



Theme Resource Pack
July 2024
(7 July - 3 August)

Introduction

It's summer, the sun is shining, and it's time to get packing!

This month the epic foundational story of Exodus is going to help us get packing with God! We ask the Holy Spirit to move us from where we have been to where we are going — into newness of life. To let go of the past so that we can immerse ourselves in the promise of the present.

Letting go of a heart-heaviness can sometimes be hard to do, but God holds us carefully and tenderly as we see in Exodus as he leads the Hebrews out of Egypt. God hears our cries and leads us out of sorrows with a new sense of purpose.

We begin by asking — as the Hebrews did — what are we leaving behind? What do we want to no longer carry into our new life with God? What are we glad to be rid of and what do we need help letting go of? Following on from that, like the Hebrews hurriedly preparing for the first Passover, what are we wanting to take with us? What is essential? Often what we pack are not 'things' at all, but traits like curiosity, hope, confidence, and open heartedness that God uses to equip and enthuse us.

Then, as we join the Hebrews wandering in the wilderness, we check in with how we are going. Are we going round in circles or, worse, going backwards? Are we on the lookout for manna, and are we open to resting, re-setting and reconfiguring along the way? And finally as the theme draws to a close we look ahead to the urgent, immediate Gospel of Mark that begins in a different wilderness — but with the same people — asking insistently, 'So what now?' If we are getting packing with God are we open to our restless Messiah Jesus's call to adventure to discover the burgeoning Kingdom all around us and share it!

Weekly Overview

- What are we leaving? — *Getting rid and letting go.*
- What are we packing? — *The essentials we need to pack.*
- How are we going? — *Two steps forward, one step back, and several sideways!*
- What now? — *Anticipating the Kingdom and revelations of divine glory!*

Format

Every month we have a God-given theme delving into different aspects and areas of faith. Over the course of 2024 these themes connect and take us on a faith journey out into the wonders of life with Jesus. Our themes shape our Daily Worship, Sunday Live streams and all sorts of other creative things we get up to! It is broken into four sections that focus on a different topic each week. The weeks run Sunday - Saturday and each has a series of daily Bible readings and prompts for reflection.

What are we leaving? *Getting rid and letting go (Week 1, 7 July)*

Introduction: We begin our theme by thinking about what we are getting rid of and letting go as we we Get Packing with God! This month we are going to spend a lot of time in the Book of Exodus, the sweeping foundational story of the Hebrew people escaping oppression as God delivers them from captivity in Egypt. As we ourselves step into new life with God we reflect on what we ourselves are leaving behind. Letting go of a heart-heaviness can sometimes be hard to do, but God holds us carefully and tenderly as we see in Exodus as He leads the Hebrews out of Egypt. God hears our cries and leads us out of sorrows with a new sense of purpose.

Setting the scene: Piles of boxes ready for recycling or donating.

Seeds to sow: What needs clearing out, sweeping up, and renewing in our communities? And what needs to be left behind?

- 1. Exodus 1: 8-10 Leaving suspicion, hostility and fear behind.** Exodus is the story of the Hebrews escaping persecution, animosity and resentment. As we look to Get Packing with God what are we leaving behind?
- 2. Exodus 1: 11-14 Leaving cycles of oppression behind.** Trapped in a loop of injustice, oppressor and oppressed must break free to discover new life. As we pack for a new future with God what are the power dynamics we are leaving behind? Both the times when we have suffered and the times when we have directly or indirectly disadvantaged others ourselves.
- 3. Exodus 1: 15-21 Leaving behind a legacy.** In the midst of the misery the audacious Shiphrah and Puah think on their feet and come up with an ingenious lifesaving scheme! They become agents of life and hope for every pregnant woman, leaving behind the fear of death and hopelessness. Looking back, what are the legacies and who are the heroes we are grateful for? Those who have acted bravely in the face of fear for others.
- 4. Exodus 1:22-2:4 Leaving abandonment behind.** Even in the bleakness of sorrow Moses's sister does not abandon him. We are grateful for all the people who stand with us through difficult times.
- 5. Exodus 2: 5-6 Leaving troubled waters behind.** Moses did not choose to go into the Nile and he did not choose who would find him — but the river delivered him to a new future and was part of making him who he was. All sorts of circumstances in our upbringing that we have no control over shape who we are to become and it's with God's grace that we trust that the broken pieces can be made into a beautiful mosaic.
- 6. Exodus 2: 7-9 Leaving the dysfunction behind.** Moses's sister comes up with a daring plan to reunite her young brother and mother. It works but it is only a fractured solution, while mother and child are together it is only on temporary basis. As we Get Packing with God, what are the quick fixes and partial measures we want to leave behind as no longer needed in our new life?
- 7. Exodus 2: 10 Leaving the past behind.** Moses was drawn from water — his story an analogy of birth itself — coming through peril to be delivered by compassionate women into the world. The Nile could have been the end of Moses's story, but it was only the beginning, it is part of him, but it does not define or limit him. How can Moses inspire us in our new lives with God to leave the past behind?

