in recognition of his new responsibilities. What special clothing does your church use to identify a minister, elder, or deacon? What is the purpose of that special clothing or other identification?

Mention the use of Urim and Thummin in making decisions. Invite comments about this method of making decisions. Do you believe that God controlled these seemingly chance stones? Reflect on the use of a similar method by Jesus' disciples to choose a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:21-26).

Explain that *ordination* is a way of setting someone apart for special service. Call attention to the list of offices and callings. (See “Advance Preparation.”) What difference is there between the ordination of Aaron and the ordination of a minister of word and sacrament or of an elder or deacon? How are those persons changed by being setting apart through ordination? Why is it important for ordination to be a public worship?

Invite class members who have been ordained to comment about the experience. How can class members be more supportive of those who are serving in ordained positions?

### **Times of Community** (pp. 35-36)

Invite the class to reflect on the differences and similarities between ordination and baptism. How does baptism change a person? How does it change the community?

Reflect on the differences and similarities between ordination and a wedding ceremony. If you are or have been married, recall your own wedding and how you felt after the ceremony.

Use the questions in the student book for further reflection and discussion.

### **Teaching Times** (pp. 36-37)

Agreeing to serve as a teacher is accepting a call to ministry, even if it is not an ordained ministry. Invite any former teachers in the class to share why they responded to the call to teach. I firmly believe that God provides each congregation with the gifts needed for the ministry to which God has called it. However, sometimes people get in the way!

I have been involved in teaching children for many years, but at this time I was not serving in that capacity. One day while at the church, the chairperson of the Christian education committee approached me about serving as the teacher of an elementary Sunday school class. It was mid-August and the new teachers were to start the first Sunday in September. I asked for a day or two to think about it. Less than an hour later, the chairperson sought me out to say that someone else had agreed to take the class.

Have class members consider: How did this approach negate the concept of God’s call? How would you feel about serving if approached in this way? How can your congregation be more intentional in inviting people to respond to God’s call to service rather than “filling a vacancy”?

Most teachers can recall moments when they felt especially blessed to be a teacher. As time permits, let persons share some of those moments. How do those special memories affirm your acceptance of God’s call to teach?

Share a special teaching moment in your class. How did it affirm or encourage you as a teacher? Describe your call from God and your response as you teach this class. How would your life have been different if you had refused the opportunity?

### **A Time of Commitment** (p. 37)

Affirm what you see as God’s calling for members of the class. Acknowledge the importance and uniqueness of each person’s call. God calls us each to a particular ministry. It is up to each of us to respond to that calling.

Challenge class members to examine their own calling and how they are responding to their calling at this time.

### **Closing**

Close with a prayer that each person will understand her or his calling and honor God’s call in life. Pray for encouragement, strength, and wisdom as each person responds in a special way.

# God Calls People to Jubilee

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To present the issues addressed in God's commands to redistribute property and to deal justly with one another in Jubilee; (2) to appropriate the biblical principles of economic justice and faithful stewardship of God's creation; and (3) to engage in actions that promote economic justice and good stewardship.

**Background Scripture:** Leviticus 25:8-24; **Scripture Selection:** Leviticus 25:8-24

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Matthew 18:21-22. *Hymns:* "Make Me a Blessing," "We Give Thee But Thine Own." *Devotional Reading:* Matthew 18:21-35.

## Advance Preparation

Read the Scripture Selection. Study the lesson comments and questions in the student book. Provide one or more copies of the *Confession of Faith*. Copy the prayer at the end of these teaching suggestions on an erasable board or newsprint. Secure a recording of "Imagine," by the Beatles and arrange to play it for the class.

## Welcome/Introduction (pp. 39-40)

Greet class members as they arrive, giving special attention to any visitors. Make announcements and remind class members about any upcoming fellowship events or service opportunities. Invite persons to share prayer concerns and joys with the group. Ask a volunteer to open class with prayer.

