

In Their Midst

Exodus: From Slavery to Covenant Presence

Session 13. As the Lord Had Commanded

Reading: Exodus 35:1-39:43

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers how willing generosity, Spirit-given skill, and careful obedience turn God's sanctuary command into completed sanctuary work ready for his dwelling presence.

Catholic Touchstone

This session touches stewardship, Spirit-given gifts, the sanctification of human work, sacred art, and obedient cooperation in building up the Church.

Israel now carries out what God commanded on Sinai. The people give freely, gifted artisans work wisely, leaders guard the integrity of the command, and Moses inspects the finished work. Keep the distinction between gift and achievement clear. God gives the design, materials, abilities, and calling, yet Israel truly cooperates. Exodus 39 ends with the sanctuary components completed and blessed, but the tabernacle has not yet been erected or filled with glory. That climax belongs to Session 14.

What You Need to Know

Command becomes cooperation

Exodus 25 through 31 gave the sanctuary instructions. Exodus 35 through 39 narrates their execution. The repetition is purposeful. The people are not improvising a religious project according to preference. They are freely cooperating with a pattern received from God.

A willing offering

The offerings are repeatedly described as willing or prompted by the heart. Moses announces what is needed, but the people are not manipulated into giving. Their generosity becomes so abundant that the craftsmen ask Moses to stop further contributions.

Gifted work and ordered responsibility

Bezalel and Oholiab possess wisdom, understanding, knowledge, craftsmanship, and the ability to teach. Other skilled men and women join them. The text does not oppose spiritual gifts to practical competence. Skill, teaching, administration, generosity, and physical labor all serve the one sanctuary.

The Sabbath still governs the work

Moses repeats the Sabbath command before discussing the collection and construction. Even sacred work does not authorize Israel to disregard God's ordering of time. The sanctuary is built through obedience, not through religious busyness that excuses disobedience.

Completion is not yet indwelling

At the end of Exodus 39, the furnishings, vestments, and structural components are brought to Moses. He sees that the people have done the work as commanded and blesses them. The actual erection, consecration, and filling of the tabernacle occur in Exodus 40.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Creation, completion, blessing, and rest

Invite the group to compare the conclusion of the sanctuary work with the conclusion of creation. In both, ordered work reaches completion, the finished work is seen, blessing follows, and Sabbath frames the account. This correspondence helps readers see the sanctuary as an ordered place where creation is directed toward worship. Present this as a strong literary and theological correspondence, not as though every construction detail has a defined allegorical meaning.

From tabernacle to temple

The tabernacle prepares for the Jerusalem temple. The pattern reaches its first great climax in Exodus 40, and later continues when the glory of the Lord fills Solomon's temple at its dedication.

The Word dwells among us

John announces that the eternal Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The verb *eskēnōsen* carries the sense of pitching a tent or tabernacling. The sanctuary pattern reaches its fulfillment first in Christ himself, in whom God's presence comes bodily among his people.

A people built into God's dwelling

The New Testament also describes the Church as a holy temple and believers as living stones. Christians do not construct this dwelling by natural ability alone. Christ is its foundation and cornerstone, while the Spirit joins persons and their gifts into one holy people.

Voices of the Church

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

St. John Henry Newman, 1801-1890

St. John Henry Newman teaches that holiness ordinarily grows through attending faithfully to the duties of one's state of life, doing each task at its proper time and as well as one can.

Meditations and Devotions, Part III, "A Short Road to Perfection".

How this is cited. This is a close summary of Newman's practical counsel in the named meditation, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Invite the group to recognize careful, ordinary work as a real field of holiness rather than a distraction from it.

St. Josemaría Escrivá, 1902-1975

St. Josemaría teaches that Christians are called to sanctify their work, to be sanctified through that work, and to help sanctify others through it.

Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer 114.

How this is cited. This is a faithful summary of the threefold teaching on the sanctification of work in section 114.

For the group. The artisans of Exodus help the group ask how competence, integrity, and service can become an offering to God.

St. John Paul II, 1920-2005

St. John Paul II distinguishes the Creator, who brings being from nothing, from human artisans, who shape existing materials. He teaches that artistic creativity remains a genuine participation in the wisdom and generosity received from God.

Letter to Artists 1.

