

Instructional Approach

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The Burning Bush: The Disruption of God

Summary

In [Exodus 3](#) God communicates to Moses through an inexplicable, unexpected, and disrupting burning bush. During this educational experience students learn that sometimes a burning bush can take many forms but we need to keep our eyes open and be ready to turn aside for God's disruption in our lives.

Introduction

In this lesson the story of Moses and the burning bush from Exodus 3 is presented as the last lesson in a three-part lesson series. At the onset students will refresh their understanding of the larger story of Moses found in Exodus. While the burning bush is a very popular story in the Bible, this lesson encourages students to look beyond the surface of the scripture and become aware of the connection between Moses' supernatural event and the many different forms of burning bushes that God may place in our lives. It is often easy to get caught up in the busy-ness of our lives so much so that we don't see God trying to get our attention. Walking away from this lesson, students should be able to have a better understanding of how it is that God communicates to us and have a heightened awareness of God's desire to get our attention. This lesson will specifically address God's tendency to get our attention through disrupting events in our lives and focus on our response to God's call for a deeper relationship with him.

Approach

The Instructional Approach is used in this lesson. This approach is intended to impart knowledge and understanding of the Exodus passage through instruction to the student by the teacher with the understanding that

students learn through many different learning styles. The goal of this approach is to encourage students to apply to their daily lives knowledge gained from the scripture passage.

The Context

For a lesson such as this that incorporates a variety of different learning approaches, the demographic is geared towards a group of 20 to 25 high school students between the ages of 14 and 18. This lesson should be teachable in a youth group setting as it should last approximately 45 minutes. If you plan to teach to larger group of students, you may consider adding more trivia questions to the Jeopardy-style review game. You will also need more creative supplies if you are catering the lesson to a larger group. (For a group with students with a disability, a leader or buddy will need to be assigned to that group.)

Theological Exploration

The story of Moses and the burning bush is one which we all may wish would happen to us. We wish God spoke to us with a literal burning bush and wonder what we may have done wrong to keep us in the dark. When we consider the story more deeply there are many more layers to God's burning presence in the life of Moses which extend even beyond this spectacular incident. We also begin to wonder if we are ready for this kind of a burning bush moment. Are we ready to encounter the presence of a completely powerful and completely loving God? It often takes a disrupting event in the form of a burning bush to encourage us to "turn aside" enough from our busy lives to truly encounter the overwhelming, uncomfortable, paradoxical nature of a holy God who desires a relationship with us.

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Learning Goals

Upon completing this lesson, students will:

1. Comprehend and review the whole story of Moses as a part of a six-part series exploring Exodus. This comprehension involves recalling facts of the story from previous weeks and reinforcing what was learned before.
2. Discover the importance of studying scripture in the midst of the larger story as well as understand the great insight we can gain when we pay attention to details in the story.
3. Consider the meaning of the burning bush experience for Moses in his context and apply the concepts to how God communicates to us and how we respond.
4. Challenge our willingness to respond to God's initiative when we are given a form of a burning bush, as well as recall what forms of burning bushes we may have already encountered in the past.

Scripture References

- Exodus chapters 1 and 2—[“Pharaoh Oppresses Israel”](#) and [“The Birth of Moses and his Fleeing to Midian”](#)
- [Exodus 3:1-15](#)—The Burning Bush

Exegetical Summary

In this portion of Exodus, Moses experiences a disrupting event. While Moses is leading his flock in the wilderness he came to Horeb and “the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was not burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, ‘I will turn aside to see this great sight...When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush.’” We notice that Moses not only looked at the bush but he made a decision to turn aside and look into things further. The words “turn aside” can be better translated as “go off the beaten path, the normal road,” according to Tim Keller. In the midst of an ordinary, everyday experience

of tending the flock, something disrupted Moses' life and he chose to go off the beaten path to discover it. He was opening himself to the unexpected, overwhelming presence of God. (Keller 1998)¹

When God requires Moses to remove his sandals, we realize that the very presence of God has made this location holy ground.

God commands Moses to remove his shoes. This is a command of Moses respect because God is there and the ground is Holy. John Wesley equates the removing of his shoes to people of Wesley's time period removing their caps.²

This has been referred to as a “sacred place” narrative as opposed to a “call” narrative,³ meaning that the burning bush sets Moses up in a holy place.

These chapters are evidence of the interaction of the human and divine. The Divine calls a messenger and the messenger Moses is used in enacting God's plan.⁴ Moses' encounter with God takes his ordinary day and changes it greatly, in addition to changing the course of the remainder of his life.

Preparing for the Lesson

The leader will need to gather the supplies in advance for this week's teaching. Below is a list of what is needed. Pay attention to the reading activity and decide in advance what materials will be offered to the students following the reading.

¹ Keller, Timothy. "The Search For God." Redeemer Presbyterian Church Sermons. Oct 4, 1998.

² Wesley, John. "Commentary on Exodus 3". "John Wesley's Explanatory Notes. n.d. <http://www.studydrive.org/com/wen/view.cgi?book=ex&chapter=003> (accessed September 20, 2012).

³ Child, Brevard S. EXODUS. Westminster Knox Press, 2004.