Explain the concept of *sabbath*, a break or change from normal routine. Memphis Theological Seminary, as well as many other schools, allow professors to take sabbaticals (time off) every so many years to work on books for publication, do research, or work on other projects that they cannot complete while participating in a full teaching schedule. The school benefits from having professors who publish books and other scholarly works; the community and world benefit from having these works available. What other businesses/institutions could benefit from offering sabbaticals to their employees? What benefits can you foresee?

Review the meaning of *Jubilee* using the information in the opening section of the student book (pages 39-40). What would Jubilee mean in practical terms for our world? How would it impact home ownership? family farms? businesses and industries? How might it affect property values?

Ask class participants if they believe that Jubilee would be possible in our society. Why or why not? Is our society ready for this? What do you think God's will is about Jubilee?

## Christian Stewardship (pp. 40-41)

Have someone read the Scriptures relating to stewardship listed in this section of the student book. How do the texts relate to your view of stewardship?

Ask someone to read what the *Confession of Faith* says about stewardship (6.10). Also read the biblical texts that are cited. Reflect on the phrase "all of life and creation is a trust from God, to be used for God's glory and service." In light of that teaching, how should we view caring for God's creation? How should we use our skills and energy? What does it say about how we treat others?

## Our Shrinking Planet (p. 41)

Summarize the story of tainted milk in China cited in the student book. Talk with class members about the motivating factors in such incidents. Our first reaction may be, "How could anyone even think of doing such a thing?" Yet, we continue to hear stories about greed among people in our nation, many

of whom seem to be good people. Do they really think that nobody will be hurt, or do they just separate themselves from their actions? What moral or ethical responsibility do we have when it comes to our spending habits? Do you consider the practices of a company before deciding whether or not to shop in their stores or to buy their products? Why or why not?

### **What Does God Say?** (pp. 41-42)

Suggest that class member close their eyes for a moment. Then say: God says, “Rely on me. Take a rest. Practice sabbath principles.” In what way do you practice sabbath principles? How comfortable would you be resting every seventh year, trusting God to provide for your needs?

### **Liberty in the Jubilee Era** (p. 42)

Leviticus 25:10 tells us to “proclaim liberty throughout the land to all inhabitants.” From what things do people today need to be liberated? (poverty, violence, homelessness, financial issues, joblessness, etc.) How can we be instrumental in that process?

### **Our Responsibility for the Poor** (p. 43)

God called the people to practice Jubilee. How can we, as Christians, bring ourselves to share what we have and live as equals with others? How does liberation “level the playing field”? What might prevent the practice of Jubilee in our society?

Suggest class members imagine what the world would be like if the year of Jubilee were practiced. Play John Lennon’s song “Imagine.” How does it relate to the idea of Jubilee?

### **An Ideal or a Practical Pattern?** (p. 43)

The student book suggests that the people may never have followed God’s instructions regarding the year of Jubilee. How might history have been different if they had? What impact would Jubilee have on contemporary societies? Disregarding the chaos that would likely result, what are the pros and cons to implementing a year of Jubilee now? How would you feel about such a practice?

### **What Can We Do?** (pp. 43-44)

Encourage class members to recall the things they identified earlier from which people need to be liberated. Which of the suggestions under this heading in the student book address those issues? In which of these areas is your congregation already involved? Talk about practical ways of implementing additional ideas. List the practices that seem to be doable in your church and community. Make plans for how your class or congregation will become involved in helping to meet these needs. What follow up will be needed? Who will be responsible for the various details?

### **Closing**

As class members prepare to leave, remind them of any upcoming class or congregational events. Ask for a volunteer to contact regular attendees who have been absent. Who will contact visitors and invite them to return?

*Share together in this unison prayer:* Lord, help us to act in ways consistent with your call. Help us to behave in ways of which you approve. Thank you for your grace, your power, your mercy, and your patterns for us to follow. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

# God's People Grumble

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To examine the Israelites' grumbling about their life in the wilderness; (2) to explore the complexities of giving and receiving, of securing necessities and luxuries in our lives; (3) to enumerate and give thanks for our blessings.

**Background Scripture:** Numbers 11; **Scripture Selection:** Numbers 11:1-6, 10-15

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* This is the day the LORD has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. The LORD is God and he has given us light. Give thanks to the LORD for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart. (Based on Psalms 118:24–119:2.) *Hymns:* “Count Your Blessings,” “The Day of Resurrection,” “A Child of the King.” *Devotional Reading:* Psalm 142.

