

God Gives Instructions to Moses

The Bible Study



What you will need:

- Bibles in a modern translation, note pads, pens
- The altar stone. Paint red with yellow flames—symbolising the burning bush, the fire on an altar, or the fire of God's Presence on Mt. Sinai.
- Copy for each person of the five love languages
- Pre-plan for two of the group to do the "Moses and the Burning Bush" Monologue by Joey Bauer. (www.dramatix.org/archive/Biblestories/Moses_monologue.html.)

"Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause my name to be honoured, I will come to you and bless you. If you make an altar of stones for me, do not build it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool on it..."
Exodus 20:22-25 (NIV)

Communication

Talking with loved ones and friends in a deep and meaningful way is important to our relationships. Some times we are not aware of how we can communicate in a way others will receive and believe our intentions. For instance author Gary Chapman teaches that there are five languages of love. If you and your loved ones and friends speak a different "love language" your relationships may suffer. The five languages are: quality time, words of affirmation, gifts, acts of service, and physical touch. What says "I love you" to one person may have no meaning to another.

Have 5 love languages typed up on paper—give to each member to look at.

- Get them to put the five love languages in order of their preference
- How can knowing these love languages help you be a more loving person?
- If they feel comfortable get them to share their love language.

Communion with God

Many biblical scholars feel that one of the reasons God created humans was for the purpose of fellowship, companionship or friendship, and communication is an important part of these relationships. God gave His law to Moses to give to the descendants of Abraham in order that they could be the people of God. As the people of God they would be the conduit of God's ultimate plan. The saviour, the Messiah would come to the world to restore perfect communion between God and humankind. Until the Messiah came the law would be the guide and guardian to point the way to God. The tabernacle and the temple "housed" the altar for the atonement of sins. The set up of the tabernacle and the temple contained "clues" and "symbols" of God's ultimate plan of salvation.

Jesus came to repair and restore the communication. Jesus came to redeem and restore humans spiritually and physically allowing us to fellowship and commune with God. To "commune" means: to converse or talk together, usually with profound intensity, intimacy, etc. interchange thoughts or feelings.

Psalm 19 tells us that the very heavens communicate the glory and the existence of God. Quite often God uses nature to grab the attention of humans and alert them that He exists and wants to have a relationship. Psalm 19 goes on to speak about the Law of God and its value to us. Before Adam and Eve chose to disobey God they had a special association and fellowship with God. They had a close communion with the Creator. After they sinned, that communion was cut off. Adam and Eve would remember how sweet it was to commune with God and tell the story to their children and descendants. The memory faded or became distorted in the retelling. Still there was a desire in every human to have a relationship with God and humans continued to seek God. God designed the world so that it would point to His existence, but humans found it easier to worship nature than to worship an unseen God.

In a previous study we saw how God chose to speak or show Himself to certain people who were listening and looking for Him. We began to learn more about God through their stories. Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and his family, Abraham and Sarah, Hagar, Isaac and Rebekah, Esau and Jacob were all humans who had their lives touched by the hand of God. We have seen how their actions and reactions contributed to our understanding of God as revealed through the Old

Testament. They learned about God through trial and error. Nature does not always speak clearly, our emotions do not always allow us intelligibility, and the "voice" of God is often drowned out by the clamour of life. So God gave us the Law and the Prophets to help us better understand His will and plan for the world. The Law includes the Ten Commandments and the regulations that governed the worship, legal and social life of the emerging Israel nation. This written code of behaviour was given so that the Israelites would be a holy nation, separate and set apart for God's purposes. The prophets were sent to speak God's word and explain God's expectations.

