

February 3/4, 2024

How to Approach a Holy God

Exodus: The God Who is With Series

Exodus 19:1-25

Pastor Ryan Harmon

One of the most interesting evenings I've ever had in my life occurred probably about ten to twelve years ago when one of our students at UNL invited me to join him and go to an open forum with the young atheists at UNL. I thought that sounded really fascinating, so of course I said, "Yes, let's do it," and we showed up. We were the only two people who showed up. (*laughter*) So six atheists were with me and my friend, and we ended up having a great discussion; it was a fascinating evening. At one point I asked them this question. I wasn't so much curious whether they believed there's a God; I knew the answer to that. So my question was, "Would you like there to be a god?" One of them immediately spoke up and said, "Oh, that would be great!" I was a little surprised by that, and so I asked him, "Why?" And he said, "Well, if there was a god, then he'd be like a genie, and I could ask him whatever I'd want, and he'd have to do it." It was a really honest answer, and I appreciated that. But as the conversation continued, I just encouraged him to at least consider this for a moment. "If there's a Being that created everything, that holds everything in existence, does he really think he'd approach that Being as a genie? Do you really think that would be the way to approach a Being that powerful, that overwhelming? Would it be a genie if you were to come face to face with the holy God, the God that created all things? What do you think that moment would be like?"

If I would have you pull out your calendars now and say, "Hey, mark it down. Tomorrow—24 hours from right now—you are going to have an encounter with the God of the universe." How would you prepare for that moment? That's what we want to consider this morning. We want to consider that because that's precisely the moment where Israel finds itself. So, open your Bibles with me to Exodus, Chapter 19. We've been walking with Israel on this exodus journey. God has brought them out of Egypt. He delivered them across the sea, and over the past few weeks we've walked with them as they've encountered various trials on this learning course with God about what it is to live with Him and to trust Him. Israel has been brought out—God made it very clear—in order to come to Him in the wilderness, to worship and serve Him. That was the intent. So as the story continues, here they are on the doorstep of a dramatic encounter with the very God that had delivered them. So, Exodus 19, verse 1:

In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain. (*NASB, Exodus 19:1-2)

Three months have transpired—three months of travel—a quarter of a year. No doubt, this would have been a wearying trip. I'm sure they were very tired. It was a large group of people, and it's not necessarily easy terrain to travel through. So, I'm sure they were somewhat weary; but oh, their minds also had to be filled with the wonders of what God had revealed to them, the ways He had performed miracles on their behalf as they were on this wandering. We've recounted them these

past few weeks. They came across the sea and God delivered them. And then they came across bitter water and God made it sweet. Then He provided manna from heaven and quail in abundance, and then He brought water forth from the rock. And then Amalek came, and God delivered them. And then last week there was a visit from the in-laws. It's rough! God had shown Himself to them, demonstrated that He was trustworthy, and now they are at the end of the first leg of this journey as they make this march towards the Promised Land that God has for them. God has brought them back to the mountain that He told Moses He would bring the nation back to...the very mountain where Moses met God in that burning bush. And God said in that moment, "I will deliver them. They will join Me here, and they will worship Me here at this mountain." So now they have arrived, and now they wait for what is next. Verse 3:

**Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying,
"Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel:**

This was familiar territory for Moses. This is where it all began; his story began in Egypt, but really this new phase of his life as a servant of God, began right here where God met him in the burning bush...holy ground for Moses. He knows what to do, so he starts climbing this mountain. He has said he's going to go meet with God, but in a beautiful picture as Moses is making that climb, it's almost as if God is anxious to start talking. And so as Moses is climbing, God just blurts out, "**Thus you shall say...**" One commentator said that the scene leaves the impression that Yahweh, that God, is as eager to begin this conversation as are Moses and Israel. God can't wait. "Let's start this relationship in earnest." And of course that makes perfect sense, because it has all been leading up to this moment. This is what we knew at the outset that God was going to do. He was going to take them back to this exact place. So, the LORD, Yahweh, continues in verse 4:

'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'
These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." (Vs. 4-6)

We've emphasized it a few times through this series, but it's important for us to remember that throughout Exodus, all the initiative is God's. God acts. No one has proved themselves worthy of His intervention, of His encounter with them. No one has done it just right. And God said, "Okay, because they proved themselves worthy, then I will come forward?" No! God saved Israel just because He chose to save Israel. God delivered Israel because He chose to deliver Israel. God is the first actor. God is the initiator. Israel's job throughout was not to impress God. It was to respond to God. God makes a statement; they are to respond. God saves them. They are to respond and worship in obedience. God acted first, and here, God is the first One who speaks. And as He spoke, He described Israel—His people—three different ways, each of them significant on their own. But when we take these three kinds of descriptions of His people together, we kind of gain this composite picture of what God desires for His people, for Israel.

