

FAITH on the MOVE

BIBLE STUDIES

Introduction

Bible, First and Foremost

Welcome to Out of the Waters, a Bible Study that is first and foremost about exploring the biblical story. In their original context, the stories in the Bible were not read in monotone from a formal lectern; rather, they were vividly shared around the camp fire or urgently passed on from one generation to another. Coming out of an oral culture, the stories were recorded in a way that invite the listener to get to get to know the characters—to see them as relatable, full human beings, rather than distant “holy heroes.”

As Bible study participants take on the roles of Moses, Miriam, Pharaoh and others, they will have a chance to bring these characters to life and engage their stories directly. In an effort to emphasize the centrality of the text, participants only need a Bible to take part in the studies. Alternatively a Scripture handout is provided for each session, which simply gives the text of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible divided into character parts.

Shared Discovery

Each section begins with reading a portion of text out loud. Then the facilitator invites participants to share what they hear or notice in the text. These questions help to keep the class focused on shared discovery and avoid the tendency to reduce the study to simply transferring information from teacher to student. Everyone in the session has something to offer and something to learn!

The facilitator’s main role is to create “space” for exploration, openness, and—taking cues from the Bible itself—a good deal of fun!

Each facilitator guide is organized in two columns:

The material on **left hand column** provides direction from various sources for approaching each of the guiding questions. In preparation for each session, the facilitator will need about a half hour to read through the whole guide and make some choices about how to structure the session based on personal knowledge of the group and time available for the study.

The guiding questions and activities on the **right hand column** of the facilitator guide are intended to help the facilitator meet that goal of creating “space” by inviting the participants’ insights or reflections on specific portions of the texts. The facilitator may choose to read the questions as provided or use them as a guide to formulate his or her own questions. Bible study at its best combines both personal insight with the voices of others with whom we share this text—people of faith throughout history and today, scholars as well as fellow believers.



A World on the Move

The impetus of Faith on the Move Bible Studies came from the experience of reading biblical stories with “people on the move”: students at Luther College, a residential school where I serve as one of the campus pastors; Central American and African refugees with whom I worked through the Lutheran Refugee Committee in Canada; immigrant communities in my neighborhood in rural Iowa and elsewhere in the country that I’ve been able to visit during my year-long sabbatical. Reading the Bible with people who more easily fit the description of “immigrants” has helped me realize how much—in an increasingly mobile world—migration shapes all of our lives. At the same time, these conversations have also highlighted the role of migration in the vast majority of biblical characters. In fact, at the core of the biblical story are narratives of migration: Abraham and Sarah, who followed God’s promise; Ruth, who defied the stereotypes against immigrants by proving herself to be faithful, hardworking, and a blessing; Jesus, who followed his ancestors as he sought refuge in Egypt and spent his ministry challenging us to go to “the other side.”

Unprecedented opportunity, as well as desperate need, mean more people are on the move today than at any other time in human history. People in our congregations are on the move because of increased mobility in the business world, because of educational opportunities such as study abroad or mission trips, or simply because of a choice to relocate to a warmer climate in retirement. At the same time, our communities and churches are being shaped by migration. As an example, in my denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, over half of the new mission starts this year were in ethnic ministries. Like the millions who throughout history have responded to the pull and push of migration, people from across the world are coming to the United States. They come motivated by new opportunities they may see here or are forced to leave their home countries because of conflict or poverty. As people of faith whose ancestors were called to go with nothing but a promise and whose God pitched a tent right along with them, we have much to offer and to gain from joining the conversation about people on the move.

As we find our way in an increasingly global society, what are the connections between our stories of migration and those of the biblical texts? I have found that exploring these connections 1) enriches our reading of the text, 2) provides needed depth to our national conversation about immigration, and 3) helps provide a guiding narrative for new immigrants and their communities.

Preparing for a Session

In preparation for each session, you may follow these simple steps:

- 1 Spend a brief moment, in silence or prayer, to collect your thoughts.
- 2 Read through the Bible text assigned for the session. Jot down any details you note, images it evokes in you, or questions it raises.



- 3 Read through the guiding questions on the **right hand column**. Imagine how they may work in your group and adjust the language as you see fit.
- 4 Read again through the guiding questions, this time reading also the material on the **left hand column**. Highlight or underline parts you find particularly helpful or make additional notes that may enhance your ability to lead the session. Make choices about any extra activities you may want to include.
- 5 Prepare enough copies of Bibles or the Scripture handout for all participants.

Out of the Waters

RESISTING the POWER of FEAR

FAITH on the MOVE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Scripture Handout for Session 1: A Pharaoh Who Did Not Know Joseph – Exodus 1:1-14*

NARRATOR 1:	¹ These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: ² Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, ³ Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, ⁴ Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. ⁵ The total number of people born to Jacob was seventy. Joseph was already in Egypt.
NARRATOR 2:	⁶ Then Joseph died, and all his brothers, and that whole generation. ⁷ But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.
NARRATOR 1:	⁸ Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹ He said to his people,
PHARAOH:	‘Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. ¹⁰ Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.’
NARRATOR 2:	¹¹ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labour. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. ¹³ The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, ¹⁴ and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labour. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

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Out of the Waters

RESISTING the POWER of FEAR

FAITH on the MOVE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Scripture Handout for Session 2: They Are Not Like Us – Exodus 1:15-21*

NARRATOR 1:	¹⁵ The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah,
PHARAOH:	¹⁶ ‘When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.’
NARRATOR 2:	¹⁷ But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live.
NARRATOR 1:	¹⁸ So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them,
PHARAOH:	‘Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?’
NARRATOR 1:	¹⁹ The midwives said to Pharaoh,
MIDWIVES:	‘Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.’
NARRATOR 2:	²⁰ So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.

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Out of the Waters

RESISTING the POWER of FEAR

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Scripture Handout for Session 3: Civil Disobedience: The Daughters of the Revolution – Exodus 1:22-2:10*

NARRATOR 1:	²² Then Pharaoh commanded all his people,
PHARAOH:	‘Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.’
NARRATOR 2:	^{2:1} Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. ² The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months.
NARRATOR 1:	³ When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.
NARRATOR 2:	⁵ The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. ⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. She said:
PHARAOH’S DAUGHTER:	‘This must be one of the Hebrews’ children.’
NARRATOR 1:	⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter,
MIRIAM:	² ‘Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?’
PHARAOH’S DAUGHTER:	‘Yes.’

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NARRATOR 2:

So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹Pharaoh's daughter said to her,

**PHARAOH'S
DAUGHTER:**

Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.'

NARRATOR 1:

So the woman took the child and nursed it. ¹⁰When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, saying:

**PHARAOH'S
DAUGHTER:**

'Because I drew him out of the water.'

Out of the Waters

RESISTING the POWER of FEAR

FAITH on the MOVE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Scripture Handout for Session 4: The Hyphenated Egyptian – Exodus 2:11-3:10*

NARRATOR 1:	¹¹ One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. ¹² He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. ¹³ When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong,
MOSES:	‘Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?’
WORKER:	¹⁴ ‘Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?’
NARRATOR 2:	Then Moses was afraid and thought,
MOSES:	‘Surely the thing is known.’
NARRATOR 1:	¹⁵ When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well.
NARRATOR 2:	¹⁶ The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. ¹⁷ But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defense and watered their flock. ¹⁸ When they returned to their father Reuel, he said,
PRIEST OF MIDIAN:	‘How is it that you have come back so soon today?’
DAUGHTERS:	¹⁹ ‘An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock.’
PRIEST OF MIDIAN:	²⁰ ‘Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread.’

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NARRATOR 1:	²¹ Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. ²² She bore a son, and he named him Gershom; for he said,
MOSES:	‘I have been an alien residing in a foreign land.’
NARRATOR 2:	²³ After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. ²⁴ God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ²⁵ God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.
NARRATOR 1:	^{3:1} Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said,
MOSES:	‘I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.’
NARRATOR 2:	⁴ When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush,
GOD:	‘Moses, Moses!’
MOSES:	‘Here I am.’
GOD:	⁵ ‘Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground... ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’
NARRATOR 1:	And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. ⁷ Then the LORD said,
GOD:	‘I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.’

Out of the Waters

RESISTING the POWER of FEAR

FAITH on the MOVE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Scripture Handout for Session 5: What Is That in Your Hand? – Exodus 3:11-4:17 (selected)*

NARRATOR 1:	¹¹ But Moses said to God,
MOSES:	‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’
GOD:	¹² ‘I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.’
NARRATOR 1:	¹³ But Moses said to God,
MOSES:	‘If I come to the Israelites and say to them, “The God of your ancestors has sent me to you”, and they ask me, “What is his name?” what shall I say to them?’
GOD:	¹⁴ ‘I AM WHO I AM...’ ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “I AM has sent me to you...”’
NARRATOR 2:	^{4:1} Then Moses answered,
MOSES:	‘But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, “The LORD did not appear to you.” ’
GOD:	² What is that in your hand?
MOSES:	‘A staff.’
GOD:	³ ‘Throw it on the ground.’
NARRATOR 1:	So he threw the staff on the ground, and it became a snake; and Moses drew back from it. ⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses,

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GOD:	‘Reach out your hand, and seize it by the tail’
NARRATOR 2:	—so he reached out his hand and grasped it, and it became a staff in his hand—
GOD:	⁵ ‘so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.’
NARRATOR 1:	⁶ Again, the LORD said to him,
GOD:	‘Put your hand inside your cloak.’
NARRATOR 2:	He put his hand into his cloak; and when he took it out, his hand was leprous, as white as snow. ⁷ Then God said,
GOD:	‘Put your hand back into your cloak’
NARRATOR 1:	—so he put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored like the rest of his body—
GOD:	⁸ If they will not believe you or heed the first sign, they may believe the second sign. ⁹ If they will not believe even these two signs or heed you, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.’
NARRATOR 2:	But Moses said to the Lord,
MOSES:	¹⁰ ‘O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.’
GOD:	¹¹ ‘Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹² Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.’
MOSES:	¹³ ‘O my Lord, please send someone else.’
NARRATOR 1:	¹⁴ Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said,

GOD:

‘What of your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. ¹⁵You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. ¹⁶He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him. ¹⁷Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.’...

Out of the Waters

RESISTING the POWER of FEAR

FAITH on the MOVE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Scripture Handout for Session 6:

Now You Shall See What I Will Do – Exodus 5:1-6:7 (selected)*

NARRATOR 1:
MOSES AND
AARON:

^{5:1}Afterwards Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said,

Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, “Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness.”

PHARAOH:

²“Who is the LORD, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and I will not let Israel go.”

