

January 20/21, 2024

Testing in the Wilderness
Exodus: The God Who Is With Series
Exodus 17:1-16
Pastor Ryan Harmon

Well, I don't know about you, but I have loved the adventure of driving around this town for the past week. If you close your eyes and just use a little creativity, it's like you have mountain ranges everywhere, right? I named one in our parking lot Mount Kroese after Zach, who does such an incredible job of clearing our parking lots. (*clapping*) Yeah, I don't know if Zach is here, but I know it can be wearing. I was driving and I saw a sign yesterday that said, "It literally feels like it's January 74th, the month that won't end...another way the weather can get wearing. But I know life can get wearing as well, and I'm quite confident that a number of you are walking through a month and time in your life that's been difficult. Just this past week, I was on the phone with some pastor friends. We do a zoom call every two months, and as I talked to them, I heard about a son that is now in jail... a child that is in the throes of addiction... about a car accident and a car wrapped around a tree, and just overwhelming circumstances in their lives. And the profound thought that occurred to me as I was taking all of that in, was, "Life is hard... life is hard, and it doesn't seem to be getting any easier.

If you came to church today, and what you were hoping to hear was maybe a five-step plan for how to have a prosperous and easy life, I'm afraid that you're going to be a little disappointed. But if what you find is that in the midst of all the difficulty, your heart just longs to know, "How do I walk through these moments well?" maybe even more, you wonder, "How does God use these circumstances for His very purposes?" ...if that's what your heart longs to know and understand, then our text is a feast for you this morning. That's what we want to consider as we continue this march through Exodus.

So, open your Bibles with me to Exodus, Chapter 17, and let's continue this journey with Israel through the wilderness. If you were able to join us last week or were able to watch online and follow along as Jeff took us from the shores of the Red Sea out into the wilderness, God has Israel now on this march towards Mount Sinai and ultimately towards the Promised Land, towards Canaan. But as we encountered last week and they discovered was, if they thought this was going to be a journey that was going to be peaceful and without interruption, without difficulty, well their expectations quickly were dashed, as they encountered struggle and trial, and even testing. So, their journey continues as we pick it up in Exodus 17, verse 1:

Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. (*NASB 1995, Exodus 17:1)

So, Israel set out in stages. This is a large group of people. We know there are 600,000 fighting men, and then if you add in women and children, this is well over a million people. And so you have to imagine that in order to set out on this journey, they're going to have to find some way to do it in an orderly fashion. So, they set out in stages going through the wilderness, through the

desert. Now what happened is they came to Rephidim, to this place where they were going to camp, and as they came across this site where they hoped there would be water, there was no water. Now, last week, Jeff talked about a similar episode, for when they came to Marah, there was water, but the water was undrinkable. And we just took in how the LORD came and made the undrinkable water miraculously drinkable for His people, providing for them last week at the waters of Marah.

So, of course we know human nature being what it is, and of course this is the way you and I would respond is we would say, "Oh, well, the LORD did it, so surely He'll do it again." And you will respond in faith, right? Is that what Israel will probably do? What do you think? Let's see how they respond in verse 2.

Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" (Vs. 2-3)

Last week, we learned that at the waters of Marah they grumbled at Moses, but there has been an escalation, and now they *quarrel* with him. A quarrel sounds like a nice word for conflict, but really this was an aggressive posture they were taking towards their leader, towards Moses. They had had enough! They were weary; they were frustrated, and this deliverance was not all they hoped it would be. And they began to even ask, "Wouldn't it have been better to just stay in Egypt? Maybe that would have been a better option for us." So Moses, in response, first addressed their questioning of him, God's chosen leader, but he then quickly moves on to a second question that is really the heart of the issue. Moses says, **"Why do you test the LORD?"**

We talked about testing a bit last week. It's very clear that as the LORD was leading Israel through the wilderness, He was leading them very intentionally, and He was having them encounter trials and tests. They weren't wandering or lost. It wasn't haphazard. God was working with great purpose during this time. He had great purpose for their wandering, and it's very clear. Exodus 16, verse 4 made it clear what His purpose was for this wandering time and for this testing. It says in Exodus 16 that He was trying to see whether the people would obey. So often when we think of testing, we think of it as kind of as a pop quiz, or something like a pass/fail and we feel a ton of pressure! And so that's perhaps the way we think about Israel's testing in the wilderness. But we need to be very clear that the LORD was not giving them a pass/fail test here. He wasn't testing them so they could prove their worthiness to Him. He already had, by His extravagant grace, brought them out of Egypt. He's not testing them in order to see if they are worthy of His goodness. No, He is teaching them in the wilderness what it means to follow Him. He is teaching them who He is. He is showing them that He is trustworthy. He is demonstrating His character, and He is helping them learn to obey. That's what these testings were about. These testings were teaching. So, while we tend to look at them negatively, God does not intend it that way. That is not His purpose for these moments for Israel.