He starts by saying that they were **My own possession**. That could just as easily be translated as *treasured possession*, or *prized possession*. Do you have a prized possession or something you just cherish? Israel is God's prized possession. And imagine for these people who have been in slavery

for 400 years, what it must have been like to have the Creator of the universe say, “You were slaves; now, you're My prized possession.” That's your identity.

As He continued, He said that they were to be **a kingdom of priests**. We know in the ancient world, the purpose of priests was to represent the God that they worked for, essentially to demonstrate who He is to the world and kind of to be an intermediary between the people and between their God. They were to represent Him. When people interacted with the priests, it gave them a sense of what God was like. And that's precisely what Israel was to be. They were to be a kingdom of priests, each and every one of them—all the members of that nation—representing God to the world. God has given them an identity. He has told them, “This is what you are. You are my treasured possession, and here is what you will do. You are My priests. You have a sacred mission to make My name known.”

Finally, He calls them **a holy nation**. We've talked about that word **holy** quite a bit. We're going to talk about it a bit more today. But in the basic sense, holy is to be *set apart* or to be *other than*, and Israel was God's *set-apart* people, and they were called to be *other than* the nations that surrounded them. They were to be distinct and peculiar, set apart for God. They were to live among people, among the other nations, but they were to be completely different, to live and act and be and behave differently, because they served a God that is completely *other than* all the pagan false gods that these other nations worshipped. They were to be God's peculiar people upon the earth.

Now, again, I've said it once already, but it's just important. This is not God telling Israel, “This is what you must do to be saved.” No, the idea is, “I have delivered you, and now this is the relationship that I want to have with you. This is who you are to Me.” Calling His people into a response, God had freed Israel from Egypt in order to free them up to live in a constant interactive relationship with Him. He's kind of setting out that this is what I want this relationship to look like. God's people are His prized possession, His special treasure. That is what He tells Israel.

And I, just for a moment, want to fast forward for those of us in this room that are now people who sit under the shadow of the cross, and we just have to acknowledge and glory in the fact that we, as God's people, are His prized possession. You, if you are in Christ, you are His prized possession. He cherishes you.

As we move forward, and we get to the New Testament, this beautiful language is picked up by Peter in his first epistle, this idea of what our identity and what our calling is. Listen to these words from 1 Peter 2, verse 9. Peter says:

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, a royal PRIESTHOOD, a HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION...almost verbatim. So the question is, “Why? Are we all those things so that we can just sit and stare at ourselves in the mirror and say, ‘Boy, aren't we great?’” Not at all! Peter continues...**so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.**

God's people are His peculiar, special treasure, His treasured possession. And here at the outset of His interaction with Israel, at the mountain that He called them back to, He gives them an identity.

“This is who you are to Me,” and He also gives them a sacred mission, “Here is what you are to be about in the world.” How would Israel respond? Would they embrace God's words? Verse 7:

So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do!” And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD. (Vs. 7-8)

Well, of course we know the rest of the story, don't we, and we know it's not quite as simple as that. We know that very soon, while still at this mountain, Israel is going to do that which the LORD said not to do. But I think what we have to just kind of pay attention to here is the fact that what we are seeing from Israel is at least the desire of their heart, the intent of their heart, the willingness of their heart. They are saying to the LORD, collectively, “We will obey; we will do it.” And we know, and God knew, they would fail. But God in His graciousness, is willing to work with the willing. He saw the desire of their hearts, and even though they were incapable of following that through, He saw their desire. He saw their willingness, and God comes in and graciously works with willing people who are willing to submit to Him. So, in light of that, the LORD continues the conversation in verse 9:

The LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever.” Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD.

