



# STORIES AND RITUALS

## LESSON 5

### Stories & Rituals: The Bible in Broad Strokes

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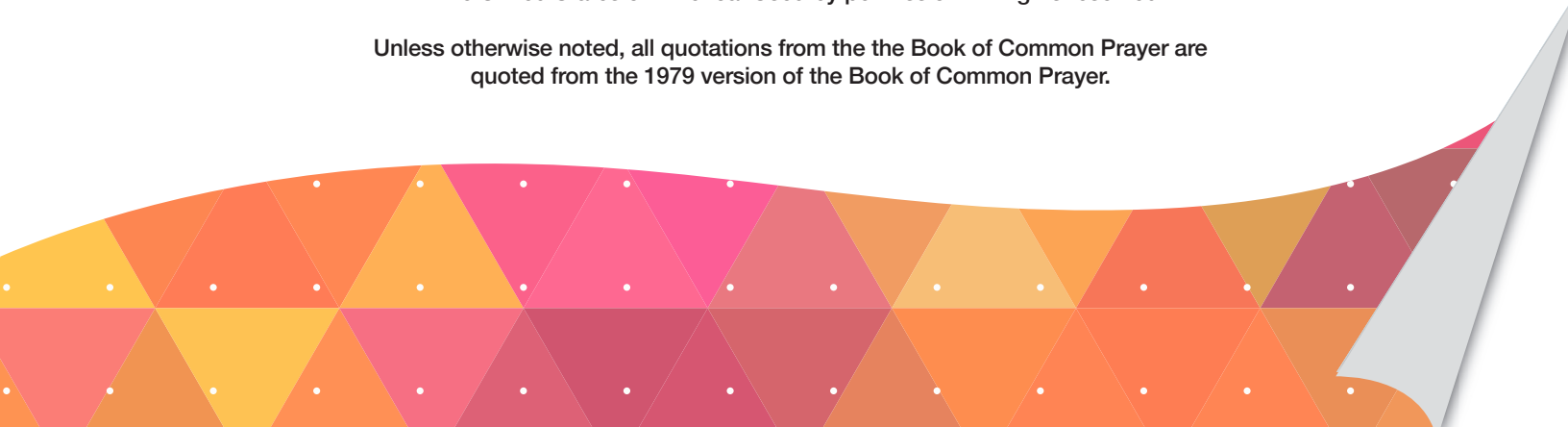
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# Moses Intercedes for God's Unfaithful People

**Texts:** Exodus 33:7-17

**Big Idea:** Encounters with God are sought and change us.

## Lesson Objectives

### Participants will:

1. Formulate an understanding of what it feels like to search for something by playing a game.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of seeking God's changing presence by engaging in a re-telling of a story from Exodus.
3. Recognize that individuals and communities can create special places to encounter God by creating their own sacred space.

### ACTIVITY (TIME)

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Dive In (10 minutes)  
**Group Check-In**

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Community Builder (15 minutes)  
**Caught By a Wave**

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The Story (15 minutes)  
**Moses Intercedes for God's  
Unfaithful People**

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The Ritual (15 minutes)  
**Sacred Space**

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Dig Deeper (10 minutes)  
**Sacred Space in the World**

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Wrap it Up (5 minutes)  
**Closing Prayer**

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### MATERIALS NEEDED

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- Nothing
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- Nothing
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- Copy of Lesson Sheet 5.1
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- Soft, instrumental music (optional)
  - Method for playing music (optional)
  - A bare table
  - Collection of objects used for worship (see sample list below)
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- Large banner of paper
  - Scissors • Glue
  - Magazines, newspapers, or old photographs
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- Nothing
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# LESSON OVERVIEW



## What's the Story?

Today your group will explore a story from the Book of Exodus. The Story is short and taken from the larger story of Moses wrestling with God and God's people. We find Moses and the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. Moses has already come down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments to find the people worshipping a golden calf of their own creation. This did not sit well with God or with Moses, who smashed the tablets and burned the calf.

Moses already went to God to seek forgiveness for this unfaithfulness, and God is sending the people along to the Promised Land. But God now has decided that they will go alone, and that God's presence will not be with them. Angels will go before them, but God will not be with them. This caused great distress among the people, who went into mourning.

This is where we find Moses in our story today, frustrated with the people and frustrated with God. Moses is just trying to be faithful and follow instructions, but he does not know the big picture. What he does know, however, is that God's presence is essential. He knows that the people can do nothing without it and that they must find a way to be in God's presence to find strength for the journey ahead.