## Advance Preparation

Read the background scripture in a different translation of the Bible than the one you normally use. Doing so will help you to focus on the passage as it will be less familiar. Read the lesson in the student book; note any sections to which you want to refer during class.

Provide a basket of plain, unsalted crackers, a pitcher of water, and small cups.

Create a display of fresh produce that includes cucumbers, melons, onions, and other produce readily available in your area. Write the word *manna* over and over on a sheet of paper; place the paper on top of the produce.

Scatter take-out menus from area restaurants, or pictures of attractive meals from magazines, around the table.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 46)

Greet the students by name as they arrive. Encourage each participant to take one or more crackers and a cup of water. As they eat the crackers, call their attention to the produce display and the menus or pictures. Invite them to compare eating crackers and water to the Israelites who complained of having only manna to eat day after day.

God meets our needs, just as God met those of the Israelites, yet we still complain. What things do we complain about today? When have you found yourself thinking, “If only I had \_\_\_\_\_, I’d be happy!”

## Moses Displeased (p. 46)

Frustration built among the people. It started with the riff raff, the foreign rabble or Egyptians traveling with the Israelites, suggests *The Living Bible* (Exodus 12:38). The Israelites heard their complaining, absorbed it, and repeated it.

How do you think God felt as he listened to Moses? Moses was trying to take care of the multitude of Israelites, but despite his efforts the people continued to complain. We all have opportunities to take care of others and show God's love for them, whether it is as a family member, a supervisor, a team player, or a part of the church. How can you encourage and support those who are caring for others?

## Complaints (p. 46)

Ask class members to recall a time when they were in a leadership position. What types of difficulties did you encounter? What were the joys? How did you deal with complaints or disagreements within the group? Why is it so easy to focus on the negatives?

Then invite class members to recall a time when the complaints of someone they were leading caused frustration. What is the best way to deal with those complaints? How can you satisfy everyone? What is the best outcome for which you can hope?

### **Moses Hears Complaints** (pp. 46-47)

Once the grumbling started in the Israelite camp, it grew louder and louder. As our complaints take on a life of their own, they become gigantic. The complaining can go on for decades. Putting new carpet in the church or choosing paint colors can become huge issues. Redecorating or relocating can be dangerously disruptive.

What are the most common items people complain about at church? When you hear (or voice) complaints, how do you deal with them? How might your behavior have contributed to others' dissatisfaction? their opinion of Christians? How can prayer resolve the issues that have generated complaints? heal those who have hurt feelings?

Form a prayer group of people who agree to pray for one another and for the concerns of the church. Perhaps members of your class could become the nucleus for such a group.

### **Meaning of Complaints** (p. 47)

Why do people complain? It may not always be dissatisfaction with the issues that they identify. The Israelites said the food was making them unhappy, but might they really have been fearful of what the future held? Fear can make people behave in ways that are foreign to them. They complain so that they do not have to think about the major changes they are experiencing. How can you smooth the way during times of transition so that people can accept the changes more easily?

### **Giving and Receiving** (pp. 47-48)

Briefly review the story from the student book. How would you feel if you had helped to build that house? How do you react when the recipient of a gift does not take time to thank you? when you see your gift among the items in a yard sale? Why? How do we sometimes treat God's gifts the same way?

### **Not Good Enough** (p. 48)

A friend told about seeing a person standing at a busy intersection with a sign saying he would work for food. She detoured to a fast food restaurant and returned with a sandwich for the man only to see him toss it away. Obviously he was not very hungry!

Our society has become very materialistic. How can we put the focus on gratitude rather than on acquiring more? When have you complained rather than counted your blessings?

### **What Do We Need?** (p. 49)

How many pairs of shoes are in your closet? How many do you *really* need? How many rooms of your house stay unoccupied most of the time? How many vehicles are in your garage?

