

Along the Way
March 16th Teacher's Guide

Exodus 14:15-31 – “Can’t Go Round It”

LIFE IN THE WILD

Just before Moses confronted the Pharaoh, God spoke to him in the desert through a burning bush. Centuries later, before Jesus began his public ministry, he went to the wilderness for 40 days. In both cases there was something about being out on the edge, out away from the familiar that enabled Moses and Jesus to live into their callings.

Throughout scripture we see that same pattern over and over again. There's something about life in the wild that strips away all our worldly comforts, invites self-examination, and requires us to depend on God.

In these weeks leading up to Easter, you are being invited to go there too. You are invited to lay aside what is comfortable, enter into a season of self-examination, and most importantly learn what you are capable of when you learn to trust God fully.

LESSONS IN OUR SERIES

As we read through the book of Exodus, we are seeking to learn lessons about Life in the Wild from the Israelites during the Exodus. **What does it feel like to be in the wilderness? What do those wilderness places look like in our lives today – those times when what we rely on gets stripped away, when we learn to depend on God?**

As a part of our worship, we will hear stories from members of the congregation about their own wilderness journeys. **What caused those? What did they learn? How did they come to trust God through those times?**

The lessons for this series challenge us to identify our own places of wilderness and to do some self-examination around:

- How God gets our attention
- How God delivers us from the enslaving pull of the world
- Holding on to faith in times of fear – TODAY'S LESSON
- Taking the next step when God calls us to move forward – TODAY'S LESSON
- Recognizing God's provision with gratitude
- Learning to trust in God
- Practicing Sabbath
- Memory & Hope - Seeing God in our own spiritual journey

- Avoiding the creation of idols for ourselves

OUR OWN LIFE IN THE WILD

Each week in worship we are privileged to hear wilderness stories from members of the congregation. Many of these stories of trust and hope are quite powerful. Allow folks to respond to what they heard. Guide the conversation in the direction of identifying our own stories of reliance on God in the wilderness of our own lives.

Last Sunday we began priming the pump, helping folks to get ready to reflect on their own wilderness journeys. On April 6th, our class time will be spent sharing insights from our own walk with God in the wilderness. In order for that to happen, folks in your class need to start thinking about their own wilderness stories now.

Last week we distributed the Reflection Questions from the **Capturing Our Story** handout (later in this teacher's guide). Remind folks to be thinking about their answers to these questions over the next few weeks.

Call their attention to the **Shutterfly Book project** on the back of the sheet. Talk about what that might look like. Commit to do some version of your own and encourage others in the class to engage in this tangible way of remembering God's presence in our spiritual journeys.

BACKGROUND TO THE TEXT

Refer back to the **Events in Exodus Timeline**. Help folks to get a sense of where today's passage fits in the larger Exodus narrative.

Last week, we talked about Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush. A lot has happened between that moment and our text for today!

- Moses returned to Egypt and told Pharaoh to let God's people go out into the wilderness to worship God.
- Ten plagues ensue, wreaking havoc on Egypt. Multiple times Pharaoh relents and tells Moses that the Israelites can leave, but each time order is restored and comfort returns, Pharaoh's heart is hardened and he changes his mind.
- It is the 10th plague, the death of the first born, that is the setting for what has come to be known as the Passover. Be sure to read the account of the Passover in Exodus 12. It is one of the most important, formative stories of the Israelites. God delivers his people from this horrific event and it is during this plague that Moses finally leads the Israelites out of Egypt.
- Pharaoh and his armies pursue the Israelites into the desert. It is here that our passage picks up the story. The Israelites are trapped between the Egyptian armies on one side of them and the waters of the Red Sea on the other. But God is about to make a way for them.

Begin your reading of the text at Exodus 14:10-31.

POSSIBLE DISCUSSION TOPICS

When we are living in a wilderness time, when we have been stripped of what is familiar, of what is comfortable, we can be prone to panic, to be afraid, to embrace the past – even if it was hurtful or difficult – simply because it is known and our present and our future is unknown to us.

Life in the Wild is not a linear road from point A to point B. There is much wandering. There are many roadblocks. The Israelites were trapped between a charging army and a turbulent Sea. Sometimes we feel trapped to. We come upon roadblocks and we can't imagine any way to get around them.

Choose one or two discussion topics that will help you to talk about, and encourage folks to:

- **Hold on to faith in times of fear**
- **Take the next step when God calls us to move**

LEARNING TO BE FREE

In the movie *Shawshank Redemption* written by Stephen King, the characters Andy Dufresne and “Red” Redding befriend each other after years of imprisonment. One of their friends, Brooks Hatley, is released from prison after decades behind bars. He can't handle society's harsh view of convicted felons or its incredible changes to everyday living. Oddly enough to the outsider, Brooks is coming to terms with what it means to be a “free” man again. No regimented schedule, no strict geographic boundaries. The comforts of his 8x10 cell no longer exist...he has become “institutionalized.” It's a term that means to be “dependent on routine of institution: lacking the will or ability to think and act independently because of having spent a long time in an institution such as a psychiatric hospital or prison.”

