

In Their Midst

Exodus: From Slavery to Covenant Presence

Session 3. Let My People Go

Reading: Exodus 4:18-6:30

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers why obedience can initially deepen suffering and how God's covenant promises answer Israel's discouragement.

Catholic Touchstone

This session touches trust in divine providence amid adversity, persevering prayer, and God's unwavering fidelity to his covenant promises.

Moses obeys, Israel initially believes, and then everything appears to get worse. Pharaoh increases the people's burden, the foremen turn against Moses, and Moses brings his anguish back to God. The Lord does not shame Moses for lamenting. He answers by revealing what he will do and grounding those promises in who he is. Help the group remain inside that tension rather than rushing to relief that the passage itself has not yet supplied.

What You Need to Know

The passage moves from hope to collapse

Exodus 4:31 ends with worship because Israel believes that the Lord has visited his people. By Exodus 5:21, Israel's foremen are blaming Moses and Aaron for making them offensive to Pharaoh. This reversal is central to the session. Obedience has not caused Pharaoh's evil, but it has exposed and intensified his resistance.

Pharaoh contests the Lord's authority

Moses does not merely request improved conditions. He announces the command of the God of Israel and calls for Israel to worship in the wilderness. Pharaoh's question, asking who the Lord is, introduces a conflict over whose word rules Israel. The coming signs and plagues will answer that question, so plant it without resolving it tonight.

Moses' lament is directed toward God

In Exodus 5:22-23, Moses does not abandon his calling or seek another god. He returns to the Lord and speaks honestly about the apparent failure of the mission. His words are sharp, but they remain prayer. The Lord answers by restating his purpose rather than rebuking Moses for bringing the crisis to him.

The promises of Exodus 6

Exodus 6:2-8 is driven by God's first-person promises. The repeated actions belong primarily to the Lord: he will bring out, deliver, redeem, take Israel as his people, be their God, bring them into the promised land, and give it to them. Israel's hope rests first on God's identity and fidelity, not on Israel's present strength.

The difficult circumcision scene

Exodus 4:24-26 is exceptionally compressed. The scene clearly joins mortal danger, circumcision, Zipporah's decisive action, and Moses' mission, but the text does not explicitly identify every pronoun or explain the expression bridegroom of blood. Do not force the group into a single reconstruction. The safest observation is that the covenant sign cannot be treated as irrelevant by the household of the covenant mediator.

The genealogy is not filler

Exodus 6:14-27 interrupts the action to identify Moses and Aaron within Israel, especially within the tribe of Levi. The narrative then repeats that these are the same Moses and Aaron whom the Lord commissioned. The genealogy anchors the mission in a real people and family rather than presenting detached legendary heroes.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The ancestral promise

Long before Moses, God told Abraham that his descendants would be strangers, would be enslaved and afflicted, and would afterward come out with great possessions. God also promised an enduring covenant with Abraham's descendants and the land of Canaan. Exodus 6 deliberately answers the present crisis by recalling that earlier covenant.

The pattern fulfilled in Christ

Israel's path shows that God's saving purpose may move through intensified opposition before deliverance becomes visible. At the Transfiguration, Luke describes what Jesus will accomplish at Jerusalem as his departure, using the Greek word *exodos*. Christ fulfills the pattern through his suffering, death, resurrection, and passage to the Father. Biblical typology does not erase Israel's historical deliverance. It recognizes that God's earlier saving works prepare his people to receive their fullness in Christ.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, c. 130-c. 202

Summary of his teaching: God did not form humanity because he needed our service. Human beings need communion with God, and God gives his gifts so that they may share his goodness.

Against Heresies 4.14.1.

How this is cited. This is a close summary of St. Irenaeus's argument in the cited section, not a direct quotation.

For the group. God's promise to take Israel as his people is a gift of communion, not the recruitment of labor that God lacks.

St. Francis de Sales, 1567-1622

Summary of his teaching: when a person begins to pursue a devout life seriously, opposition and ridicule may increase. Such resistance is not itself proof that the person has chosen wrongly.

Introduction to the Devout Life, Part IV, chapter 1.

How this is cited. This faithfully summarizes the chapter's warning about worldly opposition to those beginning a devout life.

For the group. A harder week after an act of obedience does not automatically mean that God was absent from the decision.