What are we packing? *The essentials we need to pack (Week 2, 14 July)*

Introduction: As we Get Packing with God what are the essentials we want to hold on to? What really matters? We begin this week with Moses taking hope and confidence at the Burning Bush, and end it at the point of departure with the Hebrews hurriedly preparing for the first Passover. In both of these moments and in our own lives there is a mix of the pragmatic and the wondrous — the practical and the incredible.

Setting the scene: Unleavened bread, wrapped, and ready to go.

Seeds to sow: Below we begin our reflections thinking about Moses's curiosity. What role does curiosity have in the Bible and in our day-to-day faith?

- 1. Exodus 3: 1-3 Taking an interest.** Moses carries his curiosity with him, he sees the light and investigates. Where are we taking an interest in today?
- 2. Exodus 3: 4-6 Taking notice.** How can we take time to say "Here I am" to God today?
- 3. Exodus 3: 7-10 Taking faith.** Faith — even in the face of oppression and despair — is a shining thread of continuity throughout the Bible. Fear and evil will not win out, the eternal love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has already won and is being realised through the working of God's Kingdom. Where can we carry faith today?
- 4. Exodus 3: 11-20 Taking a vulnerable approach.** How can we follow Moses's example of being honest and open with God so that we can take confidence and take hold of God's grace?
- 5. Exodus 3: 21-22 Taking gifts...** This foreshadowing of what will come later is a strange coda to this encounter. As we look to Get Packing with God perhaps these precious items can represent for us the things we can take with us out of difficult situations and carry into our new life.
- 6. Exodus 12: 14-20 Taking the essentials.** Why all the yeast hate!? Here we jump forward in the story, through Moses speaking up on behalf of his people, and Pharaoh's hardheartedness. The Hebrews are preparing in haste to leave and are instructed to make unleavened bread — they are not to take the time to let it rise. As we pack with God what are the unleavened essentials we are taking with us? And what are the things we no longer have time for?
- 7. Exodus 12: 21-28 Taking the legacy.** The living tradition of Passover which is also linked to our Communion through the Last Supper of Christ — is a kind of symbolic re-enactment that bonds the participants together. While our Get Packing theme is about looking forward, part of looking forward is taking care to remember the stories of our past that have shaped us. Stories, after all, are easy to pack!

How are we going? *Two steps forward, one step sideways* (Week 3, 21 July)

Introduction: As we Get Packing with God we can sometimes find that the way is two steps forward, one step back, and several steps sideways as we find our feet! Travelling with God (as the Hebrews were discovering) is not necessarily about going in a straight line... No real adventures simply go from A-B do they!? This week as we join the Hebrews wandering in the wilderness, we check in with how we are going on our own walks. Are we going round in circles, or even going backwards? Are we on the lookout for manna, are we open to resting, re-setting and reconfiguring along the way?

Setting the scene: An expedition, an adventure, a quest!

Seeds to sow: An adventure is about the twists and turns on the way, not simply the end destination. How are we travelling light, not packing too much, to keep us nimble on the way?