The LORD also said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.’ When the ram’s horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.” So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. He said to the people, “Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.” (Vs. 9-15)

So Moses went and talked to the LORD and said, “Here is the way the people responded.” And the next step that Yahweh delivers to Moses is kind of letting him know what needs to happen next. Here are a few actions that need to be taken before I descend. He tells Moses that if they are to be His people, he is to **consecrate them**. So Moses does just that. He consecrates Israel. To consecrate something is essentially *to set it apart*. It's a little bit like making it holy. It's dedicating something to God and to God alone. It's the statement, “LORD, I am yours; I am not my own.” And Moses did that over the people. Somehow he consecrated them, dedicating them to the LORD. We don't know exactly how he did that, whether it was a prayer of consecration or some kind of ceremony, but we do know what's significant is this is an overt intentional statement that Israel belongs to God, and God alone. Then, in response, immediately after that, Israel was **to wash their clothes**. Again, we're not quite sure where that came from, what the precedent is for that, but when you

take those two actions together—the consecration, and the washing of the clothes—what is very evident is that what the LORD is doing for Israel is He is helping them walk intentionally through these days so that they might be prepared to meet Him when He descends. He's helping them take physical actions and mental actions to walk through this moment soberly and thoughtfully and intentionally, not haphazardly, not just kind of showing up at the scene and seeing if God happens to arrive, but to walk through these days of preparation with intensity and intentionality, that they might come before the LORD on that day, with purpose.

Before we talk about that very meeting, which is what comes next, we have to also notice that Moses seems to add a third kind of regulation or action. He tells them that ***a man is not supposed to go near a woman***, and consequently then also, a woman is not to come near a man. And what this is about is just saying that in the nation, over this period of preparation, there just won't be any sexual activity. There will be thoughtful, meditative preparation for this moment of meeting the LORD, a somber preparation. God is going to come, and He wants His people to be ready.

Now, I suppose a question that kind of arises in this moment is: “What kind of God is it that sets up all this preparation and all these regulations just for a meeting?” And the answer is: a dangerous God. Our God is dangerous. Our God is immense in power, more overwhelming and bigger than we can possibly imagine. He is not a genie. No, He is all-mighty God. And it was important that Israel approach Him with respect and with awe. His dangerous nature is kind of made clear. It's made evident by the fact that God sets up all these boundaries. He told the people, “If you come too close, the result will be death. If you transcend the boundaries that I've set up, there will be consequences for that.” Because this is serious stuff, meeting God is a serious thing. And that's why Israel was to prepare with intentionality, with sobriety, as they prepare to meet their powerful God. Our God is not weak and thank goodness He is not. Who wants to worship a weak God? No, our God is majestic in power, glorious in every way, incomparable in terms that we can barely even conceive of His goodness, of His might.

So Israel was to approach with reverence, with awe and with all respect. All of that is kind of summed up when we say things like, “We are a people who fear God.” What we mean by that is we give Him the respect that He's due. There's no one like Him. There's no being greater. There are many different ways to describe all the different glorious facets of God's character. And there are wonderful books written on this subject, kind of going through the attributes of God, and they are incredibly helpful.

But a biblical word that sums all this up is one that we talked about a little earlier, and one that we just sang over and over. It's this word, *holy*. Our God is holy. There's an Old Testament theologian named John Walton that summed up the concept of holiness this way. “God's holiness is the combination of all His attributes. All of these attributes, combined together, distinguish Him from us. His creation where God is omnipresent. He's omnipotent. He's omniscient.” And all those things are true. And when you take all of that together, and just consider His immensity and His brilliance, the word that kind of describes all that is, He is *holy*, a *holy* God, completely *other than*, incomparable in greatness.