St. Cyprian of Carthage, d. 258

Summary of his teaching: writing to his people during a plague, St. Cyprian says it is no wonder that the evils of this life fall on Christians and pagans alike, that Job and Tobias show the need of patience without murmuring, and that unless the struggle came first the victory could not follow.

On the Mortality.

How this is cited. Summary of the treatise's argument, not a quotation, and no section number is given because the divisions vary between editions.

For the group. Help the group name pain honestly. Shared suffering is not evidence that God has withdrawn, and endurance is not the same as pretending.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 207, 211. God reveals himself as the one always present to save, and his name expresses a faithfulness kept in spite of human sin.

CCC 227. Faith in the one God leads us to trust him in every circumstance, including adversity.

CCC 2575. Moses learns prayer through his encounter with God and becomes a servant who speaks with God and intercedes for the people.

CCC 1094. Christian catechesis reads the unity of God's plan through typology, recognizing in God's works under the Old Covenant preparations for what he accomplishes in Christ.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

Why God brings Israel out (develop). Notice that liberation has a destination: Israel is to worship the Lord and become his people. Do not complete the answer yet.

Fear of God versus fear of rulers (develop). Contrast Pharaoh's question about the Lord with Moses and Aaron's obedience. Notice also how the foremen's fear of Pharaoh turns against the mediators sent to help them.

God dwelling among his people (develop). Emphasize the relational promise that Israel will be God's people and he will be their God. The manner of his dwelling remains ahead.

Mediators of deliverance (develop). Moses and Aaron are rejected by the people they serve, yet God recommissions them and identifies them within Israel.

Deliverance through water (hold). Do not advance this thread tonight.

The sealed guess (hold). Do not reopen the participants' sentence about why God brings Israel out. It opens in Session 8.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

If obedience makes circumstances worse, that is evidence that the supposed call did not come from God.

Consequences matter, but this passage does not permit that conclusion by itself. God had already warned that Pharaoh would resist. The deterioration reveals Pharaoh's cruelty, while God's renewed promises clarify the mission. Discernment should consider God's revealed word, moral truth, wise counsel, and the whole course of providence, not immediate comfort alone.

Moses' complaint shows a lack of faith that God should have condemned.

Moses is confused and distressed, but he brings his complaint to the Lord. Scripture often presents faithful lament as honest prayer. The Lord answers Moses and recommissions him. Faith is not pretending that suffering is painless.

Session Goals

1. Trace the movement from Israel's initial belief to increased oppression and discouragement.
2. Identify how Pharaoh's actions reveal resistance to the Lord's authority.
3. Distinguish faithful lament directed toward God from abandonment of God.
4. Discover how Exodus 6 grounds hope in God's identity, covenant, and repeated promises.
5. Practice evaluating the claim that worsening circumstances disprove a divine call.
6. Connect Israel's threatened mission with the Paschal pattern fulfilled in Christ without bypassing Israel's historical deliverance.

Time Note

Planned for 75-90 Minutes

Allow 5 minutes for prayer and welcome, 8 minutes for Win, 13 to 15 minutes for the reading, 43 to 48 minutes for Build, 10 minutes for Send and Live It, and 4 minutes for the memory verse and closing prayer.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut the Dig Deeper prompt under Question 10 first.
2. Shorten Question 2 to one textual observation and the leader's answer.
3. Ask Question 7 in pairs rather than discussing every observation with the full group.
4. Use only the first Send question, while still inviting everyone to choose a Live It practice.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Father, you are faithful even when we cannot see what you are doing. Give us honest hearts before your word. Teach us to recognize your voice, to bring you our discouragement, and to trust your promises without denying the weight of suffering. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. When has doing the right thing turned out to be harder than you expected?

W2. When you feel discouraged, what kind of response from another person actually helps you keep going?

Receive the stories without correcting them. Tonight's passage makes room for both obedience and discouragement.

Read

Read aloud

Use three readers. Reader one reads Exodus 4:18-31, reader two reads Exodus 5:1-23, and reader three reads Exodus 6:1-30. Ask everyone else to mark changes in who speaks, what the people feel, and every promise God makes.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

Obedience and early hope

1. In Exodus 4:18-31, what steps of obedience do Moses, Aaron, and the elders take, and how do the people initially respond?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. List the acts of obedience in order and name who performs each.

Ground. Ask what each person risked in doing it.

