



# groups

## Introduction to March 2019 Sermon Series

Throughout the month of March, we will continue to look at characters in the Old Testament – Moses, Joshua, and Ruth. Each week, we'll look at one of these people, ask how he or she points to Jesus, and how we can see our story in his or her story.

Our goal in reading the Bible is not only to know more about the Bible and God or to know the stories better, but also to do what God teaches in His Word. Each of these discussion guides will take you through a passage or story about one of these people and help you to know what God is teaching through His Word.

### *How to Use This Discussion Guide*

- Use the summary statement for each week to quickly understand the text's theme. You can use that as a reference point to help guide your discussion or bring it back if your group begins to get off topic.
- Use the prayer prompt at the end of each guide to help you close in prayer.

Additionally, here are some tips and guidelines to help you lead these discussions:

1. **Choose the questions that best fit your group and your time constraints.** There are a lot of questions in this guide and your group may not be able to discuss them all. That's okay! You don't have to ask all of them. Before your group begins, choose the questions that are most likely to help your group understand what God is saying in the text and how to apply it to their lives.
2. **Begin every group meeting with prayer.** We can only understand and apply God's Word with the help of the Holy Spirit. So, invite the Spirit to open your hearts and minds to what He says to His people.
3. **Keep the conversation focused on Scripture as much as possible.** Some people may want to bring in their opinions or continually refer to what David said during his message. This is helpful in small doses, but the goal of this discussion guide is to help you determine what God is saying in His Word. Encourage the group to continue to return to the Scripture. One way to do that is by saying, "That's a great insight! Where do you see that in the Scripture we're studying?"
4. **Encourage participation, but don't let anyone dominate.** Encourage everyone to share insights, ask questions, and read aloud. But don't allow any one person – even yourself, the leader – to monopolize the time. Some people are just unaware of themselves and how much they speak, so gently encourage them to listen and make space for others to talk.
5. **Help your group members to be specific in the application of Scripture.** It is easy to generalize when we talk about the Bible and how to apply it. So ask your group members specific questions – for example, "What part of the world do you sense God wants you to pray for? How will you do that? How will you make that a habit?"

We pray that you will hear God speak through His Word and that His Spirit will move you to obey Him. The Word of God – the Bible – lets us know the God who loves us and saves us. May this discussion guide help you and your Life Group to become more immersed in His story.



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## Week 1: Moses' Calling Sermon Date: March 2-3, 2019

**Theme:** God demonstrates His glory, power, and grace by calling ordinary people to His extraordinary purposes.

- **Share about a time when you had to take on a task you felt unqualified to accomplish.**
- **How did you respond to the task? What did you learn from that experience?**

**Ask a volunteer to read Exodus 3:11-15.**

Leader's Note: When God meets Moses in the burning bush in Exodus 3, Moses was living in exile in the wilderness after having killed an Egyptian in anger for beating a Hebrew. By fleeing Egypt, Moses had rejected an opportunity to advocate for Israel's freedom as a prince in Egypt. While God had placed Moses in a unique position from which he could have served God's people, Moses had failed to leverage that unique position in God's service. Nonetheless, God spoke to Moses from a burning bush to inform him that He intended to use Moses for His purposes despite his weaknesses and failures.

- **What excuses (v. 11, 13) did Moses make in these verses? How did God answer his excuses?**
- **When you are commanded by God or sent by God to do something, what excuses do you most often give God? How have you seen God answer those?**
- **What does God mean by describing Himself as "I am"? How did that answer Moses' excuses?**

Leader's Note: The divine name Yahweh literally means "I am." It occurs 7,000 times in the Bible and is translated "LORD" in English Bibles. By describing Himself this way, God was communicating to Moses that He is everlasting, self-sufficient, self-existent, and does not change. He is the source of all things and the ruler over all things. By sharing His name with Moses, God was declaring His perfect, holy character. When we set out to serve the Lord, we too must remember that we serve an everlasting, self-sufficient, all-powerful God who can empower us to accomplish what we never thought possible.

**Ask another volunteer to read Exodus 3:16-22 and 4:1-4**

- **What excuse did Moses give in chapter 4 for his reluctance to respond to God's call? How is this different from the excuses Moses gave earlier?**
- **Can you relate to this fear? What is your biggest fear when it comes to obeying God?**
- **How did God respond to Moses' concerns? What does God's response tell us about how we might overcome our own fears of failure?**

Leader's Note: Moses' staff represented his identity as a shepherd, his livelihood, and his power and authority to lead his flock. By changing Moses' staff to a snake and then back again, God reminded Moses that he was not the one who would free the Israelites. He only had to make himself available for God's purposes and trust God to set Israel free. God would use a shepherd to bring His people out of Egypt.

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Ask another volunteer to read Exodus 4:10-17.