MOSES AND
AARON:

³“The God of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us; let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD our God, or he will fall upon us with pestilence or sword.”

PHARAOH:

⁴“Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labours!”... ⁵“Now they are more numerous than the people of the land and yet you want them to stop working!”

NARRATOR 2:

⁶That same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, as well as their supervisors,

PHARAOH:

⁷“You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves. ⁸But you shall require of them the same quantity of bricks as they have made previously; do not diminish it, for they are lazy; that is why they cry, “Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.” ⁹Let heavier work be laid on them; then they will labour at it and pay no attention to deceptive words.”

NARRATOR 1:

¹⁰So the taskmasters and the supervisors of the people went out and said to the people,

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TASKMASTERS:	‘Thus says Pharaoh, “I will not give you straw. ¹¹ Go and get straw yourselves, wherever you can find it; but your work will not be lessened in the least.” ‘
NARRATOR 2:	¹² So the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt, to gather stubble for straw. ¹³ The taskmasters were urgent, saying,
TASKMASTERS:	‘Complete your work, the same daily assignment as when you were given straw.’
NARRATOR 1:	¹⁴ And the supervisors of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh’s taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and were asked,
TASKMASTERS:	‘Why did you not finish the required quantity of bricks yesterday and today, as you did before?’
NARRATOR 2:	¹⁵ Then the Israelite supervisors came to Pharaoh and cried,
SUPERVISOR:	‘Why do you treat your servants like this? ¹⁶ No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, “Make bricks!” Look how your servants are beaten! You are unjust to your own people.’
PHARAOH:	¹⁷ ‘You are lazy, lazy; that is why you say, “Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.” ¹⁸ Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, but you shall still deliver the same number of bricks.’
NARRATOR 1:	¹⁹ The Israelite supervisors saw that they were in trouble when they were told, ‘You shall not lessen your daily number of bricks.’ ²⁰ As they left Pharaoh, they came upon Moses and Aaron who were waiting to meet them. ²¹ They said to them,
SUPERVISOR:	‘The LORD look upon you and judge! You have brought us into bad odor with Pharaoh and his officials, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.’
NARRATOR 2:	²² Then Moses turned again to the LORD and said,
MOSES:	‘O LORD, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me? ²³ Since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has mistreated this people, and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people.’
NARRATOR 1:	^{6:1} Then the LORD said to Moses,

GOD:

‘Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh: Indeed, by a mighty hand he will let them go; by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land.... ‘Say therefore to the Israelites, ‘I am the LORD, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. 7I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians.

Out of the Waters

RESISTING the POWER of FEAR



FAITH on the MOVE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Session 1: A Pharaoh Who Did Not Know Joseph – Exodus 1:1-14

*“Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.” Exodus 1:8**

Introduction

From nursery rhymes to movies, stories communicate our deepest longings and our greatest aspirations. They help us understand and interpret the world. Some stories—such as our faith stories or our family stories—are at the core of our very identity. In this first session we explore the roots of the epic story told in the book of Exodus, emphasizing the importance of remembering, both as an act of memory and as one of reclaiming the story (re-membering) for our day.

To orient yourself to the series, be sure to download and read “Faith on the Move Bible Studies: Series Introduction.” To prepare to lead the session, review the materials in this document. The column on the left below is your guide for personal preparation for leading the study. The column on the right is to be used to facilitate participant discussion during the session itself. Make enough copies of this session’s Scripture handout for all participants.

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TIP: Consider setting up a small display of items that represent important ancestors in your family—pictures of grandparents, a small family heirloom, etc. If any of your ancestors migrated to the United States—or if your church has immigrant roots—consider having pictures or other items that help tell their story.

If this is the first time you are using a study from the Faith on the Move Bible Study Series, you may want to use the following introductory activity:

Obtain a large map of the world or draw one on a chalkboard or on chart paper. As participants arrive, ask them to place a mark (a dot or a small circle) on the place where they were born. Once everyone has gathered and you have offered an opening prayer, say: “On your own or with the assistance of someone next to you, take a moment to look at the labels of the clothing you are wearing. Make a list of the places where it was made. You can do the same also with items that you are carrying with you like your purse, watch, phone, cap, glasses, etc.” After a few minutes, ask participants to call out the names of the countries they have identified on their labels. As they do so, place an “x” on that country on the map. When you have a good number of locations or most participants have had a chance to call out a country’s name, draw the group’s attention to the visual representation of the reality of mobility in our world today—both for product and for people.

TIP: Tell participants they can simply jot down first names. Then invite them to write a word or phrase by each name that reminds them of a story about or a memorable characteristic of those whose names they have written down.

EXTRA: If there is time, participants may add the names of other ancestors who have been important in their lives, or those whose stories are central to their family. You may ask, “What stories circulate in your family during family gatherings, special celebrations, etc.?”

Biblical stories often begin with genealogies. It is tempting to skip them, to think they’re irrelevant. However, they are significant. They ground the story in context. As individual ancestors were named, images and stories would fill the minds of those who first heard those stories.

Opening Prayer

You may offer an opening prayer or invite a participant to lead the group in prayer.

Ancestors

Take a brief moment to write down the names of your ancestors, beginning with parents and going as far back as you can. Briefly share a story about one or two of your ancestors with someone in the group.

READ Exodus 1:1-5.

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

What names do you recognize in these first few verses of Exodus? What stories do they call to mind?

In a few verses, the writers of Exodus connect the story they are beginning to tell with that which is told in Genesis. By naming Jacob—who became “Israel” after struggling with God—the writer evokes memories of God’s promises and constant presence even in the midst of difficult family and life situations. The second half of the book of Genesis (beginning with chapter 30) tells the story of Jacob and his children, the sibling rivalry that led them to sell their younger brother Joseph into slavery, and their eventual reconciliation as a famine forced them to be reunited in Egypt. This story is very significant to the Exodus story.

Preserving family stories and cultural traditions has always been significant to immigrants. Stories sustained God’s people in times of both stability and upheaval. For many immigrants, however, keeping hold of these important cultural stories can be difficult. The pressure to assimilate to the new culture is strong, particularly upon the younger generation who are either born or grow up in a culture foreign to their parents. The balance between assimilation and identity is a life-long struggle for immigrants, and a hotly debated aspect of immigration conversations.

Verse 1: “...Israel...came to Egypt...” Why had Jacob/Israel and his descendants gone to Egypt? Why was Joseph already there? Like a brief naming of our ancestors, the list of names in these first verses evokes many stories!

How would remembering these stories be particularly significant to the people of Israel as they lived far away from their land of origin? How might ancestor stories or traditions be important for immigrants today?

Addressing the very first human couple in Genesis 1:28, God blesses them and commands them: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth...” By using the same phrasing in Exodus 1:7, the writer further connects the story being told to that of Genesis, and presents it also as a story of beginnings. This is good news: in spite of the death of Joseph and his whole generation (v. 6), the Israelites and their culture would not end with the death of the first generation of immigrants.

According to verse 6, the Israelites had already been in Egypt for at least a full generation. All those featured in the story would have been born in Egypt; yet, they are still perceived as foreigners in the land. Cultural mores and legal definitions were significantly different in the ancient world, particularly in a time well before the modern concept of “nation states.” While this fact must be kept in mind as the biblical account is explored in today’s context, the core issues raised by the story—the role of fear, justice, etc—remain quite applicable to our day.

Be Fruitful and Multiply

READ Exodus 1:6-10 What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

In a Bible study in southern Florida, a participant exclaimed, “¡Que lindo! [How beautiful!]” in response to the description in verse 7 of the increase in Jacob’s descendants. Her comment emphasized the importance of the family in her culture of origin. What do you notice about the tone and language of this verse?

Compare Pharaoh’s reaction and tone in verses 9-10 to that of verse 7. List Pharaoh’s concerns.

How do Pharaoh’s concerns compare to those expressed about immigrants today?

Pharaoh viewed the growing immigrant population as a threat, and according to verse 12, so did the rest of the population. Pharaoh devises a variety of “population” control measures, beginning here with hard labor. Throughout this study, we will reflect on God’s role in rendering these various measures ineffective.

Reflecting on his own experience of having to do hard labor in the field when he first came to the United States, a participant in a Bible study in Washington State said that he and his family—like many other immigrants today and many in previous generations—had learned through that hard work to appreciate things in a way that many others in the broader culture may not. The hard work made him and his family physically stronger. He celebrated this as a positive that may have come out of a negative. Paradoxically, the perception of immigrants’ strength causes fear in “locals,” just as the strengthening of the Israelites caused fear in the Egyptians (v. 12).

Memory—remembering—is a key concept in the Bible. God repeatedly promises to remember God’s people and commands us to remember God’s actions on our behalf. Jesus likewise commands his disciples to eat bread and drink wine when they are gathered “in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:24-25). The theme of memory is equally central to the book of Exodus. The new Pharaoh forgot the contributions of Joseph—the contributions of the immigrant—and now sees his descendants only as a problem. In contrast, the writer remembers their contributions by naming their role in building Egypt’s supply cities (v. 11), thereby recalling Joseph’s own role in saving Egypt from famine. More importantly, in contrast to the Pharaoh’s forgetfulness, God will be shown as the one who remembers Israel and the promises made to him and his descendants.

TIP: If your discussion group does not include individuals who are themselves immigrants, encourage participants to share the names and stories of those they may know who are newcomers to the community. Reflect together on how knowing someone personally—specifically an immigrant—might shape a person’s view about immigration.

Memory

READ Exodus 1:11-14

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

What is the role of fear in the way that the Israelites were perceived? What role does it play in contemporary perceptions of immigrants?

The “children of Israel” are limited to hard labor in the fields and in construction (v. 14). Compare this with the work immigrants do today, particularly those who are undocumented.

Following his dream about seven fat cows and seven lean cows, an earlier Pharaoh recognized that he needed an immigrant (Joseph) who was lingering in his jail in order to face an uncertain future. By contrast, the new Pharaoh (who did not know Joseph) fails to see the immigrants as assets. Discuss the current public perception—and media portrayal—of immigrants: Do we remember their contributions as much as the challenges they may pose to our communities (issues of assimilation, use of resources, etc.)?

Do our elected officials, our “Pharaohs,” know “José”? Much of the food we eat has been picked, processed, or milked by immigrant labor. Do we know “José”?

Transitions

Return to the stories you shared at the beginning about your ancestors. What role have these stories and memories played in your own life? How important is it to you that your descendants hear these stories, and why?

We live in a world of high mobility and transition. How do our family stories, and our faith stories, help us to stay grounded?