It does raise a question though. Moses very clearly said to them, and it wasn't a good question, but he said, **"Why do you test the LORD?"** In other words, this is a problem, and so I guess the question that arises is, "If it's okay for the LORD to test His people, and the testing is even a positive

thing, why then is it such a problem for Israel to respond in kind? Why is it not okay for them to test the Lord?" After all, we're kind of in this moment, in our modern world, where there is no authority that's absolute, and everyone should have to prove their trustworthiness. And so, we might wonder to ourselves, "Why was that such a problem? Why couldn't Israel do to God what God was doing to them?" I want to come back to that. I think it's an important question, and we'll come back to it in just a few moments. But in this moment, I just want you to consider what Moses is in right now. As a leader, what a rough spot it is for him. How rough was it? It was so rough that he was fearing for his very life. Verse 4:

So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me."

Now make no mistake, a stoning was never intended to be light. There was no such thing as a light stoning, for they were intended to kill. The people, at least a faction of them, had become murderous in their intent. They were so frustrated they were ready to take Moses out. So how will God respond? Verse 5:

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us, or not?" (Vs. 5-7)

You know, sometimes you'll hear people say things like, "Well, the God of the New Testament is so gracious, kind and loving, but oh, the God of the Old Testament is so vengeful, so angry." And when I hear that I wonder to myself, "Have you read the Old Testament?" If you take it in, and just the way He responds in this moment when Israel is asking these questions, God responds with patience, understanding, kindness, and graciousness. But then they questioned the leader Moses that He had put in place, and they questioned his capability. "Would God do, and meet their needs? Would He do it again?" Then they moved on to question God's very presence with them. And in response to all of those rebellious questions, God just comes in and tells Moses, "Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to act, and I'm going to meet their needs again."

So Moses brings the leaders before Israel, and God is there in the midst; His presence is with them. Moses takes the staff, the staff that really has symbolized God's power. The staff has no power in and of itself. It's that God uses this very normal thing to demonstrate His absolute power. So when Moses strikes the rock and water flows from it, it's not a trickle, but there's an abundance of water, satisfying the thirst of a nation of people. God richly provides for their needs once again. In these short two chapters—ever since they departed from the Red Sea and made their way into the wilderness—this is now the third time that God has just demonstrated that He will be with them, as He promised. Not only that, but He will provide for them as He promised. He will take care of their needs, and yet they struggled to trust Him. In the midst of all of this testing, they still struggled to trust Him.

It's a very natural response. I think we can all admit, as people, that we don't like discomfort. We don't like it when things are painful, or when there are questions. That's difficult for us. But the challenge here, and the challenge for Israel, was not to get so caught up in their thirsty mouths or their hungry stomachs, that they would lose sight of the fact that God was doing something bigger. He had a purpose and an intent in the midst of these difficult moments.

There's an author named Carmen Joy Imes, and she's written a book about this little moment in the exodus journeying of Israel. It's called *Bearing God's Name*, and in it she uses a word to describe this moment for Israel. It's a word we don't really use often. The word is liminal...liminal! If we were at a camp or we were in a classroom, I'd say, "Now let's say it together... "Liminal," right? It's a great little word. Liminal just means, *the time in between*. Israel has set out, but they haven't reached their destination. They're in this *in between moment*. It's called a liminal space. That's the way she refers to it. If you were ever, as a kid on a road trip, and you said to your parents, "Are we there yet?" that's a liminal place. It's uncomfortable; it's easy to get impatient. So, with that thought in mind, she continues and says this. *"For Israel, the wilderness journey from Egypt to Canaan is liminal space. Far more than just a place to pass through, it is the workshop of Israel's becoming. The wilderness is the temporary destination that makes them who they are. Liminal places always do this. They change us."*

Oh, God had great intent in the wilderness, and it wasn't to make the path easy! It wasn't to remove all the trouble. It was to teach His people how to trust Him in the midst of the trouble. Oh, their journey—make no mistake—their journey was trying. It was difficult; it was tiring. You could see that in their response. You might say in that moment, "God, why are You allowing this?" And the very clear answer is, He allowed it, and He was doing it in order to teach them to trust Him. So, God was dealing with Israel.