That's the mindset of the Israelites. They have become institutionalized; hoping and praying for generations to be redeemed and yet, here they are, in the midst of freedom and are longing for their captors to enslave them once more. Never mind that God has wielded some of the greatest supernatural acts in recorded history to demonstrate His power. Disregard the everlasting covenant he has made with their forefathers. Fear has overtaken them.

Have the Israelites forgotten the dramatic deliverance of the Passover? Already?

Do we forget how God has delivered us in the past just as quickly?

In what ways can faith become institutionalized? How do we end up putting limits on a limitless God? Why do we do that?

When we demonstrate our faith in God, is it in times of joy? Or in times of fear, sorrow and despair? Would you agree that the most challenging of times are prerequisites for faith? Why or why not?

Why do you think Moses says “The Lord will fight for you; you need *only* to be still?”

Once free and delivered out of Egypt, the people yearned for the days of bondage because they lacked courage and their faith was superficial. Following God is at times scary and uncomfortable, but if we are “still” He will reveal Himself to us and we will know that He is God.

Sometimes we won't allow God to do His work in our lives; we hold so close our perception of control when all the while, it's a falsehood. The sooner we realize that our control is limited at best and simply be still, God will reveal Himself in whatever capacity we need Him. Remember, He knows what we need before we even ask...just ask and be still.

QUIT YOUR WHINING!

I am confident we have all done our share of complaining. The senseless moaning and groaning about how life is not fair and this or that shouldn't have happened to us. Have you ever gotten to the point where you were sick of hearing yourself whine or complain? Imagine God's email inbox of complainers...wonder if it hits the SPAM folder? There's a difference in complaining and offering up our prayers for help. A student lesson from Precept Ministries International written by Kay Arthur poses the following notion.

Many times we waste time crying and moaning instead of doing what God said.

As for you.... You and I have a responsibility to act on what we know.

Exodus 14:15 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. 16 "As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land.

As for Me.... It is God's responsibility to be God. He has never failed.

Exodus 14:17 "As for Me, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. 18 "Then the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen." 19 The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. 20 So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night.

If we looked at our lives in this context (As for you and As for God) does that change how we should react to life's roadblocks? Are we looking for what God would have us to do and then leaving the rest up to him? In the grand scheme of things, what is it that God really requires of us?

STEPPING OUT IN FAITH

Can you imagine what it must have looked like to see the waters of the Red Sea parted? This was no small puddle. There were walls of water on either side of the dry sea bottom. The waters were probably loud and swirling, pushing against the divine arm holding the raging sea back. Put yourself in the place of an Israelite, standing there with his or her family, small children, what few possessions they could carry with them – and Moses says, let's go.

This isn't a matter of a few quick hops to the other side. Once you commit to the crossing the Red Sea, you are all in. And the danger of the waters returning to their natural place and swallowing up you and your loved ones is ever present.

There is a scene from Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade that captures some of the emotion and fear of taking a huge step of faith. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFntFdEGgws>

German theologian Jurgen Moltmann has said of his faith journey, "The road emerged only as I walked on it." By definition, faith is walking where we cannot see but where we trust God has led us to go.

For the Israelites, taking the next step involved stepping in to the Red Sea.

For Indiana Jones it was stepping on to a bridge that he believed was there but he could not see until he took that first step of faith.

What is the next step for you in your wilderness journey? What is that bridge for you?

LEADERSHIP

Moses has accomplished his mission and God's will or at least that's what the Israelites think until they see the 600 chariots bearing down on them. The Israelites were terrified and immediately blamed Moses for what they thought was their pending death. They would have rather been enslaved than die in the desert. Taking an intense and rather destitute situation and turning it into one of inspiration and motivation requires good leadership. In this example, it required much more than just a strong leader; it required unshakeable faith.

We've all been in positions of leadership at some time in our lives. As a parent, boss, teacher, etc.

What are some qualities of a good leader?

Can you give an example of a good leader in your life? How did they turn hopelessness into salvation?

See two great quotes on leadership below. **Does Moses represent these definitions?**

Aristotle- *He who has never learned to obey cannot be a good commander.*

Martin Luther King, Jr.-*The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.*

Where do you have an opportunity to lead by faith in the midst of fear (yours or others)?

