



Let's Worship

WEDNESDAY *words*

A BUSY PASTOR'S GUIDE TO A SERIES OF FOUR BIBLE STUDIES FOR WEDNESDAY NIGHT

Exodus 14

WEEK 1: OUR SURPRISING GOD

Surprise! It's a rescue!



by MATT TULLOS

We serve a God of holy surprises. Surprises are an aquired taste. I have to confess that I resist surprises many days. I like to know what is around the corner when I step inside the car for the morning commute. Surprises are rarely good on the road, are they? Surprises from teenagers are often ominous and confusing as well. Sometimes God's surprises bring laughter (Remember Sarah?). Other times they bring fear (Shepherds, Mary and a score of saints.) And sometimes Holy surprises make us do really dumb things (See Rhoda- Act 12:13) But God's surprises always change us.

Lord, even though I'm often black and blue all over from the shifting collisions of fate I look to You for sudden advent and surprises. I know that the one who created time is not under the jurisdiction of a smart phone or a to-do list. Your glory happens when we least expect it!

In this issue of "Wednesday Words," you'll find four messages which recount just four surprises of God. Each one will challenge us to pray for holy surprises and unusual interventions.

ONE LOOK AT THE MAP OF THE EXODUS JOURNEY to the promised land and you'll realize that this journey God rarely works with straight lines. God often has a plan where the destination must take a backseat to the journey. The Bible is filled with examples of last minute rescues and daring feats of audacious escapes where God comes through when everything seems like there is no hope. Let's celebrate the surprise of rescue.

Life with God is not lived in straight lines.

We are often confused by this concept. You'd think that once God was in the landscape of your life everything would become predictable. But not so! There are hairpin turns and harrowing switchbacks. So beware! What can we learn from this story that helps us understand ourselves, God and our reaction to last minute rescues?

- The surprise of God often seems to lead us into **crisis** than out of it.

God knows that often the best way to teach us to trust him is by putting us in situations where we have nowhere else to turn. The children of Israel found themselves in between a rock and a hardplace as they followed God's way. Some often cling to the hope that if we are following God nothing bad will occur. That's not what the Bible teaches, though. There are two predicaments that are working together in this story.

A situational challenge: **The Red Sea**

The Adversarial challenge: **Pharaoh's army**

Our challenges often come two by two!

God wants to teach us through crisis and so often He allows these challenges and crises to happen so that He can shape us into people of deeper faith and trust.

- God's delays are not **denials**.

The story of the wilderness wandering is a great example of how God often will delay us from reaching the place He has promised us. You would think that God's chosen people would have gotten in the express lane and made it across these few hundred miles in a matter of days. But 40 years?

This is another example of God chosen process over speed.

Application: We rarely see a prodigal son turn back as soon as we want him to turn back. We know that prayer and faith are important but they aren't formulaic. God is often more

interested in how we react to the circumstance than He is concerned about the circumstance itself.

God will put you at odds with people who are close to you.

As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses,

“Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!” (Ex. 14:10-12).

Isn’t it amazing how quickly we forget the blessings we are in the middle of all the mess. It is often the case that when we experience crisis relationships begin to become dysfunctional. We often take leaps of faith as churches but when things get rough and we see people say farewell because of a dispute over worship, vision, or approach, we begin to wonder if we really heard from God. We must remember that this is a battle and we can’t afford to lose faith, back up or shut down.

Share a time when you felt God’s direction and yet you hit a wall and you began to doubt.

He is enough. Just be still!

Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” Exodus 14:13-14

We hear God’s voice saying: “You may not understand your circumstances right now, but don’t worry, I’m still in control!”

Read the following reflection:

When our lives are caught up in a torrent of pain
He is faithful
When we are lost in darkness
When our backs are against the wall
When we feel the stares of our enemies
He remains
When the walls close in on us and we endure hardship
He never leaves us
His love shines brighter
His arms are stronger
His reach is longer
His hope is mighty
His joy will sustain
His peace will remain
No matter how far we descend
He’s a friend to the end.
His love is not weak, whimsical, passé, or temperamental
There is nothing as wide as the love of Jesus

It has been said that God says “fear not” 366 times in the Bible. One for each day including leap year!

Three Things God Does:

Out of this story we see that God is at work even when we aren’t watching. He surprises us by doing these three things.

1. **Diverting** the criticism
2. **Dividing** the water
3. **Destroying** the enemy

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Notes:



OUR SURPRISING GOD

EXODUS 14

Surprise! It's a rescue!



by MATT TULLOS

- Life with God is not lived in _____.
- The surprise of God often seems to lead us into _____ than out of it.
- A situational challenge: _____.
- The adversarial challenge: _____.
- Our challenges often come two by two!
- God's delays are not _____.
- God will put you at _____ with people who are close to you.

