

Small Group Study

Our Mission

To build a Christian community by making fully devoted disciples of non-religious and nominally religious people

Discussion

Created for Connection: “Covered in God’s Blessing”

Scripture

Have a volunteer read the following scripture:

Exodus 6:6-8 (NLT):

“Therefore, say to the people of Israel: ‘I am the LORD. I will free you from your oppression and will rescue you from your slavery in Egypt. I will redeem you with a powerful arm and great acts of judgment. I will claim you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God who has freed you from your oppression in Egypt. I will bring you into the land I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will give it to you as your very own possession. I am the LORD!’”

Questions

Please feel free to adjust this study to fit your group’s needs and to listen to the direction of the Holy Spirit. It is not necessary to use all of the questions.

1. Exodus begins with the God of compassion, the God of justice, hearing the cry of slaves in Egypt and setting out to do something about it. God sends a man named Moses to rescue them, and it’s through Moses that God makes four promises to these slaves.

“I will take you out.”

“I will rescue you.”

“I will redeem you.”

“I will take you to me.”

There’s a reason why these four promises are so significant—they’re the promises a Jewish groom makes to a Jewish bride. This is wedding language. Somebody hearing this story in its original context would realize that some sort of marriage is going to take place.



Ice Breaker

Use ONE of the questions to help people open up and to focus your meeting. It is very helpful to go around in a circle with the leader going first. (Remember if you have new members or guests you should take time to introduce everyone.)

- 1.** Describe a beautiful wedding that you have been to. What made it so lovely?
- 2.** What is a custom from another culture that you find interesting or difficult to understand?
- 3.** What do you usually wear when you go to sleep at night?

The next fourteen chapters anticipate the coming marriage between these newly liberated Hebrews and this God of the oppressed.

The writer wants us to see that God is with these people. In their grumbling and complaining and ingratitude, God is with them. The text says that a “cloud by day and a fire by night were with them all the time.” The Hebrew word here for the presence of God is *shekinah*. The *shekinah* of God, hovering over his people in a cloud and in fire.

God tells them, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.” “Treasured possession” is the phrase a groom would call his bride. More wedding language.

The response of the Hebrews is, “We will do everything the Lord has said.”

The people essentially say, “We do.”

Have you ever thought of our relationship with God in this way, in terms of a marriage covenant? How does knowing that affect your relationship with God? Your everyday life?

2. In a Jewish wedding ceremony, a legal document called the *ketubah* must be agreed upon and signed by both parties. Essentially it's a list of what they are entering into. Both the bride and groom must be clear with each other on what they are committing to, what they both affirm it will take for this relationship to work.

The Ten Commandments are a *ketubah*.

The Ten Commandments are not just a set of harsh rules from a God who is looking for ways to judge and control us but an agreement about how God and we are going to live together.

And for the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures, we find God referring back to these original vows. In the book of Hosea, God says to his people, “You cheated on me!” (Hosea 1 & 2). The whole book is a picture of how God's people have been unfaithful to him.

This was supposed to be a beautiful thing, but the people haven't been faithful. They've broken God's heart.

How does knowing this influence your perspective on the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:2-17)? Which of them do you have the hardest time with?

3. From the perspective of the Scriptures, a man and a woman coming together is a picture of God and His people coming together—the God of Exodus, the God who travels with His people in a cloud of smoke and fire. The God who is with His people. The God of the *shekinah*.

To symbolically represent this coming together, for thousands of years Jews have taken a prayer shawl, which in the book of Numbers, God commanded the people to wear, and fastened the four corners to four poles, and then the wedding attendants held the four poles so that the couple could exchange their vows under the canopy, the *chuppah* (pronounced HOO-pah). A marriage takes place under the chuppah just like Israel

exchanged vows with God under the shekinah. This same God, the one who hovers over His people, hovers over the married couple, protecting them and journeying with them and blessing their union.

A marriage is a sacred, holy thing. And the shekinah glory of God rests upon it.

In the ancient world, after the ketubah had been signed and the vows had been exchanged, the couple wasn't officially married until they had consummated their relationship. So the wedding party would lead them to their bridal chamber, attach the chuppah above the bed, leave them, and wait outside until the couple had sex. Then the couple would come out, and the celebration would begin--often lasting for several days.

A marriage is a sacred, holy thing and the sexual bond is central to the relationship. Their understanding in the ancient world is that sex is not an optional thing for a marriage, something couples can take or leave. The sexual bond is central to what it means to be married.

No consummation, no marriage.

This understanding of sex as marriage is found throughout the Bible because it was thought of this way throughout the ancient world.

In Exodus 22 the command reads: ""If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged to anyone and has sex with her, he must pay the customary bride price and marry her. But if her father refuses to let him marry her, the man must still pay him an amount equal to the bride price of a virgin."

The point is, sex in the ancient world was marriage. If you had sex, you were married. All that needed to be worked out was the legal and financial consequences of what this man and this woman had just done. The physical union was what, in the eyes of society, made them man and wife. At the wedding, then, the party didn't start until they had sex.

Which is a bit different than in our culture. Sometimes when a couple is living together, one of their friends tells them they should make things right in God's eyes by making their relationship a legal marriage. But maybe it's already a marriage in God's eyes, and maybe their having sex has already joined them as man and wife from God's perspective.

What are your thoughts on this? What are your thoughts on the role of sex in a godly marriage? What are some ways it can go wrong?

What other thoughts did Fred's sermon bring to mind this week?

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God bless,

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