Depth. Consider why the passage records the people's worship before it records their collapse.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses returns toward Egypt with his family and the staff of God. Aaron meets him, receives the Lord's words, and speaks with Moses to the elders. The signs are performed, the people believe, and they worship when they hear that the Lord has visited them and seen their affliction. The mission begins with real obedience and genuine hope.

Dig Deeper

What does the people's worship reveal about what they believe God has already noticed, even before their circumstances change?

2. Exodus 4:24-26 is difficult. Without trying to solve every ambiguity, what facts does the text clearly place together?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The text places together a threat of death, a neglected or urgently needed circumcision, Zipporah's decisive action, blood, and the continuation of Moses' journey. At minimum, the episode shows that the covenant sign matters within the household of the man being sent as covenant mediator. The text does not clearly settle the referent of every pronoun or fully explain Zipporah's expression.

Dig Deeper

What does Zipporah do while Moses appears passive, and how does that continue the study's pattern of courageous people acting to preserve life?

Pharaoh resists

3. Compare Moses and Aaron's command in Exodus 5:1-3 with Pharaoh's reply and policy in verses 4-9. What does each side claim, and what does Pharaoh do?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses and Aaron speak in the name of the Lord, identify him as the God of Israel, and ask that Israel be allowed to hold a feast in the wilderness. Pharaoh denies any obligation to obey the Lord and treats worship as an excuse for idleness. He then withholds straw while maintaining the same brick quota, using economic pressure and punishment to resist God's command.

Dig Deeper

Pharaoh asks who the Lord is. Keep that question in view as the study moves toward the plagues.

Build the case

4. Build the strongest textual case that Moses' obedience has made Israel's situation worse. What changes in Exodus 5:10-21?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The people must search for stubble while producing the same number of bricks. The Israelite foremen are beaten, their appeal to Pharaoh fails, and Pharaoh calls them idle. The foremen then confront Moses and Aaron and blame them for making Israel offensive to Pharaoh and for placing the people in danger. From their immediate viewpoint, the mission has brought heavier labor, violence, humiliation, and division.

Press the claim

5. Does the worsening situation prove that Moses misunderstood God? Listen first to the strongest version of that claim, then test it against the passage.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. A claimed divine mission should bear recognizable good fruit. Moses promised deliverance, but his intervention produced harsher labor, beatings, and greater danger. The people who must bear the cost did not consent to this escalation. If a leader's claimed revelation makes vulnerable people suffer more while producing no visible rescue, the responsible conclusion is that the leader may have misheard God or used God's name to justify a disastrous plan.

Answering from the text. The concern for the vulnerable and the demand to test religious claims are legitimate. Yet this text has already shown that God warned Moses of Pharaoh's resistance. Moses and Aaron obey the command they received, while Pharaoh freely chooses the cruelty that increases Israel's suffering. The Lord does not promise immediate ease. In Exodus 6 he reaffirms his identity, remembers his covenant, and specifies what he will do. The text therefore presents the setback as Pharaoh's resistance within an unfinished mission, not as proof that the mission was false.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Immediate results alone cannot settle the question. The group should notice three pieces of evidence: God had warned of resistance, Pharaoh is the agent who chooses harsher oppression, and God answers the crisis by reaffirming rather than withdrawing the commission. This does not make the suffering unimportant. It means the story has not yet reached the point at which God's promise can be judged by its final outcome.

Moses returns to God

6. What does Moses say in Exodus 5:22-23, and what does his decision to say it to the Lord reveal?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Name what Moses actually says.

Ground. Ask what it means that he says it to the Lord rather than about the Lord.

Depth. Discuss the difference between faithful lament and unbelief, and how the text distinguishes them.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses asks why the Lord has allowed harm, why he was sent, and why deliverance has not appeared. His words expose confusion and anguish. Yet Moses returns to the Lord rather than walking away from him. His lament remains relational prayer, and it gives the Lord's answer the final word.

Dig Deeper

What is the difference between speaking pain to God and making pain the only authority over what you believe?

Live discovery: the older promise

Live discovery

Divide into two groups. One group reads the first passage and lists what God foretells about suffering and deliverance. The other reads the second passage and lists what God promises to Abraham and his descendants. Report back without using study notes.