How this is cited. This is a summary of the opening section's distinction between the Creator and the human craftsman.

For the group. Skill is neither self-created nor passive. It is a received gift that matures through disciplined human cooperation.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 2003. Grace includes special gifts, or charisms, ordered toward sanctifying grace and the common good of the Church.

CCC 2427. Human work continues the Creator's work, can be redemptive when united to Jesus, and can become a means of sanctification.

CCC 2501. Human beings express truth and beauty through artistic works by using talents received from the Creator.

CCC 2502. Sacred art is true and beautiful when it evokes and glorifies the mystery of God and leads people toward adoration and love.

CCC 1180-1181. Visible churches signify God's dwelling with a reconciled people and are houses of prayer where the Eucharist is celebrated and reserved.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

God dwelling among his people (develop). Show that everything is ready for the dwelling, but do not allow the group to jump past the erection and glory of Exodus 40.

Mediators of deliverance (develop). Notice Moses receiving and inspecting the work, Bezalel and Oholiab teaching, and many skilled workers serving within ordered responsibilities.

Where is the lamb? (develop). The altar, priestly vestments, and sanctuary are completed for sacrificial worship. Let the unresolved need for sacrifice remain visible without repeating the Passover session.

Why God brings Israel out (revisit). Recall the Session 8 discovery that God brought Israel to himself. Here the redeemed people cooperate in preparing a dwelling for covenant worship.

Fear of God versus fear of rulers (develop). Contrast labor demanded under Pharaoh with work freely offered under the Lord, while allowing the group to articulate the difference.

Deliverance through water (hold). Do not force this thread into the construction narrative.

Objection Bench

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

If God supplied the plan and the Spirit supplied the skill, human effort seems irrelevant.

The text presents divine gift and human cooperation together. God calls and equips, while the people give, teach, weave, construct, inspect, and obey. Grace does not erase their agency. It enables and orders it.

Sacred art and expensive worship spaces waste resources that could help the poor.

Concern for the poor is a binding Christian duty, but Scripture does not treat worship and mercy as enemies. Exodus emphasizes willing gifts rather than exploitation, and the project stops receiving material when enough has been given. Sacred beauty must serve God and his people, never vanity or neglect of justice.

Session Goals

1. Identify the repeated roles of willing hearts, Spirit-given ability, teaching, and careful obedience.
2. Distinguish God's initiating gifts from Israel's genuine and necessary cooperation.
3. Discover why the Sabbath command frames even the sacred work of building the sanctuary.
4. Trace the narrative movement from divine command to inspected and blessed completion.
5. Connect human work, artistic skill, and stewardship with the Christian call to holiness and service.
6. Leave the group ready for the final question of whether God will actually dwell in the completed sanctuary.

Time Note

Planned for 75-90 Minutes

Plan for about 85 minutes: 5 minutes for prayer, 10 minutes for Win, 15 minutes for the selected reading and scan, 43 minutes for Build, 9 minutes for Send and weekly practices, and 3 minutes for closing prayer.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut the optional comparison of individual furnishings in Question 7 first.
2. Shorten Question 11 to one observation from Ephesians if time is tight.
3. Use only the floor and ground prompts for Question 6, omitting its deeper prompt.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Father, you called Israel to prepare a place for your dwelling, and you gave your people willing hearts and skillful hands. Send your Holy Spirit upon us. Teach us to receive your gifts humbly, to use them faithfully, and to listen carefully to your word. May all our work serve your glory and the good of your people. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

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

W1. What is a skill or practical ability that someone once took the time to teach you?

W2. When have you been part of a group project where people contributed very different gifts?

Keep this light and personal. The goal is to help everyone enter the human experience of receiving skills and working with others.

Read

Read aloud

Ask three readers to read Exodus 35:1-36:7 and Exodus 39:32-43 aloud. Then divide Exodus 36:8-39:31 among pairs. Give each pair a few minutes to scan its assigned section for materials, workers, actions, and repeated language, then report one observation.

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.

Willing hearts

1. In Exodus 35:1-29, what different commands, invitations, people, materials, and kinds of work do you notice?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Ask the group simply to name repeated words or actions.

Ground. Sort their observations into giving, making, leading, and resting.