## What's the "Big Idea?"

Today's lesson focuses on the big idea that *encounters with God are sought and change us*. To be in someone's presence is a special thing. Individuals get so excited to meet their favorite celebrity or someone they look up to. We ask for autographs and take selfies with them. Some people will even wait in very long lines to meet a special person. But we often take the people closest to us for granted. This is true with God as well, who is closer than any other, as God is in our very being. So we have to take time to seek the encounter with God and allow the moment to inspire and change us.



## What's the Symbol?

A tent or canopy is something we look at as a piece of recreational equipment, but for many it is their only shelter. It is also what was used to set up a special place for individuals to meet God in today's story. The thin material separates space and provides privacy, reminding us of the importance of space.



## What's the Ritual?

Today's ritual will invite participants to think about how they can create spaces and times to encounter God. As a group, they will be invited to use various objects to create a sacred space that holds meaning for them.



## Setting Up Your Space

Set up your "altar" area. Set up a canopy or tent in the front of the room (if you have a large group you may want to set up multiple tents or use fabric to transform your meeting room to look like a tent). Set up a bare table inside the tent. Place your collection of items to be used during the ritual outside of the tent.

## DIVE IN (10 MINUTES)

### Group Check-In

#### *Materials:*

- Nothing

#### During the session:

- Open your session with a quick prayer. Use this one or a prayer of your own:  
**Holy Lord, open our eyes, ears, and hearts to see your love and faithfulness in the world around us. Help us see your love for us in your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**
- **Let's start our time together by sharing some of the great and not-so-great things that have happened to us this week. What were the high points and low points of your week?**  
Go around the group and invite everyone to share.

## COMMUNITY BUILDER (15 MINUTES)

### Caught By a Wave

#### *Materials:*

- Nothing

#### Before the session:

- Select a location to play this game. Preferably, this game should be played in an area that allows for many different hiding spots, but is open enough for individuals to run around.

#### During the session:

- **Have you ever played a game of hide-and-seek before? Today we are going to play a game of hide-and-seek with a twist.**
- Select a student to be "it." Instruct them to close their eyes and count to ten as everyone else hides. Once "it" finishes counting down, they must go around the room and try to find everyone else who is hidden.
- If "it" finds a person, then that person must follow "it" around the room as they try to find everyone else. If, as they are following "it," the person finds someone else hiding that "it" doesn't see, then they try to wave at the person hiding without being caught.
- If the person successfully waves to the other hidden person, and the other person waves back, without "it" catching either wave, then the person following "it" around can run away and hide again. However, if "it" catches either wave, then both people must go in the center with "it."
- "It" is successful if they find everyone in the room AND keep them from hiding again.
- A round ends when everyone is successfully found. Continue playing the game as time allows.

## COMMUNITY BUILDER - CONTINUED

- If you were “it,” was it easy or hard for you successfully seek everyone who was hiding? *[Answers will vary.]*
- If you found people, how did you find them? Were there any signs, movements, actions, or other factors that helped you easily seek people? *[Answers will vary.]*



## THE STORY (15 MINUTES)

### Moses Intercedes for God’s Unfaithful People

#### Materials:

- Copy of Lesson Sheet 5.1

#### Before the session:

- Make a copy of Lesson Sheet 5.1
- Practice reading through the story several times so you are familiar with it.

#### During the session:

- Tell the story on Lesson Sheet 5.1.
- **After the story, ask: What is this story telling us about God?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: God allows individuals to seek God; God responds when we seek God’s presence; God uses special sites and areas set up for the purpose of meeting God; God’s presence is holy and seeks holiness.]*
- **What is this story telling us about humanity?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: Humanity’s desire for God changes; humanity can seek God’s presence; humanity can create special places to meet God; God’s presence causes us to be honest about our shortcomings and changes us.]*
- **What is this story telling us about the world?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: The world can be a place where God can be met; God uses creation as a sign or symbol of his presence (i.e. the pillar of cloud); creation can be used to create special places to meet God.]*
- **God’s presence is something that we often take for granted. We seek it most often when something has gone wrong or we need help or healing. God’s presence is always available to humanity if we seek to encounter God. This encounter requires that we take full account for our lives and bring everything with us into God’s presence.**



# THE RITUAL

## (15 MINUTES)

## Sacred Space

### Materials:

- Soft, instrumental music (optional)
- Method for playing music (optional)
- A bare table
- A large collection of objects used for worship

### Before the session:

- Collect a large assortment of objects that could be used to create a “sacred space.” These objects can include, but are not limited to: candles, crosses, icons, fabric and table linens, rocks and other natural elements, strings of lights, scented candles, Bibles, prayer books, etc.
- Place these objects in a location that is off to the side, but still visible to your group.