- **What final excuse does Moses make in these verses?**
- **How do we see God's mercy in the way He responds to Moses' excuses?**
- **In what ways does God's revelation to Moses point us to the good news of Jesus Christ?**

Leader's Note: The gospel is the story of a God who issues a call to helpless sinners. In our blindness and deafness, we are imprisoned by our own sinfulness. We cannot see the goodness of God until He gives us new eyes. We cannot hear the voice of God until He opens our ears. Revelation is more than a doctrine about the Scriptures. It is more than a doctrine about the beauty of God's creation. Revelation is at the very heart of what God has done on our behalf to bring Himself glory.

- **Why do you think God likes to do His work through ordinary people?**
- **What do you need to trust God to help you do this week? How might knowing that God will prepare you for that task give you confidence as you seek to serve Him?**
- **What truths about God from today's study do you need to remind yourself of this week as you seek to overcome fear of failure?**

Close in prayer, thanking God for persisting in loving, choosing, and empowering us despite our weaknesses and excuses



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## Week 3: Moses' Ministry

**Sermon Date: March 16-17, 2019**

**Theme:** We should not take for granted the kindness of God in giving us His Law, for His Law keeps us safe and leads us to Him.

- **What comes to mind when you hear the word “rules” or “law”? How about “instruction”?**

Leader's Note: Sometimes we think of the Ten Commandments as a set of commands given to all people of all places and times. However, as we will see, the original giving of the Ten Commandments took place at a particular time and place and for a particular purpose. The Law comes in the context of an already-established relationship, namely God's steadfast love for His people whom He delivered from slavery in Egypt. The Book of Deuteronomy presents a summary of God's people wandering in the wilderness following their flight from Egypt. God's formation of a people group is historically rooted in that it was a fulfillment of His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Whereas Exodus 20 is an account of the Lord's speaking the Ten Commandments to Moses, Deuteronomy 5 is something of a review of the event. Before God's people enter the promised land of Canaan, Moses relays to them the Law in all its fullness and detail. The Ten Commandments themselves are merely a summary of the entirety of the Law's content.

- **Why is it important to keep in view the relationship involved with any set of rules?**

Ask a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 5:1-5.

- **In what ways is God gracious in giving His law to Israel? How is this a privilege compared to the way God has revealed Himself to other peoples and nations (Leaders, see Rom. 1:18-25; 2:12-16)?**
- **What surprises or strikes you about the personal nature of God's covenant with Israel?**

Ask another volunteer to read Deuteronomy 5:6-21.

- **What does verse 6 reveal about the nature of God? What kind of God is He?**
- **Why do you think it's important that verse 6 precedes the giving of the Ten Commandments?**

Leader's Note: God had a pre-existing relationship with His people before the Law came.

- **What stands out to you most when you read the Ten Commandments in this context?**
- **What do the commands in verses 7-15 seem to have in common? What do the commands in verses 16-21 seem to have in common? How are these six commands worded differently than the first four commands?**

Leader's Note: The commandments relate to two dimensions—the human to God (the vertical) and the human to human (the horizontal). Our relationship with God is closely tied to our relationships with others. The Fifth Commandment has been called the bridge Commandment. It forms a bridge between relating to God and relating to others. A person learns respect for God by first learning respect for authority in the home.

- **What do the Ten Commandments suggest about what God values for His people?**

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Ask another volunteer to read Deuteronomy 5:22-33.

- **What do God's laws reveal about God's character and His desire for humanity (v. 29)?**

Leader's Note: The fire, cloud, and thick darkness indicated the Lord's unequalled glory. The fire suggested its openness and the cloud and darkness its hiddenness. Were the glory of the Lord to appear in all its brightness, no human could look upon it and live (vv. 25-26; Ex 19:20-22). The two stone tablets reflect the ancient Near Eastern custom of making a copy of the covenant texts for each party. One of these was for the Lord and the other for Israel.

- **How does God's granting Israel a mediator in Moses show us that His Law allows for grace?**

Leader's Note: The people observed that it was possible for a human being (Moses) to have audience with the glorious and powerful God and still live (v. 24; cf. Exod. 20:19); yet they were not sure that privilege extended to all people, so they urged Moses to assume his mediatorial responsibility on their behalf (v. 27).

- **How does the Israelites' request for a mediator point us to our need for the one true Mediator, Jesus Christ?**
- **What does verse 33 reveal specifically about God's character and His purpose for the Law?**
- **Why are our attitudes just as important as our actions? What do our attitudes reveal about our relationship to God and others?**
- **How can the Law help us see our need for the gospel (e.g. Gal. 3:24)? How can we use the Law in sharing the gospel with others who don't have a relationship with Jesus?**
- **How does the way Christians live have bearing on whether our community lives according to God's principles?**

Close in prayer, thanking God that He has given us His guidelines for living because He loves us and desires His best for us. Thank Him for sacrificing His Son on the cross for us and ask Him for help to live in obedience, both in attitudes and actions, to His guiding principles.