God knows our wants and will supply our needs. Look at the familiar hymn, "Count Your Blessings." Read the words. What blessings are you weary of receiving? Why doesn't more buying satisfy our cravings? What possessions and luxury items did your grandparents have? How can you use your possessions to serve God? One family opens their home regularly to people who are in the area on church business. They consider it a way of sharing what God has given them.

### **Closing**

Pray together the prayer at the end of the comments in the student book. Encourage people to return next week.



# God's People Rebel

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To tell about the Israelites' rebellion against God and Moses in the wilderness; (2) to identify ways that complaining can lead to rebellion; and (3) to confront our anger when life does not go our way and to deal responsibly with it.

**Background Scripture:** Numbers 14:1-25; **Scripture Selection:** Numbers 14:1-12

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 78:5-7. *Hymns:* "We're Marching to Zion," "Like a River Glorious," "Standing on the Promises," "God of Grace and God of Glory," "The Battle Belongs to the Lord." *Devotional Reading:* Psalm 78:5-17.

## Advance Preparation

Begin your preparation by asking the Holy Spirit to lead you in your study and teaching. Pray also for each person who will participate in the class.

Provide an erasable board or newsprint and markers.

Display or draw traffic signs or information signs to place around the room (keep off the grass, no parking, and others). Class participants will likely not know why the signs are displayed until the lesson is well underway.

Read the Background Scripture and study the lesson in the student book. Highlight and make notes on the margins when you find something that you want to emphasize.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 51)

Welcome each person, paying attention to the particular needs and special circumstances. Ask about families. Allow time for class business, announcements, and sharing concerns. Invite a volunteer to open the class with prayer.

Encourage participants to tell about a time when life was going badly and someone said, "It's not my fault." Perhaps they have said the same thing themselves. Suggest that sometimes our initial reaction is to deny responsibility for our actions and circumstances. How might those who denied responsibility have contributed to the outcome? Why can it be so difficult to own our responsibility?

## Spying Out the Land (pp. 51-52)

After wandering in the wilderness for so many years, it must have been somewhat overwhelming to know that they were near the land God had promised them. Yet, things did not work out quite the way they had expected.

God told Moses to send spies into the promised land. Why do you think God felt it necessary to send spies? List the many amazing things the spies saw. Without photographic evidence, how could they have proven what they saw? Invite someone to use hand gestures to describe what the spies saw. Ask someone else to draw a depiction of the giant fruits.

All of the scouts reported that the land was indeed prosperous and promising beyond belief. Ten of the twelve spies then began to recite the reasons that the land could not be taken. Only Caleb said that it could be conquered. Why do you think the ten men were so negative? What enabled Caleb to take such a positive stance?

How do you think you would have reacted? Which stance would you have supported? Why? As Christians, do we find ourselves most often following the majority or the minority? Which should we follow? Which position usually takes the most faith and courage? How can we have courage to stand in opposition to the majority?

### **Crying and Complaining** (p. 53)

Invite class members to describe the response of the people to the majority report. What one or two words best describes their reaction? Why do you think they immediately doubted God's care? Why did they feel the need for a new leader?

Suggest class members think of a time when they have disagreed with the direction in which a leader was heading. Ask: How did you handle the situation? In what ways did you attempt to influence the decisions? If you felt the need for new leadership, were you willing to be part of the solution? Whose responsibility is it if a church does not grow and prosper? When is it time to change leaders?

### **Resolving Problems by Managing Anger** (pp. 53-54)

The Israelites looked at their weaknesses and said, "We can't defeat the people who inhabit the Promised Land." They continued to lament having ever left Egypt. Why did they turn their anger against Moses? How could Joshua and Caleb be certain that the land could be conquered? Why is it easier to stay with or return to the known rather than taking a step of faith into the unknown?

How can we resolve similar problems? How can we manage our anger when things seem to go badly? List things that could increase people's faith. Which ones have the most potential? Turn that list into a plan of action for your church.

### **Time to Make a Decision** (pp. 54-55)

The Israelites did not want to take a chance by claiming the land that God had promised them. How often do we miss out on some incredible blessings because we are afraid? Why are we so afraid?