As you read Exodus 1-3 you get an encapsulated version of the early life and times of Moses. His life is divided up into three sections of forty years. The first forty were spent in the palaces of Pharaoh learning to be a ruler. The second forty are spent in the desert learning to be a servant. The last forty years of Moses' life were spent as a servant leader. The first altar of Moses' life was the Nile River and he was placed there in a basket by his mother on the order of Pharaoh. Pharaoh had ordered the death of all baby boys born to a Hebrew family. They were to be thrown into the Nile River as a sacrifice to the river goddess, Anuket and god, Hapi. This death of the Hebrew boys would serve two purposes – reduce the population of Hebrews and appease the river gods. Moses was rescued by the daughter of Pharaoh and raised in the palace.

The name Moses sounds like a Hebrew word meaning lift out. God would use Moses to help lift the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt. Moses was a type of a saviour, who led the Hebrews out of bondage. Jesus lifts us out or leads us out of bondage to sin.

The next significant "altar" of Moses was when he encountered God at the burning bush. God clearly communicated His will and plan to Moses. It is in this significant encounter that God reveals His Name to Moses. This particular name of God is amazing. The English translation is "I Am" and is worth taking time to ponder. First of all "I" is a one letter word that connotes being, personality, and intelligence. The second word "Am" communicates existence. "I Am" is a way of communicating that First Person

At the "altar" of the burning bush Moses is called and challenged by God to become the vessel of deliverance for the Hebrew people. In this first encounter Moses covered his face because he was afraid to look at God, later he would ask to see God's face. In this first encounter, Moses begged God to send someone else. He had many excuses why God should use someone else. God agreed to partner Moses with his brother Aaron. God also challenged Moses to rely on God to use him and his abilities. God asked Moses what he had in his hand. It was a shepherd's staff. It was not the rod of a ruler or the staff of a priest. Moses carried the staff of a shepherd. God would use a shepherd to undo a Pharaoh.

Act out the Monologue "Moses and the Burning Bush" by Joey Bauer. It adds a different dimension to the story.
www.dramatix.org/archive/Biblestories/Moses_monologue.html.

The people were not too sure of Moses the deliverer, and the new Pharaoh was certainly not going to listen to a former rival turned desert rat. God's perfect timing and plan often are confounding to us mortals. Through the process of deliverance, God was able to show that He was greater than all the Egyptian gods.

The last plague, the slaughter of the first born gave birth to the celebration of Passover. It is full of symbols and clues to how Jesus would be the Lamb of God who would take away the sin and death sentence of the earth. This "altar" called Passover was significant to the Hebrews and it is significant to the Christians. Jesus is the "first born" of the New Covenant after having fulfilled every detail of the First Covenant. This descendant of Abraham has blessed the whole world. It was the final plague on Egypt that forced Pharaoh to release the Hebrews from their bondage. They did not go out as empty handed beggars either. God gave them favour in the eyes of the Egyptians who gave whatever they were asked to give. See Exodus 12:33-36.

The number of people who left with Moses included 603,550 men plus the women and children. (Exodus 12:37 and 38:26) Other people went with the Hebrews. If you were to just double the number of men, which would mean over a million and more like two million people were in the crowd leaving Egypt. That is about half the population of New Zealand. It was a good thing Moses had spent 40 years in the desert learning where to find the water and how to survive. This equipped him to be the leader the people needed. The Bible says God took them through the desert rather than by the shorter route so that they would not face war right away and change their minds and want to return to Egypt. The people exited Egypt organized by tribes and families. They followed the Presence of the Lord which appeared to be a pillar of fire at night and a pillar shaped cloud by day.

The next altar or time of total commitment is marked by the Red Sea. The people were camped there and following God's instructions. The armies of Pharaoh began to advance on them and the Israelites panicked. Exodus 14:13 records Moses' words to the people telling them not to fear but stand and see what the Lord would do for them. God instructed Moses to raise his shepherd's staff and the waters parted. The Israelites crossed on dry ground.

Not long after that the people turned against Moses when they could only find bitter water. God showed Moses a branch to put in the water. Moses obeyed and the water was good to drink. Jesus is the healing branch. God provided manna and quail for the people to eat. When the manna first appeared the people asked, "What is it?" The Manna was to be collected each morning so that they would have enough for the day. The day before the Sabbath they would collect two days worth. This manna was bread from heaven. Jesus is the bread from heaven. We follow the idea of having daily bread or daily devotions. At another stop the people were without water and complaining. God instructed Moses to take his staff and strike a rock. Water came from the rock. Jesus is the rock and from Him we get the living water.