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## Week 4: Joshua

**Sermon Date: March 23-24, 2019**

**Theme:** God demonstrates His faithfulness to His people by disciplining and protecting them.

- **What is the best piece of advice you have ever received? How did this piece of advice influence, protect, or shape you?**
- **If you knew exactly when you were going to die, what is the one piece of advice you would want to impart to your family or friends?**

**Ask a volunteer to read Joshua 23:1-6.**

Leader's Note: The book of Joshua began with an aging Moses passing the mantle of leadership to Joshua, and now as the book draws to a close, we find an aging Joshua charging the leaders of Israel to remain true to God's covenant.

- **Why do you think God had specially chosen Israel to be His people? Why do you think God blessed the Israelites and gave them victory over their enemies?**

Leader's Note: In Deuteronomy 7, God made clear to Moses that He did not choose Israel because of anything good or impressive about them. God chose Israel because they were the fewest of all peoples and because He loved them. In other words, God chose and blessed the Israelites because He is gracious and good.

- **Why was Joshua concerned that the people of Israel remember that in all their previous military victories, "the Lord your God was fighting for you" (v. 3. see also vv. 9-10)?**
- **Why is it important that we acknowledge the ways God has provided for us and protected us in the past? How might neglecting to do so affect your walk with Christ today?**
- **What did God promise to do with Israel's remaining enemies that still occupied parts of the Promised Land (vv. 4-5)? What did Joshua command the Israelites to do in light of this knowledge (v. 6)?**

**Ask another volunteer to read Joshua 23:7-13.**

- **Why was Joshua so concerned that the Israelites not "associate with these nations remaining among you"? What did Israel stand to lose by doing so (v. 7 and vv. 12-13)?**
- **How does this command square with Jesus' expectation that believers be His witnesses to all people (Leaders, see Matthew 5:13-16 and Acts 1:8)?**

Leader's Note: Joshua commanded the Israelites not to associate with the surrounding nations because they were not strong enough in their faith to live among them without compromising their faith. The Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites were pagan people whose worship posed a threat to the Israelites' exclusive devotion to God (Ex. 23:24-25, 33). Some of these people's religious practices included lewd sexual acts with cult prostitutes and even child sacrifice. God had charged the Israelites to conquer the land of Canaan both as an act of judgment on their idolatry and as a means of preserving and

protecting His people. This command does not contradict Jesus' expectation that we, as His followers, would live as His witnesses among nonbelievers—it was not until the Holy Spirit came upon believers that they would be strong enough to live faithfully for Christ among pagan people.

- **What things most often distract you from a sincere and exclusive devotion to Christ?**

Leader's Note: While we may not be tempted to worship pagan gods in the same way the people of Israel were in Joshua's day, there are many things in our culture, if left unchecked, that can distract us from delighting supremely in Christ. We live in a culture that, like the pagan nations inhabiting the Promised Land, is obsessed with obtaining power, success, and pleasure at all costs. In light of these temptations, we, like the Israelites, need God to strengthen us to continue obeying "all that is written in" His Word (vv. 6-7).

**Ask another volunteer to read Joshua 23:14-16.**

- **What is the relationship between our obedience and God's promises?**
- **Are God's promises always contingent upon our obedience? Why or why not?**

**Read Hebrews 12:8-11.**

- **Why is it important to note that God will be faithful to all of His promises? How does God's faithfulness to all His promises demonstrate His love for us?**

Leader's Note: Believers are saved by grace through faith and not by works. Through the sacrifice of Christ, believers become children of God whose right standing is not based upon their obedience, but on the Lord's faithfulness. That, however, does not mean that God will never punish us for our sin during our time here on earth. The Lord never disciplines us out of bitterness. If we are facing the consequences for our sinful actions, it is because God loves us and wants us to share in His holiness (v. 10). The discipline of the Lord may be unpleasant, but is used to produce the fruit of "peace and righteousness" in our lives. God disciplines us because He wants to make us more like Christ.