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Supplies Needed

- Students need to have heard Exodus 1 and 2 and have a good idea of what has happened in Moses' story.
- Leader will need copies of the Bible passage for all students who want to follow along during the reading.
- Large paper for comic strips
- Markers, colored pencils
- Clay or play-dough
- Covers needed to keep things clean
- "Jeopardy"-style questions
- Scoreboard: a white board or posterboard are good options
- Paper and pens for reflection and closing

Lesson Activities

Opening activity (10 minutes)

Open with a review game: Use the following questions or write your own from the first two chapters of Exodus. The group will be divided into two groups to play a game. (These questions could also be arranged in an electronic format, such as PowerPoint or ProPresenter, which would work well for large groups.) However, it may be simpler to have students choose a point value of 100 to 500 and simply ask the question. It is important to keep the game moving quickly and hold students' interest.

Exodus 1:

1. Question 100: What group of people was oppressed by Pharaoh?
 - a. Israelites
2. Question 200: Why were the oppressed people made into slaves?
 - a. Because there were so many of them, Pharaoh thought they would rise up against him, fight, and then leave.

3. Question 300: Complete this sentence: If you see that a ____ is a ____, kill ____; if it is a ____, let ____ live.
 - a. baby, boy, him; girl, her
4. Question 400: Where were the midwives to dispose of the babies?
 - a. Into the Nile
5. Question 500: What did the midwives tell Pharaoh when he asked why they were letting the babies live?
 - a. They said that the Hebrew women were giving birth before the midwives could get there.

Exodus 2:

1. Question 100: Who found Moses in the reeds of the Nile?
 - a. Pharaoh's daughter
2. Question 200: How old was Moses when he was put in basket along the bank of the Nile?
 - a. 3 months
3. Question 300: **T or F:** After Moses killed the Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew, he hid the Egyptian in the sand
 - a. True
4. Question 400: After Moses fled to Midian, who did he marry?
 - a. Zipporah
5. Question 500: **T or F:** While Moses was in Midian, the king of Egypt died and the Israelites cried to God because of their slavery
 - a. True

Engaging/Exploring Activities: (15 minutes)

READING: Read the text out loud. Allow students to follow with their Bibles if they would like to. (This allows for both auditory and visual learners to experience their preferred style of learning.)

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Bring Home Student Engagement:

Next, put students in pairs or small groups of no more than four. If your group does this well, allow them to pick their own groups.

Ask students to 1) write a comic strip or mini play with figurines telling the Exodus story. (You will need to provide the markers and large paper here. Before the lesson decide what style of expression is best for your group to use.) **or** 2) have a paraphrased conversation of the chapter. (This option forces a second reading of the scripture and gives a closer look and facilitates more opportunities for learning.)

Other options:

Modeling out of clay, using figurines to act out a dialogue. (10 minutes)

Each group will come back to share together for one to two minutes.

(If you have time you may review the story with this optional Exodus 3 question review.)

Exodus 3:

1. Question 100: Where is God sending Moses?
 - a. Egypt
2. Question 200: Why did Moses hide his face?
 - a. He was afraid to look at God
3. Question 300: Will the Israelites plunder the Egyptians? If so explain how?
 - a. Yes: Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians. (Exodus 3:22)

4. Question 400: List the ways God has communicated with Moses in Exodus 1, 2, and 3
 - a. Saved him at birth, allowed him to be raised as a Hebrew by his mother, helped him find work

The Talk/Mini-Sermon (10 minutes)⁵

For Moses a disrupting event takes him out of his normal life. (vs. 3-4) He had to “go over” to see it (“go over” is better translated as “turn aside”—go off the beaten path, the normal road)—something has to turn us aside or we’re stuck...A BURNING BUSH

Forms of burning bushes in our lives:

1. An Inexplicable Person
 2. An Inexplicable Trouble
 3. An Inexplicable Emptiness
- A) An inexplicable person can be a burning bush (example: a friend’s extreme care, kindness, or action can impact us. (Try and insert your own example here.)
- B) An inexplicable trouble, such as “If I really work hard/wise/careful/savvy...I can handle life.” When trouble hits you all of a sudden, you realize that this is smashing your reality and that you are not competent to run your life. You can’t do it alone; you can’t be your own savior.
- C) An inexplicable emptiness—when you get what you thought would fulfill you—and it doesn’t. Success and the emptiness that goes with it is maybe the most powerful of all. You have to have this emptiness or you’ll never find God. Often these experiences are unpleasant and very hard.

⁵ Keller, Timothy. "The Search For God." Redeemer Presbyterian Church Sermons. 10 4, 1998.

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So how do we respond?

PLEASE TURN ASIDE! If Moses had gone on his way there would not have been a story about him. You have to make room and turn aside. You're never going to go deeper if something doesn't come in and smash your paradigm.

The Unmanageable Power of the Fire

The real God is going to contradict you and tell you things you don't want to hear. We must be willing to surrender.

You can't begin to search for this creator God until you take your shoes off.

Closing/Departing: (5 minutes)

Ask students: What is one area in your life in which God may be trying to speak to you? What ways might you turn aside and respond or take your shoes off to God in this area? Have students journal and reflect on a piece of paper to take home.

Then ask the students to individually say a silent prayer to God asking God to make it clear to them what He may be trying to say.

When students are done, close as a group in prayer.

Reflection and Evaluation

- Did the students learn, comprehend, and review the whole story of Moses as a part of a 6-part series exploring Exodus? This involves recalling facts of the story from previous weeks and reinforcing what was learned before.
- Did students discover the importance of studying scripture in the midst of the larger story as well as understand the great insight we can gain when we pay attention to details in the story?
- Did students consider the meaning of the burning bush experience for Moses in his context and apply the concepts to how God communicates to us and how we respond?
- How well did this lesson challenge students' willingness to respond to God's initiative when they are given a form of a burning bush?
- What did the students create that demonstrated their understanding?
- Was I organized?
- Were all students engaged in their groups?