The question for Israel in this moment, and really by extension the question for us as God's people is, "In these moments that are difficult, in these liminal spaces where things are not quite complete, and we don't know all the answers, the question for us is: Will we accept the teaching that God offers in that very moment? Will we submit to Him? Will we say, "Lord, what exactly are You trying to teach me? How are you looking to grow me?" Will we do that, or will we grumble? When we focus on the problem when we get weary, will we test the Lord or will we let that moment just pass right on by? That's the challenge.

Well, as chapter 17 continues, these challenges continue for Israel. They've met these challenges that are very natural: food and drink. But as the chapter continues, they are going to meet a different challenge. A warring army comes on the scene. Verse 8:

Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim.

We don't know a lot about Amalek and his army. We do know that they are descendants of Esau, so these are distant relatives of Israel. But we know in this moment, they clearly ambushed Israel when they came upon them at Rephidim. And it had to be a moment that was incredibly frightening for Israel. They were not trained up as an army. When they got delivered from Egypt, they didn't battle; they didn't go to battle with the Egyptians. God had done everything. They hadn't lifted a

finger. But now as this army comes on the scene, it was clear that this time was going to be different. They were going to have to fight. So, we see that in verse 9:

So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.” Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. But Moses’ hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. (Vs. 9-13)

What an amazing scene...just incredible! This army comes on the scene, and we meet Joshua for the first time, the one who ultimately will lead the people into Canaan, and who had gained the confidence of Moses. He was kind of the captain of the army, so to speak. So Joshua and the men go down on the field, but there's essentially another field of battle as well. Moses and Aaron and Hur go to the top of the hill, and we have these two scenes. It's interesting that Moses tells Joshua to go out, and then he says, "*Tomorrow I will climb the hill.*" I'm going to speculate for just a moment, since we don't know exactly why Moses waited a day. We're not told why. But I suspect that maybe part of what God was doing in that moment was He wanted Israel to battle for just a moment and see that they couldn't do it without Him.

And so *tomorrow*, Moses and Aaron and Hur climb the hill. And in this scene that is just so amazing, he's holding up his hands, and as his hands are lifted, Israel prevails, but when his hands drop because of weariness, then Amalek and his army prevail. And so in a moment of detail that is just so interesting that the text includes it, because it clearly indicates that God just loves to use weak people, right? The army is fighting. They've been fighting for 24 hours, and you want to say, "Well, Moses, you can't even stand up? Everyone is swinging swords for 24 hours and you can't stand up and hold a staff?" Moses and Aaron and Hur are on top of that mountain, so Aaron and Hur have to find a way for Moses to sit down, and they have to hold up his hands. And in time, Joshua and the army defeat Amalek. It's just an incredible reminder that it was so important that Israel not place confidence in Moses' hands so to speak, or in the staff. They had to look beyond Moses to the power that was supplying the victory. Moses was obedient, but God was winning the battle. That battle was won on the hill; it wasn't won down on the field. God was in charge and God was bringing about the victory. God was using the weak and the weary in the world to do what only He can do. And Israel had to learn that. As they would continue their march to the Promised Land, they were going to encounter other armies. It was a critical thing for them to learn. God is their leader. Moses obeyed, but God provided the victory.

It's an essential learning for Israel, and as this chapter comes to a close, steps are taken to ensure that they will remember just that. Verse 14:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” Moses built an altar and named it The LORD is My Banner;” (Vs. 14-15)

These memorials were intended to stir up the memories of God's victories, to remind the people what God did and to infuse them with courage for the moment. Don't forget...don't forget...don't forget that this is who God is. And so Moses made a memorial. He **named it The LORD is My Banner**. We know that in the ancient Near East, Egypt and other nations would have banners that would be stationed by their armies as the different regiments would go out. These banners had the names of maybe their gods that they were marching out under, and under whose authority they stood. But what's very clear is that Moses was making a declarative statement, "God is our leader." Israel was led by God. He was the One that went to battle for them. He was their leader. He was the One who brought the victory. They could never forget that.