So Israel was to approach this moment of meeting Him with seriousness. They weren't to enter into it lightly. And so now, as they move forward, that day arrived. Verse 16:

So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. (Vs. 16-19)

(A brief video of lightning and sounds of thunder)

Oh, that was just a sliver of what that must have been like. Use your imagination and just imagine that incredible scene! Smoke descends upon the mountain, surely to obscure Israel's eyes from seeing the fullness of God's presence. They can't handle the fullness of His presence; they can't see it. God knows that about them, and so He clouds the mountain. He covers it in the cloud, and then with fire and lightning and thunder. A normal mountain, in the presence of God, turns into what is essentially a volcano. (There are no volcanoes in that part of the world.) Now, the mountain can't stand in terms of standing before the glory of the living God, mighty and powerful and wholly overwhelming. And then in the midst of all of that scene—that fire and light show that had to be overwhelming—a trumpet sound drew louder and louder. And it's not because there's an angel or someone else blowing on that trumpet louder and louder. It's because it's drawing nearer and nearer and nearer—a little bit like when you see an ambulance far off and as it draws near, it pierces your ears. God Himself was drawing near, coming down upon that mountain, and in a weird way, in a significant way, God is omnipresent. He is everywhere. But there are times where it's almost as if there is a thickness to His presence, a consolidation of His presence in some way. And there's a heavy weightiness to God's glorious presence. When we think of who our God is, this is what we need to think about. We must consider who God is and that God delivered us out of sin and death. This is who God is: awesome in might...awesome in power...completely holy...majestic...glorious...massive...powerful...dangerous...holy!

The chapter comes to a close. God has just come upon them, and now He, once again, issues a warning for Israel. He already told them not to cross the boundaries. “Don't come too near to My holiness.” But here He reiterates that warning another time. Verse 20:

The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Go down, warn the people, so that they do not break through to the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish. Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, or else the LORD will break out against them.” Moses said to the LORD, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us, saying, ‘Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.’ ” Then the LORD said to him, “Go down and come up *again*, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD , or He will break forth upon them.” So Moses went down to the people and told them. (Vs. 20-25)

I'm betting there's a few people in this very room that, if a tornado was coming through, they wouldn't run to the basement. They'd run out to go see it and get closer. *(laughter)* Maybe a few of you are like that. Moses, for whatever reason, thought all the people have heard the LORD. Look, surely they won't. They won't go across that boundary. But God knew that people are people, and they probably would. So He once again comes and ushers out, kind of gives forth this serious warning for anyone tempted to maybe climb up part of the mountain. Maybe they can get a bit closer. Any brave soul that thinks he can just get a better angle from this location, God is giving a warning that the consequences of that are serious; the consequences are death. Earlier it seemed as though the warning kind of described a punishment or a consequence that would be kind of delivered by the people themselves. There would be a stoning of a man or a beast that went too far. But here it seems as though part of what's being suggested is that coming into close contact with God, in His holiness, is something that mere humanity cannot handle on their own. In the same way that if you draw nearer to a fire, you will get burned. Drawing nearer to God in His holiness, if He has not invited you in and prepared you, will result in death. After all, our God is a consuming fire! He is not to be taken lightly. Because of this fact, just the reality of who He is, He sets forth these boundaries. He understands who His people are, and so He has set apart Aaron and Moses. They can come all the way in, just an incredible thing to consider. The priests can come a bit closer, but the people need to stand far off.

God set up these boundaries for the same reason that He set up all His regulations. We talked about this last week. All of it is intended to set up a world within which flourishing can occur. God knows that it's important that a people not draw too near to Him. And so in a strange way, this is a gracious act by Him. He's acknowledging their frailty, their smallness, their humanity, and He's saying, "If you do this, this will burn you, and so I am going to graciously give you a boundary and I want you to heed it." He's giving them a provision because He knows His holiness is overwhelming, and they were not a people that were yet taking it seriously enough. He had to say, "This is how you should approach." He said, "You should remain two layers away, and I can't talk directly with you. That would overwhelm you. I'm going to work through a mediator." And so He worked through Moses, Moses, the mediator to the people. All of this sets the stage for what is about to come next week. It's a moment where God delivers His Law, His wisdom for His people, His loving instruction for what He is organizing for His society, His culture, and delivering to His people His very wisdom out of love, because they are His treasured possession.

As I was working through this text this past week, I found myself kind of living in this tension. Maybe you feel a little bit of it yourself. On the one hand, we have this call. "Go out, tell everyone about coming near to God and just kind of being part of His community." And you say, "Okay," and then simultaneously you see that, "Hey, if you touch the wrong part of the mountain, you might die." A dangerous God...a holy God...and you have this tension of calling people to come in and worship Him.