Encourage class members to list things in which they trust. Write their contributions on an erasable board or newsprint. (If they fail to include God, do so yourself.) Which items are true most of the time? Which ones are absolutely true? Point to the list and ask: Is there anything God cannot do? Why did the Israelites lose trust in God when they heard about the giants in the Promised Land? What causes us to doubt God's ability to lead and protect us? How do you involve God when making decisions?

### **Finale** (p. 55)

Point out God's question to Moses, "How long will these people despise me?" In what ways might that question be applicable to our world today?

The student book refers to *The Message* paraphrase that says, "How long will these people treat me like dirt? How long refuse to trust me? And with all these signs I've done among them!" Point out the signs you put up in the meeting area. What signs did God perform among the Israelites? What signs does God give us today? Why do we sometimes overlook ways in which God cares for us? Why do we grumble and complain like the Israelites in the desert?

Ask the students to estimate the extent of God's patience. How long did it last with the Israelites? How long will it last with us?

Ask class members what they believe about the effectiveness of prayer. Point out the prayer of Moses when he asked God for mercy and forgiveness for the people. What was the effect of Moses' prayer? What difference can our prayers make?

### **Closing**

End the class time by praying together the prayer at the end of the lesson in the student book.

Touch base about any projects the class agreed to support. What else is the class doing? How can you be supportive of the leaders in your church and community?

# Moses Disobeys God

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To lay out the details of God's command and Moses' disobedience; (2) to explore in our lives levels of authority and issues of obedience; and (3) to accept the challenge to support our leaders in prayer.

**Background Scripture:** Numbers 20:1-13; **Scripture Selection:** Numbers 20:1-13

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 95:6-7. *Hymns:* "Trust and Obey," "Come, Now Is the Time to Worship," "Doxology," "True-Hearted, Whole-Hearted." *Devotional Reading:* Psalm 95.

## Advance Preparation

Begin preparation with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to lead you in your study and in your participation with the class.

Read the Scripture Selection and the account in Exodus 17:1-7. Be prepared to discuss the differences and similarities between the two accounts.

Read the lesson in the student book. Make notes in the book to help you remember key ideas.

Locate a map of the Israelites' travels in the wilderness and display it in the meeting area.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 57)

As you welcome each person, tell them to do something using a no-nonsense tone of voice. If they ask why, reply, "Because I said so." You might tell one person to lead in prayer, another to update the class about those who have been absent, another to stand at the door to serve as greeter, etc.

Then reflect on the experience by asking: How did it feel to have someone give you an order? Why did you follow it?

Point out the map of the Israelites' travel in the wilderness. Note that today's lesson concerns an incident that occurred at the end of the forty years of wandering.

## Authority Figures (p. 57)

Remind the class of the authority that God gave Moses. What kind of authority figure was Moses? Why do you think some people challenged his authority? What were the consequences?

Recall a time when you had to obey someone simply because of that person's position of authority. How did you feel in that situation?

Now recall a time when the authority figure truly had more information, experience, or knowledge or sought input from those who did have that information or experience. What is the difference between the two situations? Why might you feel different about obeying one rather than the other?

God expects our obedience, just as God expected the Israelites to obey Moses. What are the consequences of our failure to obey?

## Out of Water Again (pp. 57-58)

It seems that the Israelites just didn't learn! Here they were, camped close to the Promised Land once again. What did they do? Complain!

When God brings us back to the same place again, there is a purpose. What do you think God wanted the people to learn? When has God brought you back to the same place (literally or figuratively)? How did you respond? What did you learn?

### **Who's in Charge?** (p. 58)

How did Moses and Aaron respond when the people of Israel grumbled yet again? What might have happened if Moses and Aaron had not interceded for the people?

How are we sometimes like the Israelites? I have often witnessed people grumbling about not having enough time to do something that they could have accomplished during the time they spent grumbling! How can you help people to channel their energies more positively? How do you and the leaders of your congregation listen for God's instructions?

### **Following God's Commands** (p. 58-59)

God was not pleased with Moses because he did not follow the instructions God had given him. What difference did this deviation make? Why do you think God was displeased with such a seemingly small deviation from the instructions?