As we come to the last verse of the chapter, we actually come upon the most difficult verse to understand. I'm going to linger on it for just a moment. Verse 16 says:

... and he said, "The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation."

Before explaining it, I'm going to read it to you just quite literally. Okay, so this would be if we took the Hebrew and just translated it word for word, even keeping the same sentence structure. It says, "**Because a hand is on the throne of the LORD, war is to the LORD, with Amalek from generation to generation.**" Now doesn't that make you thankful for Bible translators? (*laughter*) They help us with these things. So, the **hand is on the throne** is kind of the phrase in question and the way the New American Standard that I'm reading from interprets that, is that it is a little bit like God putting His hand on the throne and swearing an oath, a little bit like we would in a courtroom. You place your hand on a Bible, and you make an oath. And the oath that the Lord made is, *Amalek will be no more. I will be against Amalek.* And that is certainly possible.

There is another way to look at this phrase, though, and say, "It's not the hand of the Lord, it's actually the hand of Amalek coming up against the Lord." And I think, in the context, that makes the most sense. That's the way the NIV translates this verse, so let me read that to you. "**Because hands were lifted up against the throne of the LORD, the LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.**" In other words, as chapter 17 comes to a close, what we have here is a promise from God that's directed toward Amalek, but ultimately applies to Israel. And the statement, the promise, is this: When people come up against Israel, they are coming up against God Himself and He will not stand for it. He is with His people. He will protect His people; He will go to battle for His people. And, ultimately, if an army comes up or a king comes up, and they try to do battle with Israel, they are doing battle with the LORD GOD, and He will not let Israel stand alone. They don't have to fend for themselves. He is with them. They will need to remember that in the days to come, in the years to come, as they set out on this conquest of the land that He had promised them, the LORD is with them.

So now as we continue, let me return to this question I have kind of let hang for a few moments. Going back to the testing, the question was this. "Why is it wrong for Israel to test the LORD if it's good and helpful for the LORD to test Israel?" These chapters make it very, very clear that God had a clear purpose for Israel, for this time of testing, this liminal space that they were in. This in-between time, as they're on this wandering that took a number of years, they're going to wander

for a while, and as uncomfortable as it was, God had a very clear purpose. This was God's classroom, and He was teaching...He was constantly teaching.

Last week, Jeff mentioned how years ago when Bryan walked us through 1 and 2 Samuel and talked about David's time in the wilderness, he talked about how that was the *Wilderness School of Leadership*. God uses these times where you're just stripped bare. He uses them to teach. It's clearly what He does. God has always used times like these, and He still uses times like these with His people. God uses these times because He knows that we need it...we need it! Israel needed it. See, the truth is that every one of us in this room—you, and me—all of us, we all need to grow. None of us have arrived; none of us can say, "You know what? God is done with me; there's nothing else I need to learn. I don't need to learn to trust Him more." None of us can say that. None of us are complete.

We say here at Lincoln Berean Church that our mission is **to glorify God by seeking to present every person complete in Christ**. Well, that moment is a future moment. There is a moment when the new heavens and new earth are created, and we are transformed, finally and ultimately. We step into this glorious new reality with our Lord and Savior. We long for that moment. And in our vision statement we say that **we're people coming together to know Jesus, become more like Him, and help others do the same**. And that phrase, *become more like Him*, implies growth. I'm going to become more like Him. My hope, my prayer is that by the grace of God a year from now, I'll be a little bit more like Jesus than I am right now. I'm in-process. I'm growing; I'm learning. None of us are complete. None of us are done. God is not finished with us.

That's exactly the march that He has Israel on. God had them going through this classroom: these difficulties, these trials, these teachings and testings, because He knows they needed to grow. Oh, they had been delivered, miraculously delivered, saved out of the hands of slavery. But now they were in this moment when He was teaching them who He was, teaching them that they could always count on Him, teaching them that they could trust Him. Demonstrating it over and over again, because we don't learn things just like that; we walk through a process, and God is patiently guiding them through this process. Oh, they had learned, but there was more yet to learn.

