



“What was important, I realized, was the ongoing hunt, the often-eccentric never-ending quest to verify the Biblical story, which itself masked one of the oldest human desires: the need to make contact with God.”

- Bruce Feiler, *Walking the Bible:
A Journey By Land Through the Five Books of Moses*, p. 9.

I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.
Then you will know that I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.

Exodus 6:7

When people think of Egypt, many picture the iconic pyramids and think of King Tut (and maybe hear “Walk Like an Egyptian” playing in their head). Beyond these iconic symbols, however, lies a deep and rich history of life along the Nile River, and in that history we find clues to understand the Bible. This month we’ll take a journey through Egypt, letting what we learn shape both our understanding of the Bible and our lives as God’s people.

Exploring Egypt

MAY 1

GOD'S NAME

Exodus 3:13-15

Sometimes people will ask this question. "When I pray, who should I pray to...God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit?" Here is a good answer: "Yes. Any of the above." Each of these names carries meaning and information about how you relate to God. In the course of a few chapters in the book of Exodus, we find multiple names for God, and God has two conversations with Moses about those names. So what might these names reveal about God, and about our relationship with God?

God desires a relationship with you. Worship deepens that relationship.

MAY 2-7

Monday	Read Exodus 3:1-6. Where have you found "holy ground" in your life?
Tuesday	Read Exodus 3:7-12. What are the sufferings and cries of the people that are reaching God today?
Wednesday	Read Exodus 3:13-15. What names for God do you find in this passage? What name for God do you most often use when you pray?
Thursday	Read Exodus 3:16-20. How can a belief that God is with you empower you to see possibilities that weren't apparent before?
Friday	Read Exodus 6:2-8. What kind of relationship does God desire with with you and with us?
Saturday	Read Exodus 6:9-12. What can hold us back from trusting God's promise or presence, or from the role God invites us to play?

CIRCLE Study Questions:

1. When you pray, how do you most commonly address God?
2. In the sermon on Sunday, Pastor Brian shared the "Do You Believe in Parker?" analogy from Rabbi David Forman. How is God beyond any comprehension or definition we can offer? How can we then relate to God?
3. What do the names for God we find in the Bible reveal about God? What do they reveal about our relationship with God?
4. What would help you grow in your relationship with God?

FaithFit Challenge: Make a list of all the names of God you can think of or find in the Bible. Next to each one, write what the name reveals about God and/or how we can be in relationship with God.

Exploring Egypt

MAY 8

PLAGUES

Exodus 9:1-7

An understanding of the gods of Egyptian mythology gives a new lens with which to understand the plagues that God sends upon Egypt. The story becomes not just Moses versus the pharaoh, but a battle between the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt. Yet even that is not quite right, as we'll see in examining the deeper context of the story. God is inviting the pharaoh, and through the pharaoh all of Egypt, to recognize their Creator.

God invites us again and again to set aside the powers that demand our allegiance and find rest and assurance in God's power.

MAY 9-14

Monday	Read Exodus 5:1-21. Have you ever thought you were following God's direction but things got worse? Why can that happen?
Tuesday	Read Exodus 7:1-7. What are ways that God reveals who God is to us?
Wednesday	Read Exodus 7:8-24. What can keep someone on a destructive path, unable to see even when God offers an offramp?
Thursday	Read Exodus 8:20-32. Do you ever try to negotiate with God? Why do we sometimes want out of what is difficult or the right thing to do?
Friday	Read Exodus 9:1-12. When has your heart been hardened to God's way, unyielding to what you knew Jesus would do?
Saturday	Read Exodus 9:13-30. What does it look like to give your allegiance to God and turn away from other powers that control your life?

CIRCLE Study Questions:

1. Do you think following God's direction in life means things will get easier? Why or why not?
2. In the message, we learned that many of the plagues symbolized God's power over the "gods" of Egypt. What do you believe it means for something to become a "god" in your life? What are some of the gods, or powers, that control our lives today?
3. What "gods" have you had to set aside in order to serve God fully? What "gods" do you *need* to set aside to serve God fully?