"As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up and saw the Egyptians coming after them. Then the Israelites were terrified and cried out to the Lord for help. They said to Moses: 'Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Isn't this what we told you in Egypt: Leave us alone so that we may serve the Egyptians? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness'" (Exodus 14:10-12).

- He is enough. Just be _____!

"But Moses said to the people, 'Don't be afraid. Stand firm and see the LORD's salvation He will provide for you today; for the Egyptians you see today, you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you must be quiet'" (Exodus 14:13-14).

Out of this story we see that God is at work even when we aren't watching. He surprises us by doing these three things.

1. _____ the criticism.
2. _____ the water.
3. _____ the enemy.



CD-ROM

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WEDNESDAY *words*

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Books of Matthew, Hebrews, Deuteronomy, and Jeremiah

WEEK 2: OUR SURPRISING GOD

Surprise! It's a Savior!



by MATT TULLOS

WHEN GOD CHOSE TO RECONCILE THE WORLD TO HIMSELF, He performed a surprising act. He sent His Son! I don't think we'll ever fully understand this mysterious surprise while we are on earth. When we celebrate Jesus' birth we are celebrating God sending a Savior to earth to do what we could never accomplish. He crushed the dividing wall. He pierced through the curse of sin to bring us into intimate fellowship with Himself so that we can be what God had called us to be in Eden: reconciled, fully alive, and intimately connected.

1. Jesus is God simplified.

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you" (Matt. 6:33).

Jesus gives us a salvation that is simple to understand. In fact the plan is so simple that a child could follow it. It will require one thing: everything! He didn't give us a law to fulfill. He gave us a life to follow.

We see glances of this simple message throughout the New Testament. When Jesus speaks to the thief on the cross and says "Today you will be with me in paradise," we begin to understand that it is faith in Christ that saves us and not a to-do list.

Accept the surprise of Jesus and reject the life of mundane rules!

The Pharisees in the New Testament were the self-help authorities of the first century A.D. They didn't turn to God, they turned to rules and appearance management. They were a proud lot. Very proud. They didn't need anyone. Why would anyone think they'd need a savior- not to mention a savior born in poverty.

Thus begins the mystery of Christ. He came to experience it all. The stench of farm animals and the chill of the night air became the first sensory experiences for God in flesh. He knew all about bandits, debtors, cons and herdsmen. He knew how it felt to be rejected, mocked, followed and cherished. It's so true that he came to experience life from the grand to the dubious. And he did it so that we could know that we are not alone. The journey from Bethlehem to Calvary cast God's love like a net over the horizon of mankind. And I'm so thankful that I was captured by His mercy.

We've all encountered people who say, "Oh I don't need God's mercy. I don't need that radical grace." These are the people that find it impossible to get into the kingdom of God. They are convinced that they are better than most. They believe they can get by with a little slice of grace but certainly they don't need the supersized grace of the cross.

2. Jesus is God approachable.

"Then children were brought to Him so He might put His hands on them and pray. But the disciples rebuked them. Then Jesus said, 'Leave the children alone, and don't try to keep them from coming to Me, because the kingdom of heaven is made up of people like this'" (Matt. 19:13-14).

Another surprise we see in Jesus is the fact that He is completely approachable. We read throughout the Gospels that Jesus always had time for the sick and needy even as he made important trips. He would stop on the way and heal the lowest segments of that culture. His strongest rebukes came whenever people wanted to limit His exposure to the helpless.

He's right there
In the midst of my mess.
He's changing my heart
as I fail and confess.
He's winnowing down
every tare of my field.
He's killing my pride
all the sin I conceal.
It's painful, it's holy
It's dreadful and pure.
It's beyond anything
my flesh can endure.
I celebrate growth
and death all the same.
It's His holy purpose
the reason He came.

3. Jesus is God understandable.

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tested in every way as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

When we walk through adversity Jesus can completely relate because he has been there. He was rejected, challenged, betrayed, deserted, mocked, ridiculed, plotted against. Don't kid yourself in thinking that Jesus doesn't have any idea what it's like to live on this earth. He totally can relate.

4. Jesus is God available.

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tested in every way as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

Ask someone to read the following three Scriptures:

"Keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep searching, and you will find. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7).

"But from there, you will search for the LORD your God, and you will find Him when you seek Him with all your heart and all your soul" (Deut. 4:29).

"You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13).

Review the plan of salvation. Remind the church that we are commanded to know how to share this good news with a hurting world.

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OUR SURPRISING GOD

Surprise! It's a Savior!



by MATT TULLOS

1. Jesus is God _____.

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you" (Matthew 6:33).

2. Jesus is God _____.

"Then children were brought to Him so He might put His hands on them and pray. But the disciples rebuked them. Then Jesus said, 'Leave the children alone, and don't try to keep them from coming to Me, because the kingdom of heaven is made up of people like this'" (Matthew 19:13-14).