There were reasons behind the instructions God gave to Moses that even Moses could not see or understand. The text goes on to explain that Moses had not trusted God and instead had followed his own plan and struck the rock. What does this tell us about the nature of God's instructions for us?

Invite class members to recall a time when they gave instructions that had to be followed without deviation. Ask: How did you convey the importance of following the instructions exactly? What would have been the result of a small deviation from the instructions?

### **Result of Disregarding the Directive** (pp. 59-60)

Based on the comments in the student book, encourage class members to identify Moses' sin. Moses disrespected God's intention by bringing more glory and emphasis to himself than to God. Suggest class members think about times when they have failed to respect God or to give thanks for God's blessings and actions in their lives. What was the result? How did you feel later?

During this time of economic uncertainty, how are you trusting God to provide for you? How would doing so free your heart and mind for other matters?

### **Why Did Moses Rebel?** (p. 60)

Encourage participants to ponder the question, "Why did Moses deviate from the Lord's instructions? How did the daily grind of leading the people affect him?" We know that Moses faced many challenges in his leadership. How would that affect him? He was, after all, quite human.

Suggest that class members consider silently how they feel about the leadership of their church. Pose these questions for their reflection: Do you trust the leadership, or do you grumble and complain? How does your attitude affect the pastor, elders, and other leaders? What would visitors sense about your church? Encourage class members to pray regularly for the leadership of their church. What difference might such prayer have on the congregation?

Church leaders are human, just as Moses was, and may slip from time to time. Pray that they will be people of integrity and follow God's instructions exactly. Pray that they will be strengthened by the Holy Spirit when they are prone to slip. Pray that the Holy Spirit will lead class members and the congregation, enabling them to follow their calling and instructions from God exactly. May we all be people of integrity, as God desires.

### **Closing**

Engage in a time of silent prayer of intercession for the leaders of your church. Conclude with the psalm and prayer found at the end of the student book comments.

# God Calls for Obedience

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To explore the meaning of the Great Commandment found in Deuteronomy 6; (2) to connect the Great Commandment to our everyday lives; and (3) to accept the validity of God's Great Commandment, to live by it, and to teach it to succeeding generations.

**Background Scripture:** Deuteronomy 6; **Scripture Selection:** Deuteronomy 6:1-9, 20-24

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* May the Lord make us attentive to wisdom and understanding. May we seek it like silver and hidden treasure. Wise choices will then watch over us and keep us safe. (from Proverbs 2). *Hymns:* "I Am Thine, O Lord," "I Am Resolved," "Make Me a Servant." *Devotional Reading:* Proverbs 2:1-11.

## Advance Preparation

Pray, asking God for wisdom to bring glory to God's name through your teaching.

Read the student book lesson and study the Background Scripture. A commentary or other reference tool might be helpful as you prepare.

Write various laws on paper or posterboard and post them throughout the meeting area. Include some outdated laws that remain on the books, especially some that seem ridiculous today.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 63)

Arrive in the meeting area in advance of class members. Pray for what will take place there during the class. Greet each person as he or she arrives. Introduce visitors to class members so that they have an opportunity to make new friends. Invite participants to share joys or concerns. Be sensitive to those who do not wish to speak their concerns aloud. Open with prayer, asking God to take care of the church and the world—especially those who are present, their families, and loved ones.

Call attention to the laws posted around the meeting area. What thoughts come to mind when you see laws posted? when you hear someone quote a law?

## Purpose of the Law (p. 63)

Take another look at the laws posted around the meeting area. Which ones are outdated? Why? Why do you think they were ever enacted?

Now think for a moment about some of the laws we find in the Bible. Do some of them seem to be outdated? Why? Which of the biblical laws will never be outdated? Why?

## The Great Commandment (p. 63)

Most people want to live a long and good life. Again and again God told the people of Israel how to live so that their lives would be good. In obedience to God, Moses gave the great commandment: love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and might. What does this commandment mean to you? for the way you live your life? Why do you think God set this commandment above all others?