- 1. Exodus 16: 1-5 Going round in circles?** Progress seems slow. Humans often suffer from a 'recency' cognitive bias where our minds are skewed to current events rather than the past: "Were things really that bad before? Why did we bother?" As we shoulder our packs to set off with God are there times when we need to 'check ourselves before we wreck ourselves' with our grumbling?
- 2. Exodus 16: 6-16 Going for fresh manna?** Manna is God's provision for the day (*or the weekend!*) it is not seed capital. The Hebrews are invited to take it but not to hoard it, to only keep what is fresh. How are we keeping our faith fresh, new for the day?
- 3. Exodus 16: 17-20 Going backwards?** Imagine if the manna hadn't spoiled. Imagine the power and influence the early adopters could have wielded over the rest? Imagine if the fittest and biggest had scooped up the majority of the manna the next day, to bury in underground stores? The Hebrews were in danger of going backwards, into falling into the same 'have and havenot' cycles they had just escaped in Egypt! What are the traps we don't want to fall into as we get packing with God?
- 4. Exodus 16: 21-30 Going for a lie in?** It takes time to break cycles of relentless toil. To be fair to the Hebrews, in Egypt they wouldn't have had the luxury of a day off. What are the patterns of overwork that we want to leave behind so that we can go forward with God in both our work and our rest?
- 5. Exodus 24: 1-8 Going for a new start?** As we jump forward again in the story we come to the place of covenant — Moses and his people are buying into a new way of life, a new way of living where they rely on God and one another more. Where they are 'going' is not so much a static location but into a new status as co-adventurers with God!
- 6. Exodus 32: 1-14 Going in the wrong direction?** As wacky as this seems, quickly cobbling together an idol is actually a pretty normal human response to adversity. Sometimes our idols are physical objects and sometimes they're notions or projects. They are often hastily thrown together and creak under pressure! What are the idols that society lifts up that have no place where we are going?
- 7. Exodus 32: 15-24 Going for the reset button!** Moses windmill slams the reset button and confronts Aaron. Aaron squirms and frames it passively, we chucked a bunch of gold in the fire and "out came this calf..." minimising his role (despite verse 4 saying that he sculpted it!) Getting packing with God can involve ongoing *repacking* when we realise we are trying to check a golden calf into our hold luggage!

What now? *Anticipating the Kingdom and divine glory!* (Week 4, 28 July)

Introduction: So we have got packing with God, we are letting go of things from the past to be able to step into newness of life. We have considered the essentials we need with us and set off into the next chapter. So... what now? What lies ahead!? As this theme draws to a close (and we anticipate the next one!) we take a look ahead to the urgent, immediate Gospel of Mark that begins in a different wilderness — but with the same people — asking insistently, 'So what now?' If we are really getting packing with God are we open to our restless Messiah Jesus's call to adventure? To discover the burgeoning Kingdom all around us! Are we alert to God's Kingdom and revelations of divine glory!

Setting the scene: Peace and tranquillity and then BAM John the Baptist.

Seeds to sow: All month we have used the metaphor of packing, so let's consider — what would your luggage look like if you were packing for an adventure with God? Would it be a light breathable backpack ready to sling over your shoulder, or a beloved battered leather suitcase brimming with stories? Run with it — see how God uses your imagination to offer you new insights.

- 1. Exodus 33: 7-11 Tent of meeting.** What can we do today to make a figurative (or even literal!) 'tent of meeting' to come face to face with God?
- 2. Exodus 33: 12-17 Seeking God's presence.** God is never far from us but we can still actively take time to seek God's presence, to enter into that divine space in an intentional way. It's not just Moses that God knows by name and loves — it's us too! How can we seek God's presence today?
- 3. Exodus 33: 18-23 A cleft in the rock.** A wonderful bittersweet picture of Moses receiving a glimpse of God's glory. God meets Moses where he is and graciously provides a cleft in the rock where he can safely shelter and observe. As we travel into new life with God, God shows us the same care and sensitivity, helping us to see — as we are able — glimpses of glory.
- 4. Mark 1: 1-8 Different wilderness, same people.** As this theme draws to a close and we leave Exodus we ask — what now? And we find insight in a different wilderness. But once again we discover: a restless people, a river, and a prophet...
- 5. Mark 1: 9-13 An Urgent Gospel — What now? What Now?!** The insistent, urgent Gospel of Mark drops us right in the deep end. So much is conveyed in just a handful of verses. Not for Mark the stories of Jesus's birth and childhood, nor the cosmic poetry of John 1. No. Jesus is *here*. He is on the move. 'What now?' The recurring question of the Hebrews in the wilderness is the constant question of Mark as we rattle through the implications of the Kingdom.
- 6. Mark 1: 16-20 Quick, come now, it's happening, join in!** As we Get Packing with God, we are responding to the call to adventure — to leave behind the stagnant and stuck and get into the vibrant and vital call of Jesus.
- 7. Mark 1: 35-39 Restless Messiah.** The incarnated, embodied Jesus knows he is on a mission. Where is God stirring a divine restlessness in us and the church? Where — and to whom — are we called to share the excitement of the Jesus adventure?