And the same can be said of each one of us. We are growing, and yet there is more growing that is to come. It's why, really, we can think of the Christian life as just this constant march and progression in growth in Christ's likeness. That is what God is doing for each one of us, if we are found in Him. It's absolutely true of each one of us. Everyone in this room can say that. God is causing growth in me; I have more room to grow. And none of that can be said about God for He doesn't need to learn a thing...doesn't need to grow an ounce. There's nothing that He lacks. There's no refinement that needs to occur in Him. He is absolutely perfect and glorious and all-consuming love and goodness. God does not need to grow one bit. And so, what is so inappropriate, really, about us testing Him, is that it implies that maybe He does need to grow. Maybe He's not quite capable. Maybe He has a thing or two to learn.

Analogies never work perfectly, especially when we're talking about God, but try this one on for size. In our house, like every house, there's always things that need to get done. And so occasionally there'll be times where I'll say to my kids, "Hey, we've got to clean this place up. Let's clean the basement. You know, pick up the socks and kind of get those toys in place." And

we'll kind of assign some chores. Now, every once in a while, not all the time, and I'm not going to name which child has said this to me, but every once in a while, someone will say to me, "You know what? It's not fair that you get to give me chores. I'm going to give you some chores." That's not how that works. (*laughter*) It's not that I think I'm better than my kids. It's not that I don't have things to learn, of course. If you looked, I'm imperfect as a father; I have to apologize. It's not that I think I'm above chores. Of course not. The reality in that moment is that what's happening is there's a misunderstanding about the nature of the role and the relationship that we have. There's a difference between being a parent and a child. It's an important distinction. Not that I think I'm above chores, really. If my kids would understand the life of an adult, they'd realized that really, all of life is chores, right? There are a few little, tiny moments that aren't chores. Everything else is kind of a chore, getting stuff done, doing what needs to be done. In that moment, they're just not understanding the nature of the roles that we have.

When we question God, when we test Him, we're forgetting the distinction between Creator and creature, God is perfect; He has nothing that He needs to learn. In the flesh it makes sense that occasionally we want to say to God, "Oh, why? Why are You doing this? Are You not able? Are You not present?" But when we get down to it, we will understand that really that says more about my heart than it says anything about God. If I were to see Him as He truly is, I would understand that He is perfectly able. He can do whatever He wants, and He loves me, and He has promised that He will be present with me. I wouldn't be inclined to test Him if I would just see Him as He truly is.

So where does that leave us? Well, the first thing that I hope it does for you is it just draws you up into worship. What a God we serve! Those of us that are constantly needing to grow, we get to serve and worship and be in the presence of the One that has no need for growth, because He is absolute perfection—completely capable, more wonderful than we can possibly imagine. Let's just, for a moment, allow our hearts to be caught up and say, "Oh, Lord, I'm so thankful that You are God. You're amazing." But it's true, and as glorious as that thought is, I know, and I understand that doesn't change the fact that life is hard...life is hard! I know that for my own life. I know that for many of your lives. I know around this room right now there are people that are walking through deep, deep loneliness. I know stories of people dealing with crippling addictions. I know stories of disappointment, and family struggles, troubles at work, troubles at home, financial stress. Disappointments just seem to mount up and come over and over again. I understand that. Life is hard, but that does not mean that God has abandoned us. Life is hard, but that does not mean that God has given up. Life is hard, but that does not mean that God is not working. We serve a God that, in the midst of these struggles, He is constantly working, constantly teaching in these liminal places, these in-between moments. Oh, He is teaching, and He is working.

So, here's the challenge. The challenge for us as we close today, is we have a choice. Either we walk through these moments, these difficulties, these trials, even these testings, and we treat them as annoying obstacles in our life that we merely have to tolerate, or we approach them as incredible opportunities to be taught by God. To learn to trust Him more...to see His character shine through...to help us grow into people more resilient in trust, and in confidence that He is God, and we are not. He is able and He promises He'll never leave us; He'll never forsake us. We can approach these moments as opportunities to become more like His Son. You know, during those final moments of Jesus' days and His ministry on the earth, He gathered His disciples together in

that Upper Room, and He had a sobering word for them. As recounted in John 16, as He looked at His disciples, He said, "***In the world you will have tribulation...you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world.***"

Here's what the world promises: tribulation, trouble, trial, hardship. But if you are in Christ, if you have cast your faith upon Him and you are found in Him, well, He promises to be with you every step of the way. And He promises to teach you and to grow you as you seek after Him. If you submit to Him and say, "Lord, teach me in this moment. It's so hard, teach me to trust. Teach me how You would walk through this. Teach me how to walk through this well, as You would walk through it." Well, He promises that He will do that because He is the One that has overcome the world, and He is able.