In pairs or small groups, talk about the “next generations”— children, youth, and young adults who may be your children, grandchildren, or part of your congregation or town. Compare their experiences with and opportunities to travel for vacation, study, work, etc. to your own. What may today’s Bible passage and conversation offer to those next generations?

Closing Prayer

After inviting any final comments and providing details for the next session, you may conclude by offering a prayer or inviting a participant to lead the group in prayer.

Out of the Waters

RESISTING the POWER of FEAR



FAITH on the MOVE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Session 2: They Are Not Like Us – Exodus 1:15-21

*“But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them.” Exodus 1:17**

Introduction

Fear and stereotypes play a central role in the story as Pharaoh attempts—and fails—to control the growing immigrant population. Together we explore the role of fear in our own lives and in our approach to others, particularly those who are different from us.

To orient yourself to the series, be sure to download and read “Faith on the Move Bible Studies: Series Introduction.” To prepare to lead the session, review the materials in this document. The column on the left below is your guide for personal preparation for leading the study. The column on the right is to be used to facilitate participant discussion during the session itself. Make enough copies of this session’s Scripture handout for all participants.

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TIP: Collect and display magazine or newspaper ads that play on common stereotypes of men and women.

Opening Prayer

You may offer an opening prayer or invite a participant to lead the group in prayer

TIP: You may want to have some initial ideas in mind about common stereotypes of Americans and Europeans to get the conversation started. Encourage people to have fun with this activity—for example, if someone has traveled in Europe, invite them to share any experiences of stereotypes they may have had during their travel. Feel free to choose other categories that may work better with your particular group—you could play with denominational identities, common ethnic backgrounds in your community, age groups, etc.

Look up the definition and derivation of stereotype in a standard dictionary.

Narrow Vision

Write the words “American” and “European” side by side at the top of a chalkboard or on a piece of chart paper. Draw a vertical line between the two words to create a two-column chart. Tell participants: “Call out images or words that come to mind when you hear ‘American’ or ‘European.’” Jot down the answers in the appropriate column.

Where do these images and ideas come from? How does categorizing help us organize our world? What limitations result from the stereotypes?

Last week we talked about how a new Pharaoh arose in Egypt who did not know Joseph (Exodus 1:8). What role do you think stereotypes played in how this Pharaoh perceived and dealt with the Israelites? What role do stereotypes play in contemporary perceptions of immigrants?

EXTRA: We do not know the names of many of the women whose stories come to us through the Bible. The fact that women’s names are often omitted, makes it even more significant that we are given Shiphra and Puah’s names. In contrast, we are not given the Pharaoh’s name, but rather know him only by his title or function! In fact, through later passages we also come to know the names of the other women who are important to the Exodus story: Jochebed (Moses’ mother, Exodus 6:20), Miriam (the prophet and sister of Moses, Exodus 15:20 and Numbers 26:69), and Zipporah (Moses’ wife, Exodus 2:21).

Encourage participants to use their imagination in “fleshing out” this encounter. Familiar with the experience of home searches, both from military regimes in their country of origin and more recently through difficult experiences of immigration enforcement, participants in a Bible study at Holden Village in Washington State imagined agents from Pharaoh’s army coming to get Shiphrah and Puah in the middle of the night. Arriving at the palace, the

Comadronas—The Hebrew Midwives

READ Exodus 1:15-16.

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

Verse 15: “The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives...” This encounter comes right after we have been told (twice!—vv. 13a and 14b) that the Egyptians were ruthless in their dealings with the Israelites. What do you think it would have been like for Shiphrah and Puah to be brought before Pharaoh? What might we expect them to have been told by Pharaoh? Were they threatened? Were they bribed?

women would have been taken through several layers of security—intended as much to protect the Pharaoh as to communicate his power. Once they were before Pharaoh, every aspect of his appearance and his surroundings would have been intended to further convey a message of power and instill fear in those who were brought before him.

Having attempted to control the people through hard labor and taskmasters, now Pharaoh tries to use the midwives (their knowledge of the community and the trust the community has placed in them). He wants to co-opt into his death project the women whose very identity and calling as midwives is to facilitate life.

Bible study participants who grew up in small, rural towns throughout Latin America readily understood why Pharaoh chose to use the midwives. Reflecting the significant role of midwives in rural community, the Spanish word for midwife, “comadrona,” is used in common speech to refer to the female baptismal sponsors of one’s child. Families carefully choose baptismal sponsors from those they trust, often identifying someone who holds a position of honor in their circles, someone they would want others to associate with their child.

An additional aspect of the role of midwives was highlighted by a Bible study participant who said, “Comadronas are the town’s gossips; they have unrestricted access to people’s home and personal lives. They are the women who know everyone in town... and they know everyone’s business! Because they make several visits to a home both before and after a child is born, they get to know much more about individuals and their lives.”

Pharaoh expresses his fear of male Israelites by seeking to destroy them—first by the hand of the midwives, and then, as we will see in our next session, by drowning them in the river. By fixating on his fear of the male children of Israel, Pharaoh indirectly discounts the women. Tikva Frymer-Kensky writes in *Reading the Women of the Bible*²: “But Pharaoh is worried only about the boys. From his perspective, the girls are insignificant. Without men, they are not even Israel. Their wombs have not yet been claimed and branded. If married by Egyptians, they will produce Egyptian children. The boys, however, may grow to be men who will fight against Egypt.” (p. 25).

Why do you think Pharaoh chose the midwives?

Why does Pharaoh order the midwives to kill the boys, but spare the girls?

²Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories, Tikva Frymer-Kensky (New York: Schocken Books, 2002)

Blinded by his stereotypes—in Pharaoh’s view only the boys could become a threat by joining with his enemies in the event of war (Exodus 1:10b)—Pharaoh ironically fails to see women as a threat.

A central theme in the story of Exodus, and in many ways throughout the Bible, is that of fear. It is fear that leads Pharaoh and his people to attempt to exterminate the Israelites. In contrast, almost every encounter between humans and the divine in the Bible is prefaced by the words, “Do not fear.”

Acts of terrorism, like the horrendous events of September 11, 2001, are aimed at controlling our lives through fear. The challenge in responding to these very real threats is to do so without allowing those responsible to accomplish their goal.

Unfortunately, the fear caused by 9/11—compounded by the current economic crisis—has fueled a growing animosity and stereotyping of immigrants. In Bible study across the country, the role of fear in the lives of immigrants was both obvious and painful. A Bible study participant who was born to immigrant parents stated, “Our communities live in fear—fear of ‘La Migra’ [the popular name used to refer to the immigration enforcement agency] and its increased focus on enforcing a system that many recognize is broken. It is important to note that the fear created by the emphasis on enforcement of immigration laws extends well beyond those who are undocumented. First of all, people who are undocumented in the country—an estimated 11 to 12 million people—are directly connected to millions of others, both documented immigrants and citizens of the country. They are parents to children born in the United States, married to long-term residents of the country. Many families have “mixed” status, where some members of the immediate family are documented while others are not. Additionally, many immigrants and descendants of immigrants suffer because of profiling.”

The excessive use of force and incarceration as a way to enforce the civil matters of immigration law has translated into a general concern among people who are foreign-born, regardless of their immigration status. “On any given day in the United States of America, more than 42,000 immigrants are being held in local jails, detention centers and prisons across the country,” states the website for the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services. The vast majority of those detained

They Did Not Do As the King of Egypt Commanded Them

READ Exodus 1:17

In the last session we talked about the role of fear both as a motivator for Pharaoh’s actions and as a tool for subjecting the people of Israel. Verse 17 begins, “But the midwives feared God.” How is the midwives’ fear of God different from the fear Pharaoh may have instilled in their hearts?

How is fear a positive or a negative factor in our own lives and in the life of our nation?

What role does fear play in the lives of immigrants in our country, particularly those who live and work here without proper documentation?

have no prior criminal record and are often not protected by basic expectations of due process. Additionally, immigration enforcement has become increasingly more forceful in the last decade, sending a message of fear throughout the community and create an atmosphere that can encourage strong anti-immigrant sentiments. The May 12, 2008 military-style work-site immigration raid in the small, rural town of Postville, Iowa, is a troubling example of this trend. Over a fifth of the town's population was arrested in a single day, devastating those who were undocumented and threatening the economy and well being of the whole town.

The law orders them to kill the baby boys when they are born. The midwives know the law as they heard it directly from the mouth of the Pharaoh. Still, they choose to directly disobey the law and “do not do as the king of Egypt commanded them.” The midwives actions are introduced by saying that they feared God. Note that it does not specifically say whether they feared Pharaoh or not—they likely were terrified of him, but what the story highlights is their action—an act of civil disobedience, done directly against an unjust law. Their motivation seems to be a “higher” moral law born out of their fear of God. We will address this in more detail in the next session.

In this session and in session 3, we will use three questions to focus the conversation on how the characters in the story acted in the face of what they believed to be an unjust law. Let's begin with Shiphra and Puah and their actions:

- What is the law? What has Pharaoh commanded?
- Do they know the law?
- What do they do?

The story of Shiphra and Puah speaks profoundly to those who live without power and who must find alternative ways of responding to their commitment to life in the face of laws that limit their ability to seek life. Many participants in Bible studies across the country were working in the United States without proper documentation. Rejecting the dismissive label of “illegals”—put on them by many politicians and the media—participants related to the Bible's portrayal of the midwives as heroes for choosing to act even against what they saw as an unfair law. As one participant put it: “Unlike the picture often painted of undocumented workers, they are indeed people with a high moral compass—a compass that leads them to make a decision that goes against every fiber in their body as peaceful, law-abiding people... as people who fear God.”

In spite of limited formal education, many of the participants who were undocumented knew they did not make their decision to migrate in a vacuum. On the one hand is the opportunity for work that they see by migrating. According to the National Immigration Forum: “The U.S. labor market demands up to 500,000

Law and Order

What does the passage's portrayal of the midwives' direct disobedience of the law say to us today?

The story of Shiphra and Puah's actions has been central to civil disobedience movements such as the civil rights movement of the 1960s. How may these stories be heard by those who, out of desperation, choose to enter or remain in the United States in order to work and provide for their families, even though they do not have the proper documentation?

What constitutes unfair laws?

low-skilled workers a year, while the current U.S. immigration system allows for only 5,000 permanent visas for that category.”

On the other hand is their own desperate need. One participant who was left his work as a coffee picker in Guatemala to come to work at a meatpacking plant in Iowa said: “We would pack truck after truck of coffee beans to send to the United States and then in the market I would see the corn that came from Iowa... yet when I realized I needed to go somewhere else to look for work, I wasn’t allowed to go.”