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"You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).



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WEEK 3: OUR SURPRISING GOD

Surprised by Friends!



by MATT TULLOS

ISN'T IT INSPIRING WHEN WE SEE FORREST GUMP running through the battlefield as bombs explode carrying his pal Bubba? We have to smile when we hear those simple, loving words, "Bubba was my best good friend, and even I know that ain't just something you can find around the corner." It's true. Good best friends are rare.

God surprised David by revealing that his best friend was to be the son of his greatest rival, King Saul. (Read 1 Samuel 18:1-3.)

1. Choose your friends wisely.

Perhaps one of the most important decisions we make is who we choose to do life with. Friendship and connections will determine our destiny, shape our future and direct our steps.

"Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals'" (1 Cor. 15:33).

"A contrary man spreads conflict, and a gossip separates close friends" (Prov. 16:28).

"Don't make friends with an angry man, and don't be a companion of a hot-tempered man, or you will learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare" (Prov. 22:24-25).

2. Forgive your friends willingly.

"Therefore, God's chosen ones, holy and loved, put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, accepting one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. Above all, put on love—the perfect bond of unity" (Col. 3:12-14).

If we are not reconciled, Jesus reminds us that we can't experience real worship. Worship is always preceded by reconciliation and forgiveness. Otherwise it's just religion.

Share the following quote from Reinhold Niebuhr: "Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore, we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as from our own viewpoint; therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness." —Reinhold Niebuhr

3. Listen to your friends closely.

Our real friends aren't the ones who simply flatter us and make us feel comfortable with ourselves. The true friend loves us enough to speak truth to us. If we want to grow we must learn this art of speaking and listening to truth.

"Without guidance, people fall, but with many counselors there is deliverance" (Prov. 11:14).

"Better an open reprimand than concealed love. The wounds of a friend are trustworthy, but the kisses of an enemy are excessive" (Prov. 27:5-6).

4. Defend your friends fiercely.

Are you willing to defend your friends when they experience adversity?

Solomon describes this type of relationship this way in Ecclesiastes:

“Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up. Also, if two lie down together, they can keep warm; but how can one person alone keep warm?” (Ecc. 4:9-11).

Story: Share a time when a friend showed their loyalty to you by defending you from injustice.

Share these ways we can defend our friends:

- Support their marriage.
- Pray for them.
- Don't tolerate gossip that is spoken about them.
- Others: _____

5. Love your friends sacrificially.

“This is My command: Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12-15).

A surprising friend is one that will lay down his or her life for you. A surprising friend is a friend that loves with a God-kind-of-love!

The moment you began your relationship with Jesus Christ you also began a relationship with other Christians. Now you are part of God's family, and in God's family there are no orphans. God did not intend for His children to live as individual islands of faith, but rather as a community of believers, interrelated with each other and part of something much bigger than themselves. That “something” is the Church.

6. Know the greatest friend eternally.

“A man with many friends may be harmed, but there is a friend who stays closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24).

Wrap-Up Reading:

To experience a love that crosses all boundaries of race, opinion, and fear

To be a friend is to know the Friend.

To understand a love that crushes the hard shell of bitterness

To know love in all its aspects

This is to be a friend.

To ignore

To know the need and never take a stand

This is the way of isolation.

His voice beckons us to share this love

It's a sacrifice far and above.

Higher than any mountain

More refreshing than any other fountain

This is the heart of the God.

It's what we choose to applaud

It's what we celebrate today

Precious, more than words can say

And the more we seek His grace

The more hurt we are willing to face.

To be the kind of friend that goes the extra mile

To see the pleasure of His smile

This is what it really looks like to be a friend

A servant faithful to the end.

To seek Him

To find Him

To serve Him

To love Him

To please Him

To be His friend . . .

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Notes:



OUR SURPRISING GOD

Surprised by Friends!



by MATT TULLOS

"When David had finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan committed himself to David, and loved him as much as he loved himself. Saul kept David with him from that day on and did not let him return to his father's house. Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as much as himself" (1 Samuel 18:1-3).

1. _____ **your friends wisely.**

"Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals'" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

"A contrary man spreads conflict, and a gossip separates close friends" (Proverbs 16:28).

"Don't make friends with an angry man, and don't be a companion of a hot-tempered man, or you will learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare" (Proverbs 22:24-25).

2. _____ **your friends willingly.**

"Therefore, God's chosen ones, holy and loved, put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, accepting one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. Above all, put on love—the perfect bond of unity" (Colossians 3:12-14).

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5. _____ **your friends sacrificially.**

"This is My command: Love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, that someone would lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you slaves anymore, because a slave doesn't know what his master is doing. I have called you, friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from My Father" (John 15:12-15).