### During the session:

- If you are playing music, begin playing it softly.
- In today’s story, **Moses creates a sacred space where he and the Israelites could seek and experience God’s presence. In our faith tradition, we too create sacred spaces where we can experience God’s presence.**
- **What are some of the objects or things we use to create a sacred worship space?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: candles, crosses, incense, Bibles, linens and fabric, music, etc.]*
- Show the group the collection of worship objects. **Over here I have a collection of objects that people might use to create a sacred worship space. Together, we are going to use these objects to create our own sacred space.**
- Split the group into small groups of two or three. **With your group, think about what your small part of our sacred space might look like. How can you use a couple of these objects to create a space where you can encounter God? Take five minutes to discuss this with your group.**
- Give groups time to think and discuss. About five minutes should be more than enough time. If needed, invite groups to sort through all of the objects you have on hand, or search for other objects they can use (feel free to tell participants that they can use their own found items, if wanted).
- As your group finishes up your discussion, pick a few objects that you can use to create your part of our sacred space. Then, once everyone is ready, we will come up one group at a time and create our space under this tent.
- Invite groups to grab any objects they would like to use. Then, invite groups forward one at a time to create their sacred spaces. Give time for each group to create their part of the space.
- **Together we have created a special place where we can seek and encounter God. As people of God, we seek God’s presence in our lives and find God in many different sacred spaces. This space we just created reflects that. Let’s gather around our space and close this time together with a prayer.**
- Invite the group to gather around the space you just created. Say the following, or use a prayer of your own: **Lord God, we encounter you in the world in many different ways. Be near us as we seek you in this place right now. Draw us closer to you so that we may always see your Spirit active in our lives. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**
- If desired, you may wish to participate in a short liturgy, worship, or prayer time together in your sacred space.

## DIG DEEPER

### (10 MINUTES)

# Sacred Space in the World

### Materials:

- Large banner of paper
- Glue Sticks
- Scissors
- Magazines, newspapers, and old photographs

### Before the session:

- Hang a large banner of paper on a wall in your space. Set nearby magazines, scissors, and glue sticks for the activity.

### During the session:

- **Sacred spaces can be found everywhere in the world. Sometimes people encounter God in a church, but sometimes people also encounter God while being in nature, or with a group of people. We each have different places where we feel free to seek and encounter God. Let's make a mural of some of these places.**
- Instruct the group to look through the magazines, newspapers, and photographs, and think about what places pictured might be sacred spaces to them. As individuals find these places, invite them to cut them out and paste them on the banner of paper.
- Encourage the group to fill the paper with images and ideas. Invite everyone to paste many different ideas of how they encounter God in the world.
- Once the group is finished, invite individuals to share the photos they posted, if they wish to do so.
- **Sacred spaces are all around us. We can seek and encounter God in many different places in our lives. As we go out into the world today, let's remember to search for God's presence in the world around us.**
- You may wish to keep the mural hanging as a reminder of the day's lesson.

## WRAP IT UP

### (5 MINUTES)

### Closing Prayer

Invite the group to share any prayer concerns or requests they may have for the week. Close your time together in prayer. Use the following or pray your own prayer:

**Mighty God, just as Moses asked for your presence to remain with your people, we ask that you would be present to us. Help us to know that you with us. Help us to help others to see you at work in the world and in their lives. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

# Lesson Sheet 5.1

## Moses Intercedes for God's Unfaithful People

(A story from the Exodus of the Israelites)

After escaping from Egypt, the Israelites made their camp at Mount Sinai. They created a giant tent city there, and it was a sight to behold. There were paths between the tents that served as streets and the tents stretched, row upon row. It had become their home. But then God told them to leave Mount Sinai, and to go to the Promised Land. But God said that God's presence would not go with them, because they had been stubborn and unfaithful, and God's presence would consume them.

Now Moses had one tent set up beyond the hustle and bustle of the tent city. He called this the "tent of meeting" and all who sought God would go there. When Moses went there, the sign of God's presence, the pillar of cloud, would rest upon this place. It was there that Moses would talk with God, as normally as you would talk with one of your friends.

Moses said to God one day, "You told me to bring together a special group of people, but you have not told me who they are. You told me that you know my name and that you have favored me, but I still do not know what is going on. If I have found favor, let me know what's going on. Let me know your ways and remember these are your people that I am leading and this is your nation."

So God said to Moses, "I will be with you, and I will give you the rest you need for the journey ahead."

Moses said to God, "Do not send me and your people from this place, unless you are coming with us. How will anyone know that you are with us and that we are yours, unless you are truly present? If you are with us people will know and your presence will make us different from all the other people."

God said in reply to Moses, "I will do what you ask. I will go with you and be present to you and this my people, because you have found favor in my sight and I know your name."