## Affirmed by Jesus (pp. 63-64)

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 22:34-40. Jesus would have been taught Deuteronomy 6:5 as a young boy. However, when the Pharisees approached him, Jesus added a second commandment: "love your neighbor as you love yourself." Everything hangs on these two commandments. What made Jesus' response so appropriate for the situation? How do these commandments relate to the Ten Commandments? Can you follow one and fail to follow the other?

## **Shema** (p. 64)

Invite class participants to consider how they keep the commandments of God in their hearts and recite them to their children. Most Christians are not diligent about observing this Old Testament directive. However, we may wear Christian symbols as jewelry or T-shirts on which scripture has been printed. How do such methods help us to remember God's commandments? In what ways do they speak to non-believers?

A *mezuzah* is a piece of parchment (often contained in a decorative case) on which is inscribed Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21. These verses comprise the Jewish prayer beginning with the phrase "Listen, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One." A qualified scribe who has undergone many years of meticulous training prepares the parchment, writing the verses in indelible black ink with a special quill pen. The parchment is then rolled up and placed inside the case.

Jewish families may attach a *mezuzah* to the doorframe of their homes to fulfill the biblical mandate to inscribe the words of the *Shema* "on the doorposts of your house" (Deuteronomy 6:9) They touch it each time they pass through the door. Many families place a *mezuzah* on the front door only, but observant Jews may affix one to every doorway in the home apart from bathrooms and closets too small to qualify as rooms. How would having something like a *mezuzah* on the doors of your home serve as a reminder of God's commandments? What other ways would work for you?

## **God's Glory** (pp. 64-65)

Refer to David's prayer in Psalm 19:14. Invite responses to how we can make our words, actions, and even thoughts acceptable to God. How would your life be different if you did so?

## **Teach Your Children** (p. 65)

When Jewish children observe their elders wearing *phylacteries* and see *mezuzahs* on the doorposts, they see that belief in God is a serious thing for their family. As Christians, how do we show that we are serious about our faith? How do we witness to the fact that we are Christians?

Relationships are key to making new disciples. Yet we often hesitate to talk with those in our own families about their faith. How do you pass your faith in God to your children (or the children in the congregation)? How have you shared your faith story with your children and grandchildren?

## **God's Love in Law** (pp. 65-66)

Parents set rules or laws because they love their children and want what is best for them, whether it be safety, nutritious foods, or enough rest. What does God want for you?

There may be times when laws seem to be unfair to certain people or segments of the population. What is our responsibility as Christians when we are aware of such injustices? If you are currently aware of any unjust laws, make plans for how your class or congregation can address the situation.

## **Commandment or Promise?** (p. 66)

If we obey God's law, we will gain wisdom and understanding more precious than silver or gold. Illustrate this truth by comparing it to a treasure chest. The key to opening the treasure chest is loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and might and loving your neighbor as yourself. How will you practice this commandment?

## **Closing**

Close by praying: Holy God, thank you for giving us rules by which to live because you want us to have long and happy lives. Grant us wisdom and courage for all the coming days. Amen.



# God Calls for Decision

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To restate Moses' promise that God would reward the Israelites' love and faithfulness with prosperity; (2) to consider the importance of loving and obeying God; and (3) to choose to obey God's call to faithful living.

**Background Scripture:** Deuteronomy 30; **Scripture Selection:** Deuteronomy 30:1-10

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Joshua 24:15. *Hymns:* "Count Your Blessings," "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," "Great Is the Lord." *Devotional Reading:* Joshua 24:14-24.

## Advance Preparation

Begin preparation with prayer that the Holy Spirit will lead you in your study. Pray also for each person who will participate in the class.

Read the Background Scripture and study the lesson in the student book. Make a list of points you want to emphasize.

Provide an erasable board or newsprint and markers.

Obtain a copy of the movie *Fiddler on the Roof* and set up equipment to view the film clip of the song "Do You Love Me?"

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 68)

Welcome students as they arrive. Allow time for class business, announcements, and sharing concerns. Invite a volunteer to open class with prayer.

Encourage participants to name their favorite hymn about love. List the hymns on an erasable board or newsprint. You may also list favorite popular tunes about love.