So, what are you walking through? What difficulty do you find yourself in? In what liminal moment do you find yourself? Each moment for us is different. But in these moments, let us be people that seek after God, that cling to Him and learn to trust Him, that He might come in and teach us, and grow us, and help us become more like His Son. For the sake of His name, let us not let these moments pass us by.

Our Father, we do thank You that You are in charge of all things. Every single circumstance, Lord, none of them escape Your notice. There's no trial; there's no difficulty; there's nothing that we can encounter that compromises Your sovereignty. You are in charge. You promise, Jesus, that through Your Spirit, that You are with us. You're closer than we could possibly know, and so we ask You, Lord, give us eyes to see You working in the midst of our difficulties. Help our eyes to be drawn up, not to the things that are difficult, but to You, who is able to overcome, You, who is able to teach, You who is able to take all that is wrong and transform it into goodness, for the sake of Your name. Oh, Lord, we trust You with that. We ask that you would do it for Your name's sake. We pray these things in Your name, Amen.

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WINTER 2024 // WEEK 2

Life Group Questions

Exodus – The God Who is With // January 20-21, 2024

Testing In the Wilderness // Exodus 17:1-16

Introduction

Chapter 17 of Exodus recounts the Israelites' journey in the wilderness, facing a lack of resources and a new enemy. This chapter underscores themes of faith in the midst of trials and God's divine authority and provision.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. Due to preferences over a wide range of groups, we do not expect you will cover every question each week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

- 1) What is your greatest interest or passion in your life right now?

- 2) What is one habit you would like to build in 2024?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
 - c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you
 - 2) Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group.
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Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

- 1) What is one thing that you took away from Pastor Ryan's sermon this past weekend?
- 2) Last week in Exodus 16, we saw an example of God testing the faithfulness of the Israelites. Now in chapter 17, we see them trying to test God in return (*verse 2*). **Why is it improper for people to put God to the test?**

Think about a time when you felt as if your faith was being tested. How did you respond? How did you learn and grow through your test?

- 3) In his letters, Paul visits some themes from our Exodus passage that can broaden our understanding. He writes in 2 Timothy 2:13, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself." This stands as a reminder that God's nature is resolute, and He will not fail to keep His promises under any circumstances. Here in Exodus, even as Israel fails to trust in God, He shows them favor and provides them with water to drink. **Have you had a time in your life when God has provided for you, even when you were not putting your hope in Him? Share this with your group.**

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 with your group. Paul creates a connection between the rock that produced water in Exodus, and Jesus, the rock upon which our faith is built. In the same way that the Israelites quarreled amongst themselves before relying on God, **do you find it difficult to seek Jesus first when facing difficulty in your own life? Why or why not?**

- 4) Back in chapter 4 of Exodus, Moses admits to some of his weaknesses, such as his slowness of speech, his authority to lead the people of Israel, and his reluctance to step out in faith. Now, when facing Amalek, it is his physical weakness that must be overcome in order for victory to be achieved (verses 11-12). **How do you personally handle your own weaknesses in your life?**

Ultimately it was Moses's companions that kept him steady until the battle was over. **How can the people in your group best support you?**

Both when drawing water from the rock and guiding the battle with Amalek, Moses uses his staff as a conduit of God’s power. It is a symbol of God’s vested authority, and without Him, it would be just a piece of wood. Similarly, we are bearers of God’s image and His Spirit who lives within us (see *Galatians 5:22-24*, *1 Corinthians 12:12-14*, and *Romans 8:9* for examples of how the Holy Spirit works in our lives). **What are some ways that we can recognize and celebrate this unique role that God gives us in His world?**

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in Life Group, take a few moments to share how the Lord may have used this exercise in your life.**

Prayer Focus: This week, pray for the Lord to be the banner that identifies your life. Make the choice each day to let your relationship with Jesus set you apart from the world around you.

Almighty God
Be my banner and my victory
In both peace and conflict,
And transform me
With your Word and your Spirit
Day by day and hour by hour
To make me more like you
And show your truth to those around me.
I pray this in the name of Jesus,
Amen.

Scripture Focus: In Colossians 1:13-20, Paul beautifully describes the process and purpose of the Lord’s creation. As you read it each day, take a moment to enjoy the world that God has made, and acknowledge his place in it, as well as your own.

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of “coming together” is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say “Amen” aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?