Unable to obtain the proper documentation to migrate—yet knowing that they needed work to provide for their families—thousands go against an immigration law they feel is not fair, not life giving.

The issue of undocumented migration stirs deep passions. As Facilitator, you will want to encourage respectful dialogue and encourage participants to become informed about this complex, yet pressing, topic. Emphasis can be placed on the broad agreement that the current immigration system in the United States is broken, and commit to the need to find solutions that reflect our values and move us forward together.

How do we balance “law and order” with “justice”?
Are they always the same?

Closing Prayer

After inviting any final comments and providing details for the next session, you may conclude by offering a prayer or inviting a participant to lead the group in prayer.

Out of the Waters

RESISTING the POWER of FEAR



FAITH on the MOVE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Session 3: Moses, the First Mojado – Exodus 1:22-2:10

*“...‘because...I drew him out of the water.’” Exodus 2:10b**

Introduction

The story of Exodus has played a central role in inspiring, sustaining, and guiding social change throughout the centuries. In this session we explore how those who could easily be dismissed become God’s agents of transformation.

To orient yourself to the series, be sure to download and read “Faith on the Move Bible Studies: Series Introduction.” To prepare to lead the session, review the materials in this document. The column on the left below is your guide for personal preparation for leading the study. The column on the right is to be used to facilitate participant discussion during the session itself. Make enough copies of this session’s Scripture handout for all participants.

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TIP: Create a simple display with pictures or books about Harriet Tubman, Susan B. Anthony, Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, or others who exemplified nonviolent civil disobedience.

Opening Prayer

You may offer an opening prayer or invite a participant to lead the group in prayer.

TIP: You may also ask participants to note that many of the biblical characters they have listed—both male and female—have experienced migration in their life.

EXTRA: Migration is also an important theme in the sacred stories of other faith traditions. For example, the Hajj, one of the pillars of Islam, re-enacts the Prophet Muhammad’s journey to Mecca, and in Buddhism, Prince Siddhartha begins his process of enlightenment through a journey that physically moves him from the isolated comfort of his palace and into the daily life of his subjects around the kingdom. There seems to be something about the experience of migration that opens people to the divine.

Stories

Ask participants to call out biblical stories and characters that come to mind. Write down the names on a board or chart paper. After making the list, note how many of the characters are male and how many are female. If, as is often the case, the majority of those listed are male, ask the group to discuss why they think this may be the case. After some conversation, invite the group to specifically name stories of women in the Bible.

As we saw last week, the text provides us the names of most of the women involved in the Exodus story. What about in the stories we have listed?

Today we continue to explore how Pharaoh discounted women to his own peril!

At a Bible study with religious leaders and immigration advocates in Rockford, Illinois, participants saw in Pharaoh’s actions a mirror of the “police state” that political leaders have historically resorted to in times of high social anxiety. Nazi Germany and Rwanda in the lead-up to genocide are among well-known extreme cases, but they should not preclude us from realizing the danger of situations such as the blacklisting of people during the McCarthy era in the United States or the participation of average citizens in enforcing Jim Crow laws in the South before the Civil Rights Movement. Connecting back to the social impact of Pharaoh’s first attempt to control the Israelites through forced labor in verses 13 and 14, one of the participants observed that “unjust laws legitimize ruthlessness.”

The ominous law enacted by Pharaoh is followed by a very “provincial” scene. A man and a woman marry, and even in an environment of death and fear, seek to begin their new life. About nine months after the devastating immigration raid in the small, rural town of Postville, Iowa (at the time the largest immigration raid in U.S. history) community members jokingly commented on the seemingly large number of pregnancies among women who had been directly affected by the raid. While some saw foolishness in these pregnancies, others saw strength in couples’ willingness to embrace life in the face of such struggle.

Driven by Life

READ Exodus 1:22-2:2.

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

Pharaoh’s offensive broadens. Having tried to recruit people from among the Israelites—supervisors and midwives—to exploit and then eliminate their own people, he now turns to “all his people.” What situations, contemporary or historical, can you think of where political leaders have used power and fear to lead average citizens to turn on their neighbors?

Verse 2:1, which reads, “Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman,” follows on the heels of Pharaoh’s ominous edict. We are then told that they had a child. What do you think of their decision to bring children into the world under such dire circumstances?

The “Levite woman” of verse 2:1 turns out to be Jochebed, Moses’ mother (see Exodus 6:20). Let’s re-read verse 2:2 and let the details in the story help us imagine Jochebed’s mix of emotions, caught between the joy of holding her “fine baby” and the fear that forces her to hide him.

In the span of just a couple of verses, we go from the fearful words of Pharaoh to the provincial scene of a child's birth, and then back to the reality of fear. These various emotions will be later reflected in the birth stories of Jesus himself, where angels' announcements and the visit of foreign dignitaries are mixed with the fear of death at the hands of Herod's army.

Like the midwives before her, Jochebed directly contradicts the law. What is the law? To throw the babies in the river. Does she know it? Obviously... she's been trying to hide her child. What does she do? That's where it gets interesting. She fulfills the letter of the law (Exodus 1:22) by placing the child into the river; however, she puts him in a basket rather than drowning him.

Repeatedly, Bible study participants who had entered the United States without proper documentation and who are parents of young children related deeply to this story. They connected with Jochebed's despair, courage, and ingenuity:

- Despair: "Every morning when I kiss my son as he goes off to school and I go to work, I wonder if I will see him at the end of the day, or if this is the day I am detained for not having the right papers. Every day I relive the time when we crossed the [U.S./Mexico] border, and the coyote [smuggler] kept yelling at me to keep him quiet so La Migra [immigration enforcement] would not find us."
- Courage: A number of mothers saw themselves in this scene, standing near the U.S./Mexico border and handing their small child to a coyote (smuggler) to bring him/her across the border. To get very small children across the border, coyotes will carry them through a legitimate entry point by using the documents of another child of the same age and general appearance. "Twice I ran after him and took my son back," said a woman through her tears. Clearly, she remembered the day as if it had

The First Mojado

READ Exodus 2:3-6 What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

In session 2 we began to use three questions to focus the conversation on how the characters in the story acted in the face of what they believed to be an unjust law. Let's review those questions in light of Jochebed's actions:

- What is the law? What has Pharaoh commanded?
- Does she know the law?
- What does she do?

Return to the situations identified earlier where political leaders used power and fear to lead average citizens to turn on their neighbors. How might or how do such situations force parents to face choices similar to those made by Jochebed in the story?

Share and discuss one or more of the quotes or scenarios of undocumented immigrant parents identified in the left column. Be mindful that such powerful stories can stir deep emotions, either of empathy or of frustration. Strive to keep an open and respectful tone to the conversation, and note any instances where a follow-up conversation may be appreciated after the study.

been just yesterday, rather than twenty-one years earlier, when she handed her then 18-month-old baby to a coyote to carry across, while she and her husband undertook the perilous desert-crossing on foot. “Finally I had to entrust him to God... It was two days before we were reunited—those were the longest days of my life.”

- Ingenuity: “What do you do when the law goes against your instinct and need for survival, against what you believe to be ultimately right? She [Jochebed] gets quite creative! At the same time, she cannot possibly know what will happen next. When you’re desperate, you do what you can... you just take the risk.”

It is hard to imagine being in a situation where placing one’s child in such danger seems like the only solution. The wisdom in the Bible is to place just such a story and decision at the heart of one of God’s most central acts on behalf of God’s people.

Again, there is a huge scene change in the story. While on one side of the river a woman makes the agonizing decision to part with her child in hopes that he may survive, on the other side we find a princess living in the lap of luxury. Unlike Jochebed’s deliberate approach to the river, Pharaoh’s daughter’s trip to the river at this precise time is happenstance. While Moses’ family has been living in fear and suffering exploitation, Pharaoh’s daughter is surrounded by servants who attend to her every need—even to fetching her this peculiar basket that comes floating down the river.

Discussions on this portion of the account evoked some of the most powerful emotions in Bible studies in various locations across the country. One after another, those who had crossed the U.S./Mexico border without documentation shared their experiences. Many of them literally crossed a river, the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo that forms part of the U.S./Mexico border (running 1,885 miles along the state of Texas and a small portion of New Mexico). Because of their experience, they could totally envision—almost feel—the fear and uncertainty experienced by Moses’ family as they approached the river Nile. They could relate to their fateful decision, surely made after much thought and prayer, to break a law, even one that they believed to be unjust. Many participants shared openly how their decision to “travel North” came at the end of a long period of discernment and internal struggle. Most immigrants—both those who are able to travel with proper documentation and those who cannot—struggle to make the decision to leave behind home, family, culture, language, and everything

Verse 5a: “The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river...” Compare and contrast Jochebed’s experience as she approaches one side of the river, to that of Pharaoh’s daughter as she comes down to the river on the other side to bathe.

“¡Moises fue el primer mojado! [Moses was the first wetback!]” exclaimed a Bible study participant, surprised to see in the story a reflection of his own experience of crossing a river that divided his poverty and oppression from the luxury, freedom, and wealth that he believed to be on the other side. Referring to his crossing of the Rio Grande he went on to say, “Like Moses, I crossed that river against the law.”

that is familiar. In the case of undocumented immigrants, the loss and risk is compounded by a huge financial burden. For example, many undocumented workers from Guatemala who participated in the Bible studies reported having paid upwards of \$10,000 per person to a smuggler to bring them across Mexico and then across the border into the United States. This amount represents over 10 years of full-time labor for the average Guatemalan laborer.

EXTRA: Verse 6: “She saw the child... and she took pity on him.” Unlike her father, whose fears and stereotypes prevented him from seeing the Hebrews as people, Pharaoh’s daughter is moved to pity by the simple act of a child’s cry. What humanizes for her the child perceived as so different—as “other”?

Jochebed’s actions, as well as those of Miriam which come immediately after, provide an insightful and ultimately hilarious sequence of events, as these women outsmart Pharaoh and his plans. The passage raises ethical questions that remain powerfully relevant as we engage the actions and decisions of those who find themselves with no power and feel marginalized by the law.

Frymer-Kensky highlights the fact that women in the story are primarily referred to by their roles as women—the midwives, Moses’ mother and sister, Pharaoh’s daughter: “Acting in their routine roles as midwives, mothers, daughters, and wives, women become the saviors of early Israel and bring on the redemption from Egypt” (p. 24). She also notes, “Pharaoh has a problem. Just as he took no heed of daughters, daughters take no heed of him” (p. 26).