Depth. Ask what this distribution of responsibilities reveals about belonging to one covenant people.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Moses repeats the Sabbath command, invites contributions, names needed materials, and calls skilled people to work. Men and women bring jewelry, cloth, skins, wood, metal, spices, oil, and precious stones. The whole community is involved, but people contribute in different ways.

2. What words in Exodus 35:5, 21, 22, 26, and 29 describe the inner disposition of the givers? What seems absent from Moses' appeal?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The offerings arise from willing, stirred, or moved hearts. Moses identifies the need and receives what is offered, but the text does not portray him coercing, shaming, or selling privileges to the people.

Dig Deeper

The people were once forced to produce for Pharaoh. Now they freely offer their possessions and abilities for the Lord's sanctuary. Ask what has changed in the purpose, manner, and recipient of their labor.

3. Why might the Sabbath command appear before the collection and construction instructions? What temptation could that placement correct?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. What command comes first?

Ground. What does that order say about means and ends?

Depth. How can service to God become disordered when a person refuses limits God has given?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Even sacred work remains under God's command. Building the sanctuary does not excuse Israel from receiving the Sabbath. The placement corrects the temptation to justify disobedience, exhaustion, or self-importance by claiming that the project is religious.

Gifted and taught

4. According to Exodus 35:30-36:2, what has God given Bezalel and Oholiab, and what are they expected to do with those gifts?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God calls Bezalel by name and fills him with the Spirit of God, wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and craftsmanship. Bezalel and Oholiab receive the ability to teach, while other skilled people are called to join the work. Their gifts are meant to become shared service, not private status.

Dig Deeper

Notice that inspiration, learned skill, craftsmanship, and teaching appear together. The text gives no reason to pit spiritual dependence against disciplined competence.

5. In Exodus 36:3-7, what problem do the craftsmen bring to Moses, and how is it solved? What does this reveal about both the people and their leaders?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The people bring more than the work requires. The craftsmen report the surplus, Moses orders the people to stop giving, and the collection ends. The people are generous, the craftsmen are honest, and Moses refuses needless accumulation.

Dig Deeper

Ask how this scene challenges both reluctant giving and manipulative fundraising.

A creation brought to completion

Live discovery

Send pairs to read Genesis 1:31-2:3 and compare its sequence with Exodus 39:32-43. Ask them to report only what they can show from the words and movements of the two texts.

Let them find it. Genesis 1:31-2:3; Exodus 39:32-43

6. Find the conclusion of the Bible's creation account. What words or movements there resemble the completion of the sanctuary work in Exodus 39:32-43?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Look for completed work, seeing, and blessing.

Ground. Ask what each account says about order and purpose.

Depth. Discuss why the comparison is meaningful without assigning a hidden symbolism to every material or measurement.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Both accounts speak of work reaching completion. The finished work is seen, and blessing follows. Sabbath also frames the sanctuary account at its beginning. These correspondences present the sanctuary as ordered work directed toward God's holy presence and the worshipful ordering of creation.

Careful obedience

7. From your assigned scan of Exodus 36:8-39:31, what details or repeated phrases show that the artisans are carrying out a received pattern rather than inventing their own worship?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The sections follow the earlier commands closely in materials, measurements, furnishings, vestments, and arrangement. The repeated refrain that the work was done as the Lord commanded Moses becomes especially prominent near the end. The workers exercise real creativity and skill within faithful obedience.

Dig Deeper

If useful, compare one completed object with its earlier instruction. The goal is not to test memory but to notice the movement from command to fulfillment.

Build

8. Why might the narrator spend so much space repeating construction details the reader has already heard? What does the repetition allow the reader to verify?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The repetition allows the reader to compare God's command with Israel's response. After the golden calf, obedience cannot be assumed. The careful account shows that the people have not substituted another self-designed object of worship. They complete what God actually commanded.

Press

9. How would you answer the following reading using the structure and repeated language of Exodus 35 through 39?

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. These chapters are repetitive construction records with little spiritual value. Surely sincere intention matters more than exact materials, measurements, vestments, and procedures. A worshiper who loves God should be free to express that love creatively rather than being bound to an elaborate blueprint.

