

Experiencing the Presence of God
Week 2: Overcoming Barriers that Keep Us from God
August 14, 2022

1. Introduction

- a. Welcome, thank yous, voting today
- b. Research on why people go to church = become closer to God
 - i. I'm going to assume we're a pretty normal group of people, and the same is true for us.
- c. This month we're going to give you focused opportunities to draw close to God, to acknowledge his presence, and to invite him to speak to you.
- d. Last week: Moses at the burning bush - notice, investigate & hear God's voice
- e. Today: similar format looking at Exodus 19 & 20 - a much larger fire!
- f. Three things to do: 1) Invite God to speak to you, 2) engage him through active participation, and 3) remember what you hear.

2. Guided Prayer 1: Reading and reflecting on Exodus 19:16-19, 20:18-21

This morning, we will be spending some reflective time with another passage of scripture. As Christians, we take seriously the reality of God's presence in the Bible. We know this is the inspired Word of God, so we read expecting to meet with the Lord in it.

I will be guiding us this morning in an intentional method of listening to God in scripture. I like to think of this as reading the Bible *with* Jesus. With one ear, we listen to the written Word of God, and with the other, we listen to the incarnate Word.

This might be a new way of listening to God in scripture for you. It might even feel a little uncomfortable. Don't worry about doing it right or perfectly. You might hear something specific and meaningful, or you might struggle to hear anything. That's okay. We're practicing. It may be that you are simply growing in your ability to slow down and listen to God. You might even fall asleep. Maybe God is telling you that's what you need right now. Let's lean in and trust that God is here and actually wants to be with us this morning.

We'll be listening to Jesus as we wade into Exodus 19 & 20. Our time will be made up of four movements.

- First, I will read the passage slowly. Listen carefully. Is there a word or phrase that stands out today?
- Second, I will read the passage again. As you listen this time, consider *why* this word or phrase stood out.
- Third, I will point out some details of this passage that help us see how God may want to speak to us.
- Finally, I'll give you some space to engage God and reflect on what you're hearing from him today..

As we begin, settle into a comfortable position and take a deep breath. If it is helpful, close your eyes.

Remember, right now we are in the presence of God. Psalm 139 tells us if we go to the highest heights, God is there. If we go to the deepest depths, God is with us. There is nowhere we can go to escape the loving presence of God.

First Movement

Listen now to this passage from Exodus 3. As you listen, pay attention to what stands out. Is there a word or a phrase you are drawn toward? Is there a particular moment of this story where the Holy Spirit seems to be drawing your attention?

Read Exodus 19:16-19, 20:18-21

What stands out to you in this passage? Is it a word or phrase, a moment in the story? Where is the Holy Spirit drawing your attention?

20-Second Pause

Second Movement

Let's now mull over what we are noticing. Why is the Spirit drawing this part of the passage to your attention today, in this season of your life? We're not necessarily looking for a theological interpretation. We are listening to what God might be saying to us today.

Read Exodus 19:16-19, 20:18-21

What might God have to say to you in this text today? Maybe God has an invitation for you. Perhaps you are recognizing God in a feeling somewhere in your body or in a particular emotion that is surfacing. Maybe God is bringing a

word or image to mind, or perhaps it is simply a sense of awe and wonder. What are you noticing today?

20-Second Pause

3. Sermon

- a. Context: Exodus 19:1-11
 - i. 3 months after leaving Egypt (maybe 4 months after burning bush)
 - ii. Camped at Mt Sinai
 - iii. God called to Moses from the mountain
 - iv. Moses came down, gave them the law, and went back up
 - v. Read Exodus 19:7-13
 - vi. The people were to take God's presence very seriously. Be prepared.