Show the film clip from *Fiddler on the Roof*. If you are not using the film clip, ask for two volunteers to assume the roles of Tevye and Golde, reading the words of the song as found in the student book. Then ask: How do you show love? In what ways is love shown to you?

## God's Love for Israel (pp. 68-69)

Throughout our lessons this quarter we have heard the instructions God has given to the people so that things will go well and they will have a good life. Ask class members to sum up those instructions in one or two sentences.

## Exile (p. 69)

A forced exile is very different from a voluntary relocation. In what ways have you experienced exile? Who in the group has been forced to move to a new place? What feelings did they have about the move? How would you feel if you had little hope of returning home? Why is a particular place we call home important to us?

## What's So Hard About Moving? (p. 70)

Ask for a show of hands indicating how many class participants have ever moved to a new city or town that is some distance from their family home. Invite them briefly to relate the major difficulties and joys of that relocation. Those who still live in their childhood community may imagine how they would feel about leaving behind friends, family, and familiar surroundings. Describe your own experience in moving or your feelings about staying in the same place.

## **The Exile of the Hebrews** (pp. 70-71)

Suggest class members close their eyes and imagine themselves as one of the Israelites. Say: Your ancestors originally moved to Egypt for food and protection. However, as new Egyptian leaders emerged, they forced your people to be their slaves. Even though your parents and grandparents were slaves, life in Egypt was familiar and dependable. After they left, it became more difficult to believe that God would take care of everything you needed. Now you are preparing to enter the land God has promised to you and your descendants. Moses has been your leader for over forty years, but he will not be going with you. How do you feel as you approach the Promised Land? Why? What would reassure you? How do Moses' words impact you?

Moses and Aaron had led the people to this place, but because of their disobedience God would not allow them to enter the Promised Land. How do you think Moses and Aaron felt, knowing that they would not accompany the people when they entered the Promised Land? What gave Moses the power to remind the people of God's rules when he knew he would die without entering the Promised Land?

## **Homecoming** (p. 71)

Invite class members to reflect on any homecomings of which they have been a part. Encourage comments on the differences and similarities between the experience of those who remain at home and those who come from elsewhere to reconnect.

Many congregations have an annual homecoming celebration. If your church does not celebrate homecoming regularly, consider working with others in the congregation to organize one.

## **How Could They Do It?** (p. 71)

Reflect on the lessons of this quarter as you consider the question, "How could they do it?" One word that seems to occur over and over in these studies is *remember*. How could remembering help the people to live as God intended for them to live? How can remembering help us to live as God intends for us to live?

Point to the last sentences in this section, "Be faithful to me. Remember all the ways I've been good to you. Share the memories," says God. Suggest that class members provide a personal summation of this quarter's lessons. Invite those who wish to do so to share their insights.

## **Living in Exile in the New Testament** (p. 72)

In the parable of the forgiving father, Jesus repeated the theme of the wanderer coming home to a grand welcome. How does this story remind you of the Israelites? How does this story give you hope and comfort? What is God's desire for our lives? What does God promise us?

## **Closing**

This lesson is the last one in the quarter. Next week will begin a new Sunday school year and a different unit of study. Distribute *Encounter* student books for the fall quarter. Note that the focus will be "covenant communities" and that texts have been chosen from both the Old and New Testaments. Mention any changes in class leadership that will occur due to the beginning of a new year.

End the lesson with a prayer that we may remember the lessons God teaches us. Ask God for the faith and strength to be the people God wants us to be. Pray for the opportunity and the courage to share God's wonderful story, the gospel of Jesus Christ, with someone else.

## Evaluation

Help to improve the usefulness of this leader's guide by answering the following questions and returning this form, along with your comments and suggestions, to the address listed on the reverse side of this page.

**To what extent was this leader's guide helpful to you?** (Circle the appropriate number. "1" = Not at All and "7" = Extremely.)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

**What are the two most helpful things in this guide?**

---

---

**If you could change one thing about the leader's guide, what would it be?**

---

---

**Additional Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

(Your name—optional)

---

(Church name—optional)

Return Address

Place  
postage  
here.

Encounter  
Discipleship Ministry Team  
8207 Traditional Place  
Cordova, TN 38016