Let them find it. Genesis 15:13-16; Genesis 17:7-8

7. God says that he has remembered his covenant. What earlier promises would Moses' audience hear behind that statement?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God had foretold that Abraham's descendants would live as strangers, be enslaved and afflicted, and afterward come out. He had also established an enduring covenant with Abraham's descendants and promised them the land of Canaan. Exodus 6 does not introduce an emergency plan. It presents the coming deliverance as God's fidelity to an older promise.

God answers with his promises

8. Read Exodus 6:2-8 slowly. List every action God says he will take. What receives more emphasis, Israel's ability or God's action?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Underline every verb whose subject is God.

Ground. Compare how much space the passage gives to God's action and how much to Israel's.

Depth. Ask what changes about hope when a promise rests on the character of the promiser rather than on visible progress.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God says he will bring Israel out, deliver them from bondage, redeem them with an outstretched arm and acts of judgment, take them as his people, be their God, bring them into the promised land, and give it to them. The emphasis falls overwhelmingly on God's identity and action. Israel must respond, but hope begins with what the Lord pledges to do.

9. How do the Israelites respond in Exodus 6:9, and what reasons does the text give? What does this keep us from assuming about discouraged people?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

They do not listen to Moses because their spirit is broken and their bondage is cruel. The text connects their inability to receive the promise with prolonged suffering. It keeps us from assuming that every discouraged response is simple stubbornness or deliberate unbelief. Trauma and exhaustion can make hope difficult to hear.

The commission continues

10. Across Exodus 6:10-30, what objections or interruptions could make the mission appear stalled, and what keeps returning?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Israel does not listen, Moses again protests that Pharaoh will not listen to him, and the genealogy pauses the action. Yet the Lord's command keeps returning. The genealogy identifies Moses and Aaron within Israel, and the closing verses stress that these are the very men commissioned to speak to Pharaoh. Human weakness remains visible, but God does not discard his chosen mediators.

Dig Deeper

Why might a story about divine power take time to identify the family and tribe of its human messengers?

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Where are you most tempted to treat difficulty as automatic proof that faithful obedience was a mistake?

S2. What promise or truth about God's character do you need to place beside a discouraging circumstance this week?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Pray one honest lament. Name before God what has become harder, what you fear, and what you do not understand. End by naming one truth about who God is.
2. Read Exodus 6:2-8 on three different days. Each time, underline or write down the actions God promises to take.
3. Encourage one discouraged person without offering a quick fix. Listen first, acknowledge the burden, and remind the person of one concrete truth from Scripture.
4. If you are discerning a difficult act of obedience, seek counsel from a mature Catholic, priest, or spiritual director. Do not treat either immediate comfort or immediate resistance as the only test.

Scripture Memory

Exodus 6:7

"I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."

Exodus 6:7

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, you remember your covenant and hear the cries of your people. When obedience becomes costly, keep us from despair. Teach us to bring you our honest questions and to receive again the truth of who you are. Strengthen those whose spirits have been broken by heavy burdens. Make us faithful to your call and gentle with the discouraged. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Exodus 4:18-6:30** Read in three movements: return and reception, confrontation and collapse, covenant promise and recommission.

Build sequence

- **Exodus 4:18-31**
- **Exodus 4:24-26**
- **Exodus 5:1-9**
- **Exodus 5:10-21**
- **Exodus 5:22-6:1**
- **Genesis 15:13-16**
- **Genesis 17:7-8**
- **Exodus 6:2-8**
- **Exodus 6:9**
- **Exodus 6:10-30**

Fulfillment and Church voice

- **Luke 9:28-36** Especially verse 31 and Christ's departure at Jerusalem.
- **2 Corinthians 4:8-9, 16-18**

Memory

- **Exodus 6:7**

Terms

- **exodos.** departure or going out; Luke uses this term for what Jesus will accomplish at Jerusalem
- **covenant.** a binding relationship established by God, involving promises, belonging, and a corresponding way of life
- **lament.** prayer that brings suffering, confusion, or protest honestly before God while continuing to address him

Catechism

- CCC 207, 211. God reveals himself as the one always present to save, and his name expresses a faithfulness kept in spite of human sin.
- CCC 227. Trust God in every circumstance, including adversity.
- CCC 2575. Moses learns prayer and intercession in relationship with God.
- CCC 1094. Typology recognizes the unity of God's saving plan.