So as I was considering this, my mind went all the way back to a childhood book I'm sure many of you have read the series: *Chronicles of Narnia*. And in the most famous book in the series, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, there is a scene where the children, who are kind of the main characters, are about to meet Aslan, the lion. Aslan, the creator of Narnia, the king of Narnia...and not only that, but a lion, right? Well, meeting a lion is a sobering thing, and so in the anticipation of that moment, one of the children says, "Is he quite safe?" In other words, "Am I going to be

okay?” And the answer one of the characters gives is very helpful. One of the citizens of Narnia says, “Who said anything about safe? Of course, he's not safe, but he's good. He's the king.” Again... “He's not safe, oh but he is good!” What a helpful distinction Lewis gives to us there!

Our God is not safe. He is a consuming fire...but He is good. And you, if you're in Christ, you are His special treasure, His treasured possession, called into an unending relationship with Him, and to be caught up in mission with Him of making our good God known. Not safe, but oh He's good! Each one of us has been given a mission as God's people, and God has always been about mission, always been about making Himself known through His people. That is a mission that's been given to every one of us if we are one of God's people.

I hope that there are people that you're praying for, people in your neighborhood, people in your workplace, people that you just are pleading with God about, and you are trying as best you can, in our feeble ways, to represent God rightly, appropriately. But I want to encourage you, as you tell others about who God is... “Oh bring Him to them in the fullness of His Holiness. Don't give them a meager God, a meek God.” I say that because I have felt this tendency myself and I've seen it in our culture that maybe we need to tone Him down a little bit. We look at God, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and we say, “How do we make Him a little more palatable for the world? How do we make it so they long to approach Him?” The world does not need a weak God. The world is full of weak gods really...impotent gods. The Bible calls them idols, and idols are very, very approachable. No one fears a piece of wood, but they cannot deliver. They are inadequate in terms of having the power to change a life. They are not worthy objects of worship, and we don't do God any favors when we make Him safer. And ultimately we don't do us or those we're trying to help any favors because we were made, we were created to worship a powerful, holy God...what our very souls long for!

I'm a child of the 90s and so, you know, I was in church at a moment where we started to talk about how Jesus is our *friend*, and that is absolutely right! He is our friend. But there also is this tension that He is the King of the world. And when you read the book of Revelation, you see Him coming in splendor, and you're like, but He is magnificent! That's the tension. I've seen it work out in this way. As I grew up in the church—and so any of you who grew up in the church may have experienced this as well—where there was this temptation, because we wanted to take God very seriously, and we wanted to give Him the respect and the honor He is due, and so we'd say things like, “Wear your Sunday best for God. Dress up for God!” Anyone experienced anything like that? Sure. Then over time, over the past 30 years, there's been kind of a swinging of the pendulum, and we've kind of embraced this idea to say, “God does not care about your clothing. Wear whatever you want. Come as you are.” And you know what? That is absolutely true. God does not care about your clothing...not one bit! But it's just one small step to change from, “God doesn't care about what I wear,” to, “It doesn't matter at all how I approach Him.” It's an easy little step to make. It does matter how we approach Him. He is more holy than we can possibly imagine. So, whether we wear a three-piece suit on Sunday morning, or you come to church in flannel pajama pants, come with a heart that holds Him up in honor and reverence and awe! Approach Him with the respect He is due. He is more magnificent than we can possibly imagine. He doesn't care what you wear but come with a heart that is just in awe of Him...that gives Him the respect, the glory, the honor that He is due. There's just no one like Him!