Unlike her father, Pharaoh’s daughter is able to see the humanity in the face of one of these Hebrew immigrants. Finding herself before this individual child, and hearing his cry, she is able to recognize his humanness. There is a danger in sentimentalizing this scene, and attributing it merely to a gender difference between Pharaoh and his daughter. Returning to the framing questions we have been using for the actions of each of the women in the ongoing story can help us see courage rather than sentimentality in Pharaoh’s daughter’s actions. What is the law? Throw the baby boys in the river. Does she know the law? Clearly; she ponders out loud, “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children.” What does she do? She acts directly against the will of her father—which is the law of the land. At the point of her pondering out loud that the child in the basket must be one of the Hebrews’ children, Pharaoh’s daughter’s actions are not a foregone conclusion. She could go either way on how she acts on this knowledge of the child’s origin. As a Bible study participant pointed out, “She has papers. She has choices.”

Civil Disobedience: Daughters of the Revolution

READ Exodus 2:7-10

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

Looking at the actions of Miriam (Moses’ sister) and Pharaoh’s daughter, let us return to the questions we have been focusing on regarding individuals’ actions when faced with what they believed to be an unjust law:

- What is the law? What has Pharaoh commanded?
- Do they know the law?
- What do they do?

Imagine what it took for Miriam to act. What if she were detained for approaching Pharaoh’s daughter? What if they figured out who she was? How did Miriam hatch this plan?

In the midst of a very tense situation, the passage playfully shows Miriam's courage and ingenuity. Thinking on her feet, she goes from watching in despair (Exodus 2:4) to finding a way to ensure her brother's survival. Like the midwives (who feared God more than the Pharaoh and refused to destroy life) and her mother (who put the child in the river as the law ordered, but did so using a basket), now Miriam uses her own ingenuity to subvert an unjust system and advocate for life. Sounding quite helpful and innocent, she steps right up to Pharaoh's daughter—at great risk to herself—and offers to find someone to raise the child. In effect she manages to get Pharaoh's own resources—from his daughter to Jochebed—to be allocated for the raising of the child who will eventually bring about the fulfillment of Pharaoh's stated fear: "...or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land" (Exodus 1:10).

The etymology (origin and meaning) of Moses' name is a matter of great scholarly discussion. According to Frymer-Kensky, the name has roots both in the Egyptian word for "son" and in the Hebrew word for "the one who draws out." She argues that the name actually points to Moses' later life—he is the one who will draw the people out of Egypt—rather than the conditions of his birth or rescue. Even as the origins of the name are unclear, what is clear is that the writer of the account emphasizes the audacity of Pharaoh's daughter as she acts against her father's stated law and calls the boy Moses, saying, "...for I drew him out of the water." She literally calls him a mojado (wetback)!

EXTRA: Earlier in the study we pointed to the connection between the Exodus narrative and the creation narratives at the beginning of Genesis, particularly between God's command to be fruitful and multiply and the proliferation of the Hebrews in Egypt. In Genesis 1, God creates a safe space—a sanctuary—for life to take hold in the watery chaos. Explore the way that the women in the Exodus account mirror God's creative actions; specifically consider Jochebed's carefully prepared basket (a sanctuary for Moses in the midst of threatening waters) and Pharaoh's daughter's daring statement that she had drawn life out of the waters.

Imagine what it took for Miriam to act. What if she were detained for approaching Pharaoh's daughter? What if they figured out who she was? How did Miriam hatch this plan?

In the midst of a harrowing situation, the story introduces humor both through Miriam's daring and ingenious plan and through Pharaoh's daughter's naming of Moses. Discuss both of these women's daring actions.

Connections

With whom do you identify in the story?

TIP: If you have not set up a display of individuals involved in non-violent civil disobedience, simply list some or invite participants to name a few of them at this point in the reflection.

The work of women's cooperatives has gained significant attention in the last decades in everything from craft production to agriculture to advocacy and environmental action. What are examples of such cooperation in your communities? Are there such support groups specifically focusing on advocating for immigrants? How do solidarity groups bring together immigrants to advocate for themselves, and provide a space for immigrants and supportive citizens to come together? How does your church facilitate/how can it facilitate the creation of such cooperation?

Look at the names and images of historical figures who are recognized for their non-violent, civil disobedience.

Jochebed, Miriam, and Pharaoh's daughter form an unlikely team in undoing Pharaoh's destructive will. Who make up your cooperatives (see left-hand column) or support teams to help you act boldly, guided by your faith and convictions

Closing Prayer

After inviting any final comments and providing details for the next session, you may conclude by offering a prayer or inviting a participant to lead the group in prayer.

Out of the Waters

RESISTING the POWER of FEAR



FAITH on the MOVE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Session 4: Hyphenated Egyptian – Exodus 2:11-3:10

*...‘I have been an alien residing in a foreign land.’” Exodus 2:22**

Introduction

The story of Exodus has played a central role in inspiring, sustaining, and guiding social change throughout the centuries. In this session we explore how those who could easily be dismissed become God’s agents of transformation.

To orient yourself to the series, be sure to download and read “Faith on the Move Bible Studies: Series Introduction.” To prepare to lead the session, review the materials in this document. The column on the left below is your guide for personal preparation for leading the study. The column on the right is to be used to facilitate participant discussion during the session itself. Make enough copies of this session’s Scripture handout for all participants.

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TIP: Create a display with items that point to the immigrant heritage of your congregation or community. Include items such as early documents written in another language and promotional materials for a heritage festival in the congregation or the town.

Opening Prayer

You may offer an opening prayer or invite a participant to lead the group in prayer.

The use of the phrase “hyphenated American” has become more common in the last few decades:

It indicates ancestry, but may also connote a sense that individuals straddle two worlds—one experience is specific to their unique ethnic identity, while the other is the broader multicultural amalgam that is Americana. (Wikipedia.org)

Unlike its more acceptable contemporary use, the term actually originated as an insult. At the turn of the twentieth century, it was used to disparage Americans who were of foreign birth or origin. As tensions built up in the years leading to World War I, former president Theodore Roosevelt said:

There is no such thing as a hyphenated American who is a good American. The only man who is a good American is the man who is an American and nothing else. (“Roosevelt Bars the Hyphenated,” The New York Times, October 13, 1915) The change in usage of this term reflects varying cultural attitudes about diversity and maintaining one’s ethnic identity. (See Wikipedia for further details on this topic.)

Moses’ identification with the Hebrew victim in verse 11 indicates that, along with nurturing him physically, his mother Jochebed also shaped his identity—likely by sharing with him the sacred stories and traditions handed down to her from her ancestors. Moses’ violent reaction, however, also reveals the mark Pharaoh’s use of violence has left on him. The cycle of violence is played out in the verses that follow. By relying on violence, Moses loses credibility before his Hebrew kinsfolk and provides Pharaoh an opportunity to act out of his long-held resentment.

In *Facing the Myth of Redemptive Violence*, Walter Wink explores the prevalence in contemporary media—from cartoons to news reporting—of the portrayal of violence as a solution to issues. He writes:

The belief that violence “saves” is so successful because it doesn’t seem to be mythic in the least. Violence simply appears to be the nature of things. It’s what works. It seems inevitable, the last and, often, the first resort in conflicts.

Coming of Age

Distribute pens and index cards or paper to all participants. and say: “At the top of the card, write down the hyphenated identity you most relate to, for example, Norwegian-American, Irish-American, African-American or Mexican-American. Below it, indicate how this hyphenated identity has been a part of your life: How is it reflected in your family’s traditional foods, celebrations, jokes, language and so forth?”

After a few minutes, invite participants to share some of the items they have written. Depending on the size of the group, you may do this in pairs or with the whole group. Then bring everyone back together and identify the various “hyphenated-identities” represented in the group. You may also refer to any others that are part of your church or community.

READ Exodus 2:11–15.

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

According to verse 11, Moses becomes aware of the injustice suffered by his people “after [he] had grown up.” Can you remember the first time you became aware of a particular injustice? What was your reaction? What was Moses’?

What was the consequence of Moses’ reliance on violence to address the wrong he saw taking place?

OFFERING AN ALTERNATE NARRATIVE...

Bible study participants who live in communities affected by increasing levels of youth violence shared their struggles to directly address the consequences of violence, while also attending to the frustration and fear that often lies behind it. A participant in Washington State said:

Many children of immigrants grow up seeing adults use violence. They may be aware that their parents left their country of origin to escape violence. Then, in this new country, they see their parents living in fear of violence and the use of force against them, especially if they are undocumented.

What impact does this prevalence of violence have on young people when they become aware of injustice—either directed at them or at others—and seek to address it? Talking specifically about gang violence in her community, the participant quoted above went on:

“In our community, we have found that it is important that we deal with gang violence not only as a ‘criminal’ matter, but that we recognize that many kids turn to gangs because they think gangs can give them what, as immigrants or children of immigrants, they often don’t get from the broader culture— protection, a place to belong, a way to get ahead in life.”

How does this “cycle of violence” play out in today’s culture?

The biblical text does not specify where Moses grew up, only that he was raised by his mother on an unintended “scholarship” from Pharaoh! Traditionally he is portrayed as having grown up as a privileged son of the empire. However, when he sees an Egyptian attacking a Hebrew, Moses identifies with the Hebrew victim as one of “his kinsfolk.”

The complexity of Moses’ identity is further highlighted by the fact that his status within Egypt, as the child of “foreigners,” is precarious. Having committed a crime, Moses is not protected by his connections to Pharaoh—not even the fact that he is the adopted child of Pharaoh’s daughter. Instead, his crime gives Pharaoh an opportunity to finish the job he had begun when Moses was a child: Pharaoh seeks to kill Moses (verse 15). Moses flees across the desert to Midian (today’s northwest Saudi Arabia, along the coast of the Red Sea), increasing the complexity of his immigrant identity.

Identity

READ Exodus 2:16–22

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

What role does Moses’ hyphenated identity (as a “Hebrew-Egyptian”) play in this text?

Moses names his firstborn Gershom, saying, “I have been an alien residing in a foreign land” (גר שם *ger sham* meaning “sojourner there,” v. 22). What does this say about his sense of belonging? How might questions of identity and belonging be similar or different for immigrants today?

In this new land, Moses takes a risk by helping a group of local women who have come to draw water at a “public” well. The women, commentators have pointed out, were likely outsiders themselves, since local customs looked down on families with no male heirs. This fact is further emphasized by the treatment the women receive at the well and by the very fact that they are caring for their flock on their own (without the traditional male protection). When reporting what happened at the well to their father, the women identify Moses as an Egyptian (v. 2:19). Imagine the identity struggle he is going through. He had to flee Egypt for the crime he committed because he had identified with the Hebrews. Yet, here in this new land, he is identified as an Egyptian. His firstborn’s name, Gershom, reflects Moses’ identity struggle!