Answering from the text. The text does value willing hearts and Spirit-given creativity, so it does not reduce worship to mechanical compliance. Yet those gifts operate within God's revealed command. The golden calf has already shown that religious enthusiasm and costly generosity can still produce false worship. Exodus joins sincerity, gifted creativity, and obedience rather than allowing any one of them to replace the others.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Exodus presents the details as evidence of covenant fidelity. Willingness alone is not enough, because Israel can willingly give to an idol. Precision alone is not enough, because the work also requires hearts moved to give and gifts empowered by God. Faithful worship receives its form from God and answers with the whole person.

Dig Deeper

Ask the group to identify the strongest truth contained in the objection before answering it. Creativity and sincere love really do matter. The disagreement concerns whether sincerity by itself determines faithful worship.

Inspected and blessed

10. In Exodus 39:32-43, who brings the work, who inspects it, what standard is used, and what happens next?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The Israelites bring the completed components to Moses. Moses sees all the work and evaluates it according to what the Lord commanded. Finding that they have done it accordingly, Moses blesses them. Their labor reaches communal recognition and blessing, but the sanctuary is not yet erected or filled.

Built into a dwelling

11. Read Ephesians 2:19-22. What remains similar to the sanctuary story, and what has changed now that Christ has come?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God still forms a holy dwelling rather than leaving people isolated. There is still ordered construction, a foundation, unity, holiness, and God's presence. What has changed is that Christ Jesus is the cornerstone, the apostles and prophets form the foundation in the stated sense, believers themselves are joined together, and the dwelling is built in the Spirit.

Dig Deeper

The passage does not make the Church a human project. God joins the people together in Christ, while each member is truly incorporated into the growing holy temple.

Send

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

S1. Which gift, skill, possession, or responsibility might God be asking you to offer more willingly for the good of others?

S2. Where would careful obedience or greater competence make your work a more truthful offering to God?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Choose one ordinary duty you are tempted to rush or resent. Complete it carefully, on time, and without seeking praise. Before beginning, offer it to God for a specific person.
2. Make a simple inventory of three gifts God has entrusted to you: one practical skill, one material resource, and one ability that can build up another person. Use at least one of them in concrete service this week.
3. Practice a real limit on work. Protect a period of Sunday for Mass, rest, prayer, and human communion rather than treating constant productivity as a virtue.
4. Thank someone whose quiet craftsmanship or service supports your parish, campus ministry, workplace, or home. Name the specific good that person's work makes possible.

Scripture Memory

Exodus 39:43

"And Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it; as the LORD had commanded, so had they done it. And Moses blessed them."

Exodus 39:43

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, every good gift comes from you. Receive our time, abilities, possessions, and work. Free us from vanity, carelessness, and the need to control. Give us willing hearts, teachable minds, skillful hands, and fidelity to your commands. Build us together in Christ as a dwelling place for your Spirit, and prepare us to welcome your presence. 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 35:1-39:43** The sanctuary instructions are carried out.

Earlier sanctuary commands

- **Exodus 25:8** God commands Israel to make a sanctuary so that he may dwell among them.
- **Exodus 31:1-11** Bezalel, Oholiab, and the skilled workers are appointed.

Live discovery

- **Genesis 1:31-2:3** Completed work, seeing, blessing, and Sabbath.
- **Exodus 39:32-43** The completed sanctuary work is inspected and blessed.

Fulfillment

- **1 Kings 8:10-11** The Lord's glory fills Solomon's temple.
- **John 1:14** The Word becomes flesh and dwells among us.
- **Ephesians 2:19-22** The Church grows into a holy temple in the Lord.
- **1 Peter 2:4-5** Believers are built as living stones into a spiritual house.

Next session

- **Exodus 40:1-38** The tabernacle is erected and filled with the Lord's glory.

Terms

- **eskēnōsen.** The Greek verb in John 1:14 translated as dwelt, carrying the sense of pitching a tent or tabernacling.
- **charismata.** Gifts of grace given by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church.

Catechism

- CCC 2003. Charisms serve grace and the common good.
- CCC 2427. Work can participate in creation and become a means of sanctification.
- CCC 2501. Artistic gifts come from the Creator.
- CCC 2502. Sacred art should lead toward God's mystery.
- CCC 1180-1181. Visible churches signify God's dwelling with a reconciled people and are houses of prayer where the Eucharist is celebrated and reserved.