The Amalekites attacked the Israelites. Moses sent his general Joshua to lead the people. Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of a hill to watch. While Moses held up the staff, the Israelites had the advantage. When his arms grew tired, and the staff came down the Amalekites had the advantage. Aaron and Hur sat Moses on a rock and they held up his hands. The Israelites won the battle. Exodus 17:15 tells us that Moses built an altar there and named it Yahweh Nissi, the Lord is My Banner.

Moses met up with his father-in-law, Jethro. Jethro advised him to delegate the responsibilities of managing such a large group of people. So Moses appointed judges over the people so that they could hear the daily complaints while he gave his attention to the bigger picture of leadership as God's representative to the people and the people's representative to God. We continue this study by looking at Mount Sinai. The people arrived there two months after they left Egypt. After the people set up camp, Moses climbed the mountain to "appear before God" and God called to him. God's message to the people is found in 19:4-6.

- What does it mean when God tells these people He brought them to Himself?
- Think of what it means to be chosen. What does it mean to be carried on eagle's wings?
- What is the reward for obedience?
- Do you feel treasured by God? What does that mean to you?

Moses returned from his first mountain moment to call the people together to tell them about God's offer. The leaders agreed to do whatever God asked them to do. Moses returned to talk to God. God told Moses that He would speak to him audibly from a cloud so that the people would hear and have confidence in Moses. God instructed Moses to go down and prepare the people for this meeting. They were to take two days to purify themselves, (bathe), and wash their clothes and be ready to meet with God on the third day. A boundary was set and access to the mountain was banned. On the third day, God showed up as promised.

In the opening verses of chapter 20, God instructed the people and gave the Ten Commandments. This direct communication frightened the people. They begged Moses to tell them what else God had to say. The people stood at a distance as Moses entered the awesome Presence of God. One of the first instructions from that moment was regarding the proper use of altars. Look especially at this portion of the reference; "Build my altar wherever I cause my name to be remembered, and I will come to bless you." This reference does not exclude or condemn the many beautiful altars that have been erected for the glory of God or God would not have given instruction about the altar that would be involved in the regulated worship of the tabernacle and later the temple. The reference gives guidelines to a people accustomed to building altars to denote a significant spiritual encounter. We have looked at examples of those key spiritual encounters in previous studies. It was instruction to them to be simple in how they marked the places or they may begin to worship the place rather than remember the Name of the Lord and the significant spiritual encounter.

This instruction also offers us an opportunity to think about how we "mark" significant spiritual encounters in our lives. The use of the Mercy seat, the Holiness Table and the Altar in Salvation Army experience may differ from the use of the altar in other denominations and Christian practice. The place of repentance or seeking more grace is a central theme of The Salvation Army and should always be central to the physical places where we worship. Sometimes this place is formal and the furniture is specific. Other times we may line up chairs or lay down a rug in the front of the meeting room to make a place of prayer. We also are very aware that we have a more permanent altar in our hearts. Not the literal heart muscle, but the symbolic centre of our intellect, emotions and being that we call our heart.

In many Salvation Army meetings the altar, Mercy Seat or Holiness Table are referred to as "the place of prayer" and invitation is given to meet with God there. We feel that a public declaration of intent is very important to the maturity of the believer. The place of prayer, the altar for us is central to our practice and to our growth as a movement. There are also times when we encounter God in significant ways in places other than church. We may not literally build an altar there, but we mark it in our memory and hearts. Those places become reminders of commitments made, blessings received or lessons learned. You may return to the place from time to time or look at a picture taken and the memory is stirred. Think of places and events where you felt the "outpouring" of God's Spirit or His encounter. Remember God and be blessed.