FaithFit Challenge: Read the story of the plagues this week, Exodus 7:1-11:10. As you pay attention to what was important, or god-like, to the Egyptians, make a list of those things that are "gods" exerting some control over your life today.

Exploring Egypt

MAY 15

WEIGHING THE HEART

Exodus 10:1-20

During the story of the plagues in Exodus, there is an odd statement, repeated more than once, that often causes questions in Bible study. "...the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh..." Why would God do that? Is that fair? If the goal is to get the people out of Egypt, how does that make sense? The answer can be found in the difference between *strength* of heart (a good thing, as the heart must be strong and flexible) and *hardness* of heart (a bad thing, inability to flex or change). As we read this story, we might ask ourselves, "Are our hearts strong or hard? "

Sin is turning inward with pride and away from God's power of love and grace.

MAY 16-21

Monday	Read Exodus 10:1-20. What's the impact of a hardened heart on one's life and actions?
Tuesday	Read Exodus 14:1-31. How have you witnessed sin, or being hard-hearted, lead to destruction?
Wednesday	Read Daniel 5:1-31. How does pride harden the heart?
Thursday	Read Mark 4:45-52. How does a hard heart keep us from experiencing or understanding what Jesus can do in our lives?
Friday	Read Ezekiel 36:22-28. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit softening or cleansing your heart?
Saturday	Read Psalm 51:10-12. In what current areas of your life do you need God to soften or cleanse your heart?

CIRCLE Study Questions:

1. Pastor Brian shared in his message a way of understanding both the strengthening and the hardening of the pharaoh's heart. How do you understand God's interaction with Pharaoh's heart?
2. What is the difference between a strong (or courageous) heart and a hard heart? Why do you think the Bible so often speaks of the heart in relation to faith?
3. In what areas of your life do you think your heart has become hardened? In what areas of your life does pride sometimes interfere with love or devotion to God?
4. In what ways have you experienced the love of Jesus softening (or cleansing or purifying) your heart?

FaithFit Challenge: This week, pray Psalm 51:10-12 at the start of every day. Then pay attention to opportunities during the day to live with a soft and open heart.

Exploring Egypt

MAY 22

DOES GOD LIKE CAMPING?

Exodus 25:1-9

The people of God spend just a few days in the wilderness before the complaining begins. They are hungry and thirsty, and change is hard, and they'd rather go back to slavery than face an uncertain future. While Moses is trying to get systems of life organized and listening for God's word, the people go back to worshipping other gods because life in the wilderness, in the unknown, is hard and uncertain. In the middle of this story, though, God gives a surprisingly detailed account of how to build a tabernacle, a tent of worship. Why? "So that I can dwell with them," God says.

Worship, offering, and story-telling are anchors of faith for the difficult times in life.

MAY 23-28

Monday	Read Exodus 16:1-30. Do our grumbling and complaining in times of trial reveal a lack of faith or trust in God? Why or why not?
Tuesday	Read Exodus 17:1-7. When have you doubted God's presence, or put God to the test?
Wednesday	Read Exodus 25:1-9. In what ways does worship, or gathering together in a sacred space, help to remind you of God's presence?
Thursday	Read Exodus 25:10-22. How do our encounters in worship – like the ark at the center of the tabernacle - help God speak into our lives?
Friday	Read Exodus 35:4-29. What role do offerings to God play in our faith?
Saturday	Read Exodus 40:33-38. When has an experience in corporate worship or a sacred space assured you of God's presence in your life?

CIRCLE Study Questions:

1. What challenges are most likely to induce grumbling in you?
2. Can you recall a time of change or transition when it felt as though God had abandoned you? What helps you to hold on to your trust in God even when life seems out of control?
3. Share a worship experience that helped assure you of God's presence.
4. How do worship, storytelling, and offering help us to stay centered in the love of Jesus when life seems difficult or out of control?

FaithFit Challenge: At the end of each day this week, ask yourself what you grumbled or complained about during the day. Then take a moment to give thanks for the gift of God's presence and reflect on how that Presence guides you to react and respond. (This can also be a great conversation to share at the end of the day with family, a loved one, or a spiritual friend.)