“No soy de aqui, ni soy de alla [I am neither from here, nor from there],” said a Bible study participant, quoting a popular song in Spanish. This basic phrase captures the ambivalent reality of immigrants and, increasingly, the feelings of those who move even within national borders for work purposes or for another opportunity.

Increasingly, people experience moves in their lives, following new opportunities or needing to move because of the loss of a job. How have you (or how has someone you know) dealt with questions of identity and belonging following a move to a new community?

Pharaoh dies, but his devastating policies continue. The people of Israel have been suffering for over a generation, and there seems to be no relief in sight—that is, until God hears their cry. This image of God hearing the plea of God’s people is presented as good news throughout Scripture, highlighting the power of prayer and the assurance of being heard by God. You may invite participants to call out the verbs they are highlighting in the passages and write them on a chalkboard or chart paper. Encourage conversation about ways in which people have experienced God as an “active listener” in their lives. You may also note that God’s deep, active concern for the people challenges any easily drawn division between faith and politics. Addressing Moses, God speaks at length about the specific political grievances of the people of Israel. Along with the spiritual liberation from God, which

Call

READ Exodus 2:23-3:10

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

This is one of the best-known and most-loved scenes in the Bible. In pairs, share memories, images, or insights about this story that have been important to you.

Moses’ impulsive reaction to the injustice he witnessed in verse 2:11 is contrasted here by God’s intentional response to the suffering of the Hebrews. Take a moment to underline the verbs that describe God’s actions in verses 2:24-25 (heard, remembered, looked, took notice) and 3:7-8 (observed, heard, knew, come down, bring them up). Discuss the feel, significance, and message behind such active language.

gets a lot of our attention, we see in this account that God's plans are to liberate the Hebrew people physically from the oppression they are suffering at the hands of the Egyptians. Spiritual and physical liberation are intricately connected throughout the Scriptures.

Moses' encounter with God will prove transformative. That transformation begins here with physical movement—by the simple act of turning aside. In the Bible, the experience of transformation is often expressed in this kind of physical action.

Write the quote from the movie so that all participants can see it. It might be helpful to introduce the quote with the following bit of trivia about the movie: Selena is played by Jennifer Lopez, and her father by Edward James Olmos.

The Bible passage highlights Moses' experience of movement. Out in the desert tending sheep (v. 3:1), he is as physically removed from his past in Egypt as he is, we can assume, emotionally distanced. Given the difficulties in his early life and the new life he has built for himself in Midian, he is likely to be at a point where he wants very little to do with his past. That's just when God, identified twice as the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and Jacob, comes to him. God's revelation and call to Moses requires both the openness that comes with movement and a new place, and the rootedness of his past. Be attentive to the way that this balance can be explored with participants.

EXTRA: If you have a map of the region, you could identify Egypt, Midian, and Mount Horeb. Mount Horeb is also known as Mount Sinai. While its exact location is not known, most scholars agree it was somewhere in the middle of what is now known as the Sinai Peninsula. Similarly, Moses' task of reconciling the various parts of his hyphenated identity take place in the physical middle between his past in Egypt and his present in Midian. Like many immigrants— and, in a way, many of us who must navigate various roles and identities of whatever kind—Moses is called to live out his calling straddling two worlds. His best gifts will flourish when he seeks to reconcile the identities within himself.

EXTRA: Verse 3:8 recognizes that the land being promised to Moses and his people is already inhabited by others. You may find it important to address, or at least acknowledge, this issue in the study. It is important to note that the Bible offers various versions of the account of Israel's entrance into the "promised

"When the Lord saw that he had turned aside..." (v. 3:4). How might this physical "turning" indicate the kind of internal transformation that will be required of Moses?

"We have to be more Mexican than the Mexicans and more American than the Americans, both at the same time! It's exhausting!" says a frustrated Abraham Quintanilla to his daughter, Mexican-American pop star Selena, in the 1997 film by the artist's name. In our Bible passage, Moses encounters a similar tension between his present and his past. In a new place ("beyond the wilderness," v. 3:1), he is confronted with his past (a call from a God identified twice in this section as the God of his ancestors, v. 2:24 and 3:6). How will he need to draw on both of his "identities" in order to be able to answer the call? How is he, as a Hebrew-Egyptian, particularly suited for the job?

land”—from the “conquest” emphasis in Joshua to the less forceful “settlement” in the book of Judges. In fact, diverse accounts coexist even within the narratives of each of these two books. (For further reading, see <http://www.crivoice.org/conquest.html>).

TIP: Depending on your group’s dynamics, you may need to take a more active role in helping participants connect Moses’ own experience of self-discovery—reconnecting to his past while imagining a new future—to their own sense of call and who they are. At the same time, this kind of conversation will require some space, so be mindful to allow time—even in silence—for participants to reflect and come to the point where they are able and willing to share with one another.

I Will Send You

Like youth and young adults across the generations, Moses “grew up” when he became aware of some challenging realities, and by spending time “away from home.” How has your understanding of yourself evolved over the years?

Moses’ encounter with God in the burning bush was transformational. In pairs, share a particular moment or experience that was important in making you the person you are today.

Moses’ surprise at seeing the burning bush may have paled in comparison to God’s statement, recorded in verse 3:10: “I will send YOU to Pharaoh.” Explore with the group the connection between being “at home in our own skin” and a willingness and ability to find and follow our calling in life.

Closing Prayer

After inviting any final comments and providing details for the next session, you may conclude by offering a prayer or inviting a participant to lead the group in prayer.

Out of the Waters

RESISTING the POWER of FEAR



FAITH on the MOVE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Session 5: What Is That in Your Hand? – Exodus 3:9-4:17

*“...‘What is that in your hand?’” Exodus 4:2**

Introduction

We’ve all had those moments of clarity when we realize the magnitude of the challenges and opportunities faced by our world. At those times, it is easy to become overwhelmed. Today’s text names this reality directly, and at points quite comically. At the same time, it reminds us, as the saying goes, that God doesn’t always call the equipped, but God always equips the called. The remaining sessions of this study will focus on larger portions of text. You will want to plan the session in a way that allows you to cover the material in the time allotted for your Bible study. This may require you as facilitator to take a more active role in keeping the conversation focused and moving.

To orient yourself to the series, be sure to download and read “Faith on the Move Bible Studies: Series Introduction.” To prepare to lead the session, review the materials in this document. The column on the left below is your guide for personal preparation for leading the study. The column on the right is to be used to facilitate participant discussion during the session itself. Make enough copies of this session’s Scripture handout for all participants.

*All Scripture passages are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, Anglicized Edition. Copyright 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A

TIP: Create a display of materials that tell the story of your congregation's ministry—newsletters, bulletins, event fliers, pictures, etc. Try to reflect the congregation's various ministries, including outreach and social advocacy beyond the congregation.

Opening Prayer

You may offer an opening prayer or invite a participant to lead the group in prayer.

TIP: As in earlier sections of Exodus, humor is central to this session's Scripture portion. Depending on your group's dynamics, you may read the statement about the phony visit to your representative and encourage participants to have fun coming up with excuses, or you could move directly to inviting them to share their experience of trying to recruit volunteers for a project. List responses on a board or chart paper, and if you find it helpful, return to them throughout the session by comparing them to the excuses offered by Moses.

Excuses, Excuses

Feigning seriousness, tell the group: "We're forming a delegation to go to the state capitol this Tuesday to meet with our representative [include the name of your local representative if you know it]. You have 30 seconds to come up with an excuse why you can't go."

Let's try to come up with a list of the best—or at least the most common—excuses we have heard when trying to recruit volunteers.

In spite of his protestations about not being good with words, Moses proves adept at coming up with excuses when God calls him to go back to Egypt and tell Pharaoh, "Let my people go!"

TIP: In today's text we return to Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush. Take a moment to reconnect with participants, and invite them to offer things that stayed with them from the last session or reflections the conversation sparked for them through the week.

Verses 9-10 offer a "summary" of last week's reading. Encourage those who volunteer to read to have fun with the text. For example, the person reading God's part in verse 3:10 could point his or her finger to the person playing the part of Moses when he/she says: "I will send YOU to Pharaoh." Similarly, some exaggeration can help bring the point home in reading Moses' astonished response in verse 11.

Moses proves quite adept at coming up with excuses and, in the process, reveals our fears and insecurities as humans when it comes to "doing the right thing." At the same time, the passage models a different approach to prayer. You might find it helpful in advance of the session to identify Moses' various excuses and God's responses to them (see chart below). Additionally, you could write these on the board or chart paper as you discuss them with the group.

Who?

READ Exodus 3:9-12.

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

Drawing from your own experience—perhaps particularly experiences with children!—discuss the power of the word "but." What do you think of Moses' persistent use of the word in his conversation with God?

	Text	Moses	God
A	3:11-12	Who am I?	I will be with you
B	3:13-14	What is his name?	I Am Who I Am
C	4:1-9	What if...?	What's in your hand?
D	4:10-11	I am slow of speech	Who gives speech?
E	4:13-17	Send someone else	Aaron shall speak for you

Who am I?

In response to God's eloquent acknowledgment of the Hebrews' suffering and to God's monumental plans, Moses offers the first of his long series of "buts." In many respects, his hesitation reveals that he fully understands the implications of what he's being asked to do. Moses' first concern is familiar to anyone who has felt a calling to advocate for justice and change. Moses asks simply, "Who am I...?"

Reflecting on his experience addressing the working conditions for tomato pickers in south Florida, a Bible study participant said, "A uno siempre le dicen: y tú, ¿quién te crees? [Whenever you start asking questions], people always say, who do you think you are?"

Moses' identity question, "who am I," points both to his own insecurities and to his hesitation about taking on such a challenging task. God answers Moses' concern with the unequivocal promise, "I will be with you," and by making a reference to the covenant God will make with him and the Israelites when they return to that very mountain (i.e., the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Horeb/Sinai, see Exodus 19:20 ff).

What is God's name?

Moses isn't buying. Even though he may have grown up hearing the stories about how the God of his ancestors had a hand in his miraculous survival as a child, Moses just isn't so sure he knows enough about this God to go off to deliver his people from the hands of the mighty Pharaoh. Besides, he has settled his life just fine

What does Moses' first excuse reveal about him?

What does God's response reveal about God?