PROMISES TO REMEMBER

Kay Arthur provides some good advice in times of fear and desperation:

If you find yourself between a rock and hard place:

1. God knows that you are there.
2. He has equipped you, prepared you.
3. He desires for you to remember that *I am God. There is none like unto Me.*
4. He has the situation under control. He is sovereign. The situation is not more than you can bear – there is a way of escape. He will not let it destroy you.
5. He says, "*You have My spirit inside of you.*" You will come out as more than a conqueror.

We will experience times that give us the opportunity to demonstrate our faith and obedience. Most likely though, those times will be full of fear, sorrow and/or desperation. Understanding that God is in full control and knows what we need, brings hope and joy into these situations. Like most of the Bible illustrates, we have a choice before us in every situation; we can be fearful of what we have before us OR we can know that God is God and he will fight for us should we only be still.

A Promise on the Mountain - Our Own Journey With God

On April 6th, we will spend our class time discussing our own journeys with God. Over these next few weeks, use the questions below to help prompt you in your reflections.

The passage for that day, Exodus 19:1-8a, describes a watershed event for the people of Israel. Everything up to this point flowed toward Egypt. Egyptian slavery was their history, their identity, and at times still the longing of their hearts. This does not mean that after Mt. Sinai Egypt was completely erased from their souls, as clearly seen from the story of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32). Someone said, "It took God 40 days to get His people out of Egypt and 40 years to get Egypt out of His people." On Mt. Sinai, however, God makes it clear what His intentions are for the Israelites. He is moving them toward the Promised Land.

The entire passage of Exodus 19:1-8a calls us to stop and reflect on our own personal journey with God. Many people have never taken time to think about what God has done in their past to get them where they are today. Many others refuse to slow down enough to ponder where God may be leading them. Use this time these next few weeks for spiritual reflection. Here are some thoughts and questions to get you started.

The people of Israel had been traveling for three months. They have stopped to camp in front of the mountain known as Mt. Sinai. They did not know when they hopped off their camels that this would be a significant place in their history. But when Moses went up to God, the Lord called to him. Earlier in Exodus 3, Moses also had encountered God at the burning bush but only after he "had gone over to look". Jeremiah 29:13 reminds us, "You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart."

Reflection #1 :

- Where is your Mt. Sinai, where you first heard God say, "This one belongs to me?"
- How do you seek/search for God? Where do you "go" to meet with God now?
- Do you think God has more to say to you than you usually take time to hear? What do you think He wants to say to you?

There is a lot of imagery around the passage "I carried you on eagles' wings." Studies reveal that eagles build their nests high on the side of cliffs. While this serves well to protect their young from predators, it makes for a frightening first step out of the nest for the baby eagles. As the young eagles reach the age of flying, the parents apparently begin removing the soft material from the nests. They rearrange sticks and thorns to make the nest uncomfortable to help their young self-discover, "I gotta get out of here."

Reflection #2:

- When has God used circumstances around you to stir you to make a change in your life?
- When have you felt a "restlessness" in your spirit that led to growth?

If the little ones still refuse to fly, the mother eagle will sometimes nudge the young eagles out of the nest.

Reflection #3 :

- When have you felt that God “nudged” you out of your comfort zone? How did He do that? What was the result?

Mother eagles know that their little ones will not immediately catch on to the notion of flapping their wings. When they begin to fall, she will swoop down to catch them. She soars even higher, releasing her child again and again until they also can soar as they were created to do.

Reflection #4:

- When have you felt yourself “falling” and felt God catch you?
- When has God carried you “on eagles’ wings?”

God spoke to His people through Moses in Exodus 19:5-6 saying, “...out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Reflection #5:

- Why do you think God chose you to be His “treasured possession?”
- What does it mean to you that you are a priest?
- Who is God calling a holy nation? (Compare with I Peter 2:9 – 10)

A Butterfly Book of Your Spiritual Journey

When significant things happen in our lives, one of the ways that we remember the lessons that we learned in those events is to capture them in something tangible. On a beach retreat years ago, I heard an important word from God that I wanted to remember. I could have written it down in a journal, but I knew the chances of me remembering that important word would be better if I could capture my learning in something more tangible. So I picked up a shell from the beach that day and made it my stone of remembrance – much like the stones used in the Old Testament as testimony to what God had done in that place. That shell sits on the vanity in my bathroom. Each morning when I see it, I remember what I heard from God that day.

A Butterfly book is a wonderful way to capture the learnings of your spiritual journey. The pictures do not necessarily have to be of the events themselves where you learned a lesson of trust or obedience or hope. They may simply come from that particular time in your life.

Collect 6 – 8 pictures from moments in your life where God was with you in the Wild. Assign a caption to each of them that may be meaningful only to you – a word or phrase that triggers the memory of what you learned or felt in those moments.

Create your own scrapbook with the pictures or upload them to Shutterfly and have a simple book bound for you – a tangible reminder of your spiritual journey with God and how he has been faithful to you *Along the Way*.