The moment you began your relationship with Jesus Christ you also began a relationship with other Christians. Now you are part of God's family, and in God's family there are no orphans. God did not intend for His children to live as individual islands of faith, but rather as a community of believers, interrelated with each other and part of something much bigger than themselves. That "something" is the Church.

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Hebrews 13:20; John 10:7-10,14-18; Isaiah 53:6-7

WEEK 4: OUR SURPRISING GOD

Surprise! He's a Shepherd!



by MATT TULLOS

ONE OF THE MORE SURPRISING ASPECTS of Christ's birth is the recipients of the first Birth announcement. Why did God choose to announce the birth of His Son first to shepherds?

It's curious that no notice was delivered to Augustus, the scribes, the religious leaders, Rome, or any other epicenter of power. Instead, God chose the street people of that day, the rank smelling, sheep coddling, lower income people. People that had no financial base or no power structure. Why? Because that's the nature of God; He is not a respecter of people.

Here are a few reasons to make the shepherds the first on the birth announcement list:

- There was a man after his own heart who was a shepherd.
- This was good news about a lamb: the lamb of God.
- This baby will be referred to as "the Good Shepherd."
- This holy lamb would be led to the slaughter.
- Once this lamb was born their jobs had less relevance because no longer would there need to be a lamb to sacrifice. This lamb would shed His blood for the sins of the world.

1. Shepherd of the celebration

(Read *Isaiah 40:9-11*.) The prophecy of Jesus birth was a prophecy of great celebration. God was describing a new day and a new rule. You can't overlook the word joy in this passage. God the Father announces a fresh declaration of grace. No more would God's children stumble under the heavy weight of the law and constant and yearly atonement proceedings. What an amazing declaration! God is coming!

2. Shepherd of a reunion

(Read *Jeremiah 31:10-13*.) Notice the three elements in verse 12: grain, new wine, and olive oil.

These are three symbols of Christ in this proclamation. Grain: Jesus comes as the **Bread of life**. New Wine: Jesus' blood will be a **sacrifice** for the sins of those who follow Him. Olive Oil: Jesus would come with **healing** and **anointing**.

3. Shepherd of our needs

(Read *Ezekiel 34:23*.) He is calling every one of us to be a shepherd. (Read *John 21:15*.)

The Big Truth: How do we love Jesus? By feeding His sheep. This is the **G.O.A.L.** of every Christian!

Give

Jesus is our example of giving. He held nothing back. (Read *John 10:11*.)

The life of the Good Shepherd is a life of complete giving. He gave everything so that we could be drawn into fellowship and now he's inviting us to generous. We give of our resources, our time, and our service. When we do this we are growing God's work on the earth.

Obey

(Read *John 10:4*.) Accomplishing God's mission on Earth is a process of being obedient to Him. We must be careful about whose voice we follow. Are we listening to the voice of Jesus or the voice of our flesh? Are we seeking to hear Him or are we drowning out the voice of Christ with outside influences?

Articulate

(*Read John 10:3.*) If we want to be like the Good Shepherd, we must realize that this mission we undertake is personal. Leaving a tract on the table with our meager tip won't do it. A bumper sticker on your car or a status update on Facebook won't do it. It requires relationship and personal connection.

What are you doing to foster real relationships today?

Love

(*Read John 13:34-36.*) Love is central to the gospel. It defines who we are as a church. Love shapes our vision as a group of believers. Wouldn't it be great if our community identified us as people with an insane amount of love for them?

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OUR SURPRISING GOD

HEBREWS 13:20; JOHN 10:7-10,14-18; ISAIAH 53:6-7

**Surprise! He's
a Shepherd!**



by MATT TULLOS

1. Shepherd of the _____ (Isaiah 40:9-11)

The prophecy of Jesus' birth was a prophecy of great celebration. God was describing a new day and a new rule. You can't overlook the word *joy* in this passage. God the Father announces a fresh declaration of grace. No more would God's children stumble under the heavy weight of the law and constant and yearly atonement proceedings. What an amazing declaration! God is coming!

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Notice the three elements in verse 12. These are three symbols of Christ in this proclamation.

- Grain: Jesus comes as the _____.
- New Wine: Jesus' blood will be a _____ for the sins of those who follow Him.
- Olive Oil: Jesus would come with _____ and _____.

3. Shepherd of our _____ (Ezekiel 34:23 and John 21:15)

The GOAL of Every Christian

G _____.
Jesus is our example of giving. He held nothing back.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

O _____.

"The sheep follow him because they recognize his voice" (John 10:4b).

A _____.

"The doorkeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (John 10:3).

What are you doing to foster real relationships today?

L _____.

"I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.' Lord,' Simon Peter said to Him, 'where are You going?' Jesus answered, 'Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you will follow later'" (John 13:34-36).