READ Exodus 3:13-14

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

In asking to know God's name, Moses is interested in more than the formalities of a personal introduction. He is really asking God, "Who are you? What are your 'credentials'?" What does Moses already know about God?

in Midian, making it his new home, setting up his family, securing work, etc. “He’s made it in the suburbs,” said a Bible study participant wryly. Moses’ hesitation is understandable. The one and only attempt he made to help “his people” didn’t end well. And now, even though the previous Pharaoh who was seeking to kill him has passed on, there is likely still an outstanding warrant for Moses’ arrest. With all this mounting evidence, Moses moves from questioning himself to questioning God—“Who should I say sent me?”

Although God eventually grows weary of Moses’ excuses (v. 4:14), at first God does entertain his doubts and questions. In fact, Moses’ questioning leads to the revelation of God’s very name. Moses accomplishes through verbal jousting what Jacob failed to do by the use of force when wrestling with the angel of God in Genesis 32:29. What does this say about the power of prayer?

EXTRA: In an earlier session we pointed to the parallels between Moses’ story and the birth narratives of Jesus. This connection is further established in the language of this passage when it refers to the death of Pharaoh. In almost identical language, Joseph is told in a dream that he, Jesus, and Mary may return home from their time in Egypt, for “those who sought the life of the child have died” (Matthew 2:20). Compare this phrasing with Exodus 2:23 and 4:18.

What does God’s name, “I AM WHO I AM,” reveal about God?

What does the fact that God entertains Moses’ doubts and questions teach us about prayer (talking with God)? What does it say about the role of questions in our life of faith?

Even having been assured about God’s presence with him and given God’s very name, Moses is still not convinced. Perhaps Moses was more of a veteran of community organizing than what we are told in the Bible, and he already knew how difficult it can be to organize people on behalf of a meaningful cause! “What if they don’t believe me?” he wonders out loud. One of the Bible study groups at Holden Village in Washington included several individuals who had been active in their communities setting up business cooperatives and advocacy groups among new immigrants. Many of them heard echoes of their own struggle in Moses’ doubts. With a laugh, one participant said, “I’ve shared Moses’ doubts... I just often have wished I also had a burning bush, a magic stick, and a couple of those other tricks!”

What if...?

READ Exodus 4:1-9

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

Moses has expressed reservations about himself and about who God is. Now he voices concern about the community he is called to serve (v. 4:1). Can you relate to his concern? If so, how?

In v. 4:2 God directs a question to Moses: “What do you have in your hand?” This shifts the dynamics of the dialogue—until now it has been Moses asking all the questions. This shift highlights the importance of this portion of the text. A Bible study participant in Iowa said, “Moses needs to look no further than his own hands to find what he needs for the task that is being given to him. God has deliberately chosen Moses for who Moses was, and God would use what Moses had on hand for God’s purposes.”

Things turn funny in the verses that follow (vv. 4:3-4). As instructed, Moses throws his staff on the ground and in amazement watches it turn into a snake! We’ve heard this story so many times, we might miss how extraordinary—and how funny—this scene really is. Seeing the snake, Moses takes off running—a feeling not quite captured by the NRSV’s “[Moses] drew back from it.” That’s when God—showing some significant sense of humor—commands Moses to grab the snake by the tail. Bible study participants loved this great image of a call to action: “Como dicen en mi pueblo, agarrar al toro por los cachos [It takes courage to grab the problem by the tail—or, as the saying goes, take the bull by the horns].”

EXTRA: Being asked to grab a snake was demanding. Having his hand turn leprous—something that would spell both physical and social doom to an individual—was devastating. These physical signs give Moses a clear indication of how demanding this calling would be.

Don’t you just love it when people answer a question with a question? What do you think of God doing this to Moses in verse 4:2? How does God’s question change the dynamic of the conversation?

What do we, as the church, have “on hand” in order to advocate on behalf of others?

God turns Moses’ staff into a snake and then asks him to grab it by the tail! Do you think the phrase “he drew back from it” captures how you would react if a stick you had just been holding turned into a snake? What words might better describe your feelings?

Have there been times when you have felt God has asked you to “grab a stick-turned-snake by the tail”?

Verse 4:10 gives Moses a chance to try his hand at comedy. “O my Lord, I have never been eloquent,” he begins, and then points out that the burning bush and the other miracles have done little to improve his eloquence. This is quite the sentence for someone who claims to be “slow of speech and slow of tongue,” especially coming after such an elaborate list of excuses! The comedy of this verse is perhaps better captured when explored in a variety of translations of the Bible:

- Moses, however, said to the LORD, “If you please, LORD, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past, nor recently, nor now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and tongue.” (New American Bible)

How About...?

READ Exodus 4:9b-12

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

What do you think about the eloquence of verse 4:10 (especially coming from someone claiming to be “slow of speech”)?

According to Moses, what impact has his encounter with God had thus far?

- But Moses pleaded with the LORD, “O Lord, I’m just not a good speaker. I never have been, and I’m not now, even after you have spoken to me. I’m clumsy with words.” (New Living Translation)

One of the participants in the Bible study put it this way: “It is as if Moses is saying to God, ‘All these tricks are great, but what I really need is some practical tools—like being able to talk, which you have yet to do anything about.’”

God’s response reveals a growing impatience with Moses: “Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go...” Imagine God addressing your questions, fears, and hesitations about taking on a challenging call. Can you hear God saying to Moses, and to you, “C’mon already! Get on with it!”

Just when you think God’s tone with Moses would have settled the matter, Moses still has his reservations—and the courage to articulate them! In what has to be the most classic response to the daunting call of addressing injustice, Moses says to God: “O my Lord, please send someone else” (note the polite tone!). In Bible studies across the country, this last retort from Moses evoked the greatest laughter—both because of its boldness and because of its familiarity.

However, in the end, God has the final retort. “What of your brother Aaron?” God says, his anger “kindled.” Or in the more direct language of The New Living Translation, “Then the LORD became angry with Moses. ‘All right,’ he said. ‘What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? He is a good speaker.’”

“Even now,” God continues, “[Aaron] is coming out to meet you.” In not-too-subtle terms, God basically says to Moses that while Moses was busy coming up with one excuse after another, God had already recruited Aaron to help with the job. From the beginning, God knew this was not a “one-person job.” Like the women in chapter 2, who worked together to rescue the infant Moses, Moses and Aaron would now work together to free the Hebrews from Pharaoh’s oppression.

Re-read verses 4:9b-12, imagining yourself in God’s place. Rewrite God’s response to Moses in your own words, and then share it with the group.

READ Exodus 4:13-17

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

Having run out of excuses, Moses says to God, “Send someone else.” Have you ever felt this way...perhaps even said it out loud?

What do you think of God’s response to Moses?

God provided Aaron as a partner for Moses’ mission. Who are your partners in ministry—both for you individually and for your congregation?

TIP: Moses provides us with a model for prayer that, while respectful, is honest and even demanding. How might the example of Moses' conversation with God provide us a model for our own prayer and the prayer of our communities? Consider taking a set of prayers used in your congregation's worship and "revising" them to reflect Moses' more audacious style of prayer. If your congregation uses pre-written prayers, you could distribute one petition to each participant. If the prayers offered in your worship are more extemporaneous, you could try to create a "transcript" from a recording of a recent worship service.

How About Me?

Which of Moses' excuses do you most relate to? How do God's responses challenge and encourage you?

What does this text teach us about prayer?

According to a 2008 study by the Pew Forum on Religious Life, the vast majority of new immigrants to the United States are Christian (an estimated 74 percent of them). What does the church have "on hand" to contribute to the challenges and opportunities brought about by this influx of new people into the American Christian tradition?

TIP: Consider using the following prayer as the closing prayer for this session:

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship. p. 317.)

Closing Prayer

After inviting any final comments and providing details for the next session, you may conclude by offering a prayer or inviting a participant to lead the group in prayer.

Out of the Waters

RESISTING the POWER of FEAR



FAITH on the MOVE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Session 6: Now You Shall See What I Will Do – Exodus 5:1-6:7 (selected)

*“... ‘Now you shall see what I will do...’” Exodus 6:1**

Introduction

In Session 1 we discussed the importance the act of remembering plays in the Exodus story and to the biblical story as a whole. We noted that the book begins with a genealogy, connecting its story to those of the ancestors. This remembering is contrasted with forgetful Pharaohs—an earlier one who did not know Joseph and now one who derisively states he does not know Moses’ God. Central to today’s story is Walter Brueggeman’s argument in *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles* that Exodus tells of two competing “Lords”—Pharaoh and God—and their corresponding views of reality. Brueggeman writes:

The early Hebrews had settled for a slave narrative as their proper self-presentation [a narrative supplied to them by Pharaoh through his brutal policies]. That narrative is disrupted by another narrative that has Yahweh the liberator as the key and decisive agent. The decision to stay in Egypt or leave for the promise is a decision about which narrative to follow, whether to understand the “plot of life” according to the character Pharaoh or according to a different plot featuring Yahweh. (Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles*, p. 35)

This final session of the study focuses on a large portion of text. You will want to plan the session in a way that allows you to cover the material in the time allotted for your Bible Study. This may require you as facilitator to take a more active role in keeping the conversation focused and moving.

To orient yourself to the series, be sure to download and read “Faith on the Move Bible Studies: Series Introduction.” To prepare to lead the session, review the materials in this document. The column on the left below is your guide for personal preparation for leading the study. The column on the right is to be used to facilitate participant discussion during the session itself. Make enough copies of this session’s Scripture handout for all participants.

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TIP: Create a display with images of the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea from art, children's Bibles, etc. Also, consider displaying fliers from the labor movement, especially those that portray the work of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Union.

Before reading today's text, you may choose to read Exodus 5:18- 23 (which is not included in the "Out of the Waters" booklet), or you may read the following summary: "After his encounter with God at the burning bush, Moses makes arrangements to return to Egypt. His wife Zipporah is instrumental in saving Moses' life from peril as they travel. Once in Egypt, Moses and Aaron gather the Israelites and tell of God's plans for them. Chapter 5 concludes with the words, "The people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had given heed to the Israelites and that he had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped" (5:31). So far, so good... until Moses and Aaron go before Pharaoh!

In Exodus 1:17 we are told that Shiphra and Puah feared God more than Pharaoh—they chose to believe God's narrative or version of reality rather than that of Pharaoh. Now it's Moses' turn to confront Pharaoh. He, too, like the midwives, is taking this risk because of his relationship with the God of his ancestors. Unlike the midwives, however, Moses has personal experience to draw from (the stories of his own miraculous survival in childhood and his recent encounter with God) as well as some degree of status. Pointing to Moses' identity as a hyphenated Egyptian, a Bible study participant in Iowa stated: "Moises tiene papeles. Tiene esa ventaja sobre las comadronas. [Moses has his papers (he's "documented"); he's got an edge on the midwives]."