- b. **God protected the people from his glory - he came close, but not too close.**
 - i. Verses 16-19. Thunder, lightning, cloud, fire, smoke = theophany
 1. God came close
 - ii. Exodus 33:20. No one can see my face and live.
 1. But not too close
 - iii. The cloud
 1. Commentator: "The cloud symbolizes the presence of God, but in the sense of the Holy One so shrouding his glory that he could accommodate himself to live among his people, to grace them with a presence which, in its awful holiness, would spell their destruction."
 2. The cloud kept the people from seeing more than was intended for their eyes while allowing them to see enough to tremble at God's presence.
 - iv. The boundary
 1. Prevented people from "seeing" more than they should (**19:21**).
 - a. Not a higher knowledge like the gnostics.
 - b. Not how everything works - his ways are higher.

- c. **God's presence was intended to keep them from sin, not from him (20:20)**
 - i. Despite being unworthy and uncertain.
 - ii. The people retreated from God's presence. They didn't engage.
 - iii. Story. One day while practicing silence I was afraid the Holy Spirit might actually speak to me.
 - iv. Does your unworthiness or uncertainty keep you from engaging with God?

- v. Hebrews 10:19. Through Jesus we can have confidence to come boldly into God’s presence. Though his holiness remains too much for us, God graces us not only with his presence but also the protection we need.
- vi. Story. Lucy and Aslan.
 1. I want to read you this brilliant passage out of *The Silver Chair*, one of the books of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, where C.S. Lewis, who writes these books, has the Christ figure in these books be a lion that at one time is this wonderful lion who the kids can sort of rest on him and grab a hold of his mane and be safe in his presence, but they're also aware that he's never safe. So, I'm going to read this passage. This is when Lucy, who's been pulled into Narnia, is meeting Aslan for the first time. She's terribly thirsty and she's now heard a stream that is running. And so she's thankful she's going to be able to go and get a drink. But then she finds that her way to the stream is blocked by this lion, so I pick up the conversation here in the middle.
 2. “Are you not thirsty?” said the Lion. “I’m dying of thirst,” said Jill. “Then drink ,” said the lion. “May I? Could I? Would you mind going away while I do?” said Jill. The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. As Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might just as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience. The delicious, rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic. “Well, will you promise not to do anything to me if I do come?” said Jill. “I make no promise,” said the Lion. Jill was so thirsty now that without noticing it, she had come a step closer. “Do you eat girls?” she said. “I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms,” said the lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if he were angry. It just said it. “I daren’t come then,” said Jill. “Then you'll die of thirst,” said the lion. “Oh, dear,” said Jill, coming another step nearer. “I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.” “There is no other stream. Said the lion.”

4. Guided Prayer 2

First Movement

I wonder, how did you recognize God’s presence as you listened? What stood out to you in the teaching? At some point in our teaching this morning, something probably stood out or connected with you. Maybe it is a word or a phrase. Perhaps a fresh insight. Maybe a question surfaced for you. What stood out today? What if that was the Holy Spirit? It might have been a moment that resonated or a phrase that piqued your curiosity. Maybe

you questioned something or felt a sense of resistance. Maybe there's a situation in your life that comes to mind.

So, what is it? If it is helpful, you can close your eyes. Remember that God is with us now.

What is God inviting you to notice today?

30-Second Pause

Second Movement

I want to invite you to become curious now about what you noticed. Why do you think the Holy Spirit is bringing this to your attention today? You might sense God inviting you to take some practical step. Maybe you have a sense of God's love or joy or peace, gratitude or wonder. Maybe your heart is troubled, or a deep question has arisen in you.

What is God saying to you through what you noticed?

45-Second Pause

Third Movement

Let's allow what we have been noticing to lead us to prayer now. Take these next two minutes to have a conversation with God. How do you feel led to respond to God today? You may express your gratitude or wonder. You might ask a question. Be honest. You may have some hard questions or frustration to share. That's okay. God can take it.

How do you feel led to respond to God today? Speak to the Lord and listen.

2-Minute Pause

Transition to Responsive Worship

We're going to move into another time of worship through music. Allow God to continue speaking to you through the lyrics of the song. Carson will invite you to stand and we'll close our time today celebrating the gift of God's presence.