So how do we approach a holy God? With reverence and with awe? Absolutely! With timidity? With fear? With trepidation? With anxiety? Is His very holiness going to consume us? Well, not at all...not at all! Oh, Israel, no doubt had to get a little concerned about getting too close. That was a very pressing concern. We see that in Exodus 19. But for those of us who are in Christ, oh we are told in Scripture, in Hebrews, to **draw near with bold confidence**. Why? Well, it's not because God's holiness has changed. He is as holy as ever. No, it's because of the cross. Israel had to have a mediator. God appointed the man Moses to mediate for them. And we need a mediator, and God sent His Son to be a perfect mediator. So Jesus came and He died on the cross. He bore the sins of many, so that we who are not holy, might be cleansed, so that we might boldly, confidently draw near to a holy God. It's the Cross! The Cross changed everything. It's the Cross where guilt was taken away, where forgiveness was offered. It's the Cross that allows us to draw near to Him, understanding that we are His treasured possession. And we've been given a sacred mission to make His name known, to be caught up in life with Him with awe, with respect, and with confidence! We serve a holy God, a God that we should approach with reverence and awe. And so let us do just that, but let us do it with bold confidence, knowing that in Christ we are His treasured possession! He calls us to draw near with confidence! Let's pray together.

Our Father, we are grateful. We are grateful that You are not small. You are not weak. There is no one like You, more powerful than anything that we can possibly imagine. Majestic in holiness! When You come down, Lord, You come down with fire. The stones quake at Your presence. We praise You for that because we know in our lives the problems we face, Lord, we are thankful that You are big enough for all of them. So, Lord, we ask that You would give us a large vision of Yourself. Stir up awe and wonder at the majesty of Your holiness. Also we are thankful that You, in love, sent Your Son to die for us on the cross that we might draw near to You with bold confidence. We will be forever thankful for that, and grateful to You, Jesus, for Your obedience, even unto death on our behalf. We thank You, and we pray all these things in Your name, Amen.

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WINTER 2024 // WEEK 4

Life Group Questions

Exodus – The God Who Is With // February 3/4, 2024

How to Approach a Holy God // Exodus 19:1-25

Introduction

The children of Israel have finally arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai. Just as promised in Exodus 3:12, God has delivered them from Egypt to worship Him on this mountain. We see through their experience that hearing from a Holy God is a meeting unlike any other.

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) If you could automatically speak a new language, what would you like to be able to speak and why?
- 2) Recall a time when you looked forward to a trip or family vacation as a child. Was it all you'd hoped; did it exceed expectations or leave you disappointed?

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) Based on what you learned in the sermon this week, **how would you describe the Holiness of God in your own words?**

- 2) In Exodus 19:3-6, God speaks with Moses alone before He engages with the whole nation. **What does God want the people to remember about Him?**

What does God want the people to understand about themselves and their role as His people?

In the New Testament, Peter refers to the imagery in Exodus 19:6 to describe the church today. Read *1 Peter 2:9-10*. **According to those verses, what is the purpose for which we are called a “holy nation” and “kingdom of priests”?**

If this is your experience, share a time you proclaimed with words and actions that you have been called out of darkness into His marvelous light.

- 3) In book of Hebrews the author refers to God’s appearing in Exodus 19 and then shows how Jesus made a way for us to approach a Holy God. Read *Hebrews 12:18-24*. **How does the scene with Moses on Mount Sinai compare to what we experience on Mount Zion?**

What are some reasons for this difference?

Now read *Hebrews 12:28-29*. According to these verses, what should our response be today as we stand before a Holy God?

What does it mean to fear the LORD even though we get to approach Him boldly? Discuss how you understand this seeming inconsistency and how it may remain a mystery.

- 4) As we've seen throughout the Exodus story, God is teaching His people how to follow Him by faith AND action. What acts of faith does God ask of His people in this chapter?

Why was it necessary for God to place strict boundaries on the Israelites approaching Mount Sinai?

Consider if there is a healthy boundary God wants for your life that you are resisting. What can you do this week to make keeping that healthy boundary a priority?

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: The last part of question #4 above asked you to consider keeping a healthy boundary in obedience to God. We all know how challenging that can be. In prayer, we allow God to be strong in the areas we are weak. Here are some steps you can take in prayer for that this week:

1. Pray in reverence and awe of God's goodness to you.
2. Pray to be convicted of any healthy boundary about which you are resisting God.
3. Pray for the strength to let go of control and trust God's best for you.
4. Express gratitude and hope for what God is doing within you as you trust Him.

Scripture Focus: Psalm 19:7-14 extolls the goodness of the Law of the Lord. Begin and end each day reading this passage and noticing the way God’s Word is meant to nourish us. At the end of the week, reflect on your thoughts and emotions. **How were you nourished in God’s Word by making time for this simple practice?**

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?