EXTRA: Divide into two groups and talk about how you would stage Moses' encounter with Pharaoh for a play or a movie—one group from Moses' perspective and one from Pharaoh's. How would the statements of the characters be heard from the perspective of your group? How is God viewed differently by each? Return together and compare the groups' perspectives and insight.

Opening Prayer

You may offer an opening prayer or invite a participant to lead the group in prayer

Who Is the Lord?

READ Exodus 5:1-5.

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

When "Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh" (5:1), they followed in the steps of Shiphra and Puah, the Hebrew midwives (1:15 and 18). How might these "meetings" have been similar or different?

Moses likely grew up hearing the stories of the midwives' encounter with Pharaoh. How might the memory of that earlier encounter have shaped Moses' approach to Pharaoh?

"Who is the Lord...? ... I do not know the Lord..." says Pharaoh (5:2). In the first two sessions we discussed the importance of memory and of knowing, pointing out the significance of the fact that "a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph" (1:8). What's the significance of the knowledge or memory of God in this scene?

Is Moses lying when he asks Pharaoh to give the Hebrew people a three-day pass to go into the desert? Were the midwives lying when they were confronted by Pharaoh for not following his commands (1:18-19)? Were Moses' mother and sister lying when they figured out a way to make sure the child survived (2:3-9)? As we discussed in Session 3 while focusing on non-violent civil disobedience, people throughout history have had to make difficult ethical decisions when faced with what they believe to be unjust laws.

Because we read the story with the full knowledge of how things turn out, it is quite easy to side with Shiprah, Puah, Moses, and the others who chose to go against the law of the land. Such a choice is often only clear in retrospect, however. Harriet Tubman, Ghandi, and Martin Luther King Jr. were seldom viewed as heroes in their own time, especially by those in authority. Their choices were complex. Reading this text with groups of undocumented workers who, out of desperation, have chosen to go against a law they believe to be unjust, allows no such easy reading. This is also the case for those who work closely with undocumented workers, like a grower in Yakima, Washington, who stated, "The current immigration system doesn't provide for the legal means to supply our nations' labor needs. When people say that undocumented workers need to be willing to take their turn in line [to obtain a proper visa to work in the United States], they don't realize there is no line to stand in if you are willing to come all the way from Mexico or Guatemala to pick apples in Washington [see note in Session 2 about the imbalance between labor needs and available work permits]. The system is broken, leading otherwise decent, law-abiding employers and workers to find ways around the law just so that they can make a living... It's like what happened with prohibition—eventually the law had to be changed."

The word "broken" is the most common adjective used by people on all sides of the immigration debate to refer to the current immigration system in the United States. Yet there are strong disagreements on how to fix the system, as well as a lack of political will to take the risks necessary to go about changing it. How might the reading of this text invite us to engage the conversation about immigration with a level of complexity that does not reduce it to the often quoted slogan of "What part of 'illegal' don't you understand?"?

Moses and Aaron only request a temporary reprieve from Pharaoh ("a three days' journey," 5:3). That wasn't exactly God's plan. God actually said, "I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey..." (3:8). What's going on here? Is Moses being careful? Is he being tricky?

Is God—who promised Moses, "I will be your mouth and teach you what you are to speak" (4:12)—being careful and/or tricky?

What are the difficult choices made by those who come to the realization that they must confront laws they believe to be unjust?

Pharaoh wastes no time dealing with the threat of a revolt among his workers. “That same day,” he commands action from both his Egyptian taskmasters and the Israelite supervisors. In Bible Studies conducted with migrant workers, particularly those who work without proper documentation, deep silence usually followed the reading of this portion of the text. Pharaoh’s oppressive tactics echoed those they often experienced at the hands of abusive employers. Sworn testimony about working conditions from workers at a meatpacking plant in Iowa provides chilling parallels to the story (names have been changed as indicated):

- They treated workers very poorly there. Women were abused. Work was very hard and hours long... They constantly were pushing [Amanda] to work faster. They would yell and at times use obscenities and very strong language. When [Amanda] was sick, they would tell her that she still had to work or they would fire her. Because of her desperate need, [Amanda] had no choice but to accept it in order to provide for her children. I saw her exhausted. That’s what life is like for Hispanics. We are not treated well. But there is a God of justice, and I hope that no one will suffer like [Amanda] suffered in that company.
- They yelled at them if they didn’t work fast enough. They would tell them that they had had too much sex with their husbands, and that’s why they couldn’t work faster.
- Sometimes [Gabriel] would get sick because he was working so many hours and they would run the [processing] line so fast. Often they wouldn’t give them breaks, and only 15 minutes for lunch. On top of that, the supervisors demanded more work from them and would speed up the line, and no matter how hard he tried and how much he worked, the supervisors would yell at him and humiliate him in front of others.
- Sometimes she would be running a fever and ask permission to go home, but they would not let her. If her stomach hurt and she asked to go home, they wouldn’t let her either. They didn’t care what happened to her.
- I saw the fear he had that they would yell at him. He would take off his work equipment as fast as he could, eat as fast as possible, and then get back to work as quickly as he could so that they wouldn’t yell at him or threaten him with the loss of his job. He worked like a slave to try to give life to his children, living like all the rest under the fear of losing his job.

Work to Live or Live to Work?

READ Exodus 5:6-18

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

If you imagine Pharaoh as a corporate CEO and Moses a union organizer, how might this scene play out?

EXTRA: How do the dynamics change if we imagine Moses as an advocate for the rights of undocumented workers?

What tactics does Pharaoh use to squelch the “revolt” brewing among his workers? How do these compare with tactics often used in labor disputes?

- You couldn't be late even a little bit, because the supervisors would tell you, "If you don't want to work, you know where the door is [that] you came in through, and you can go out of that door as well."

Sadly, these abuses were often buttressed by the threat of calling the authorities—particularly immigration enforcement—if workers dared to complain or tried to organize. The workers' fear spread, affecting even those with proper work documentation. This fear and the poor enforcement of labor laws—rather than the immigration status of the workers—are often identified by labor experts as the biggest contributors to low wages in a number of industries.

EXTRA: Bible Study participants who worked in agriculture as farm laborers also saw their work experience reflected in the Pharaoh's use of taskmasters and supervisors. Increasingly, farm labor depends on a complex system of contractors and subcontractors. The Pharaoh today is the combination of market forces that drive the price of products down, leading farmers to put pressure on their contractors, who in turn press the workers even further. In this view, how are we as consumers part of Pharaoh's oppressive system?

"Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labors!" says Pharaoh. What to Pharaoh seems like a luxury, even a waste of time, is in fact a central part of being human. Moses is asking for the opportunity—denied to those who live in slavery—to have time for rest and to celebrate the traditions that are important to his people's culture, faith, and identity. Additionally, deliverance is tied to the regular practice of rest as the story of Exodus unfolds.

Following the example of his predecessor, Pharaoh sees work not as a life-giving gift of God, but as a tool for control. "Work to live, not live to work," goes a saying that tries to mark the difference. For many immigrants, the idea of "working to live" rather than "living to work" seems like a luxury. For many, the decision to migrate—even without documentation in some cases—is motivated by the hope that they may one day be able to "work to live." If they are not able to do so themselves, they hope their sacrifices translate into their children being able to do so.

The Exodus passage equates Pharaoh's refusal to recognize the Hebrew people's basic need for freedom with his refusal to recognize God. By doing so it invites a question: How does the exploitation of workers—then

Pharaoh's labor empire is portrayed as a complex hierarchy of middle managers that includes supervisors from within the Israelite ranks (5:14-15). What do you think about the role of these "Israelite supervisors"? Compare their participation in Pharaoh's system to Shiphra and Puah's earlier refusal to be co-opted by Pharaoh.

Repeatedly, Pharaoh derides the Israelites as lazy (5:8, 17). Contrast this to God's command, built right into the Ten Commandments: "But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work..." (See Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:15.)

How do we deal with the struggle to balance "working to live" with "living to work"? What is the role of the law (labor protections) in striking that balance?

and now—reveal not only a lack of recognition of their humanity, but also a refusal to recognize God’s sovereignty over creation and over people?

In a moment of courage, the Israelite supervisors actually try to plead with Pharaoh for their own situation and that of the workers (6:15-16). Having failed at getting any positive resolution, they confront Moses and Aaron (6:21). Like thousands of labor organizers since, Moses cries out to God in despair: “Why did you ever send me?”

Moses and Aaron’s experience of rejection has been the experience of countless people throughout generations who have tried to advocate for significant social change. We ourselves may at times feel that change is not really possible even in areas of our lives or our society that we care deeply about.

The people are disheartened and, therefore, unable to listen to God’s proposal for liberation. They, like Pharaoh, cannot imagine an alternative to the complex oppressive system already in place. Many Bible Study participants expressed surprise, even shock, at the honesty of the biblical account. They hear their own despair echoed in Moses’ words. The task of addressing injustice is quite overwhelming, and the forces in place to maintain the status quo are quite overwhelming. It is only by “a mighty hand” (used twice in verse 6:1) that change will come about. Pointing out that God’s deliverance in Exodus was not dependent on what may have seemed possible or realistic, Walter Brueggemann writes, “We need to ask not whether it is realistic or practical or viable but whether it is imaginable.... The prophet does not ask if the vision can be implemented, for questions of implementation are of no consequence until the vision can be imagined.... We need to ask if our consciousness and imagination have been so assaulted and co-opted by the royal consciousness that we have been robbed of the courage or power to think an alternative thought...” (Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, p. 39)

There are many excellent resources for studying the remainder of the Exodus story, including Terence Fretheim’s *Exodus* from the series, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*.

By a Mighty Hand

READ Exodus 5:19-6:1

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out?

“Better the devil you know (than the devil you don’t)” goes the saying. How is this kind of thinking at play in the Israelites’ reaction to Moses?

Share a time when you felt like Moses did when asking God, “Why did you ever send me?” (5:22).

How does the tone of the narrative change in verse 6:1?

In the Bible, God’s alternative vision for the world is articulated as God doing something new (Isaiah 43:19 and Revelation 21:1). Moses is called to articulate God’s alternative vision to the Israelites, and even to Pharaoh. Who provides that alternative vision when it comes to the challenges faced by your church or community?

What would it be like to read Exodus 6:6-7 in the company of those whose testimonies of abuse in the workplace we heard earlier, especially if we read it as if God was speaking directly to them?

Whose role is it to provide an alternative vision in our national debate around immigration? What do you think the church’s role is to be in that regard?

Closing Prayer

After inviting any final comments and providing details for the next session, you may conclude by offering a prayer or inviting a participant to lead the group in prayer.