- **How has God shown His faithfulness to you (and your family)? How might remembering the ways God has protected and provided for you help you (and your family) persevere in faith?**
- **What needs to change in your life if you hope to be wholly and exclusively devoted to Christ? How might we help each other prioritize Christ in our lives?**
- **Has God let you face the consequences of your own sin recently? How might you respond to His discipline in a way that promotes growth and encourages others?**

**Close in prayer, thanking God for the many ways He has protected and provided for us. Pray that we would embrace both His blessings and His discipline as good gifts from Him intended to make us more like Christ.**

## Week 5: Ruth

**Sermon Date: March 30-31, 2019**

**Theme:** There are risks associated with sharing the gospel, but the risks are worth it!

- **What are the first three things you usually tell people about yourself?**
- **Of those things with which you identify yourself, which would be the hardest thing to sacrifice or give up? Why?**

**Ask a volunteer to read Ruth 3:1-18.**

Leader's Note: Although Naomi struggled with feelings of bitterness over her losses (see 1:20-21), she affirmed that God had shown kindness to her when Ruth was allowed to gather grain in the fields of none other than a close relative of her deceased husband (see 2:20). Furthermore, Naomi was surely aware of the stipulations in God's law about preserving family names and property allotments (see Lev. 25:25-28; Deut. 25:5-10). Finally, and to her credit, Naomi continued to consider ways that she could contribute to her and Ruth's well-being and future security (see Ruth 3:1). In particular, she recognized an opportunity for Boaz, a close relative, to act as the family redeemer.

- **Getting Boaz to act as the family redeemer meant that Ruth had to first approach him. What risks did Ruth take as she followed Naomi's advice (vv. 5-9)?**
- **What was the significance of uncovering Boaz's feet (vv. 4, 8)?**

Leader's Note: Some people interpret "uncovering his feet" as a euphemism for sexual contact and suggest that Naomi is asking Ruth to seduce Boaz with her sexuality. However, within the context of this book and given the noble character of Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi, that interpretation does not seem to be supported. Rather, Naomi instructed Ruth to go to Boaz when he was asleep and uncover his feet, or, more precisely, "uncover the place of his feet." By this act Ruth was inquiring about Boaz's willingness to fulfill the role of family redeemer, to take her as wife and provide for her. Boaz complimented Ruth as a noble woman and agreed to pursue the matter of family redemption the next day, explaining that a closer family member first had to be consulted. Knowing that Boaz was a close relative of her late husband, Ruth had come to Boaz privately and asked him to spread his cloak over her (v. 9) as a symbolic statement of a marriage commitment (Ezek 16:8). The request also involved a wordplay, since spread your cloak over me literally means "spread your wing over me," inviting Boaz to become the answer to his own prayer in 2:12 that she might find refuge under the wings of the Lord.

- **On the other hand, what risks did Boaz take to reach out to Ruth and allow her into his life?**
- **What does Boaz's response to Ruth's request (vv. 10-11) and his actions in verses 14-16 tell us about how he treated Ruth?**
- **Why do you think God values risk? What do we communicate to God when we take risks to make His name known?**
- **How did Boaz accept responsibility in this situation beyond what was required under the law?**

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- **What would Boaz need to do before agreeing to be Naomi and Ruth’s family redeemer? What is the lesson here for us?**

Leader’s Note: Although Boaz was willing to take Ruth as his wife, the matter was not yet settled. He pointed out that there was another man who, from the standpoint of Israelite legal practice, had the right to marry her first. Boaz could not marry Ruth unless the closer male relative passed on the opportunity. Boaz’s words reveal two things about his character. First, he was careful about following the law and yielding to what, in the custom of the day, was the other man’s right. Second, Boaz was concerned primarily for the well-being of Naomi and Ruth. If in fact this relative would take care of them, then all was good. In other words, Ruth’s and Naomi’s future care took priority over what Boaz personally wanted.

- **What clear responsibilities do we have when it comes to helping people come to know Jesus? Think about specific commands in Scripture.**

Leader’s Note: As believers in Christ, we are God’s ambassadors, tasked with representing Him to a lost world and helping people come to know Jesus. We do this through who we are and how we live, as we join with the work the Holy Spirit is already doing in people’s lives. As Jesus left earth for heaven following His resurrection, He left us with the command to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20), and the rest of the New Testament is dedicated to telling us about how the gospel spread and teaching us how to be a part of God’s mission. We have the great responsibility of caring for the people God places in our lives.

- **What risks are associated with these responsibilities? What happens if we fail to accept these responsibilities?**
- **How well are you accepting your basic responsibilities to show love and care to people who need Jesus? Is there anything more you need to start doing?**
- **What are some of the sacrifices we have to make if we want to share the gospel with others?**
- **Do any of these sacrifices feel especially risky to you? If so, which ones, and how so?**
- **What do we need to remind ourselves of when the risk of sharing the gospel with non-Christians doesn’t seem worth it?**
- **Think about your own life. Who took a risk on you and helped you come to know Jesus? What can you learn from his or her example?**
- **How can we as a group stand together to encourage each other in what God has told us to do?**

**Close in prayer, thanking God that He first loved us before we could do anything for Him. Pray that your group will have a greater awareness of His love and grace in their lives this week, and that in response they will be challenged to take risks in order to share the gospel with others.**