



Leader Guide for *From Slavery to Freedom: A Personal Reading of the Exodus Story* By Jeffrey A. Krogstad

About this Guide

This Leader Guide and companion **Participant Handout** offer the tools needed for a one-hour discussion on the theme of applying the Exodus story to our own lives—the focus of *From Slavery to Freedom: A Personal Reading of the Exodus Story*, by Jeffrey A. Krogstad.

The guide also provides suggestions for expanding the one-hour general discussion of the Exodus story to a series of sessions based on each chapter of Krogstad's book. For a more in-depth study of *From Slavery to Freedom*, see "Digging Deeper" at the end of this guide.

To get out the word about an upcoming study of *From Slavery to Freedom*, download the **Publicity Flyer** and customize it to fit your needs.

Pre-Session Preparation

Prior to the session, read *From Slavery to Freedom* and the Bible passages identified as the basis for each chapter of the book. Also reflect on the "Key Points" presented in the box at right. Read through the Leader Guide and the Participant Handout and choose options from the materials presented to use with your group. Gather the materials you will need for the study:

- Bibles
- Copies of the Participant Handout (a companion piece available on this website)
- A white board, large pad of paper, or other writing surface (helpful but not essential)
- Name tags, if desired
- Copies of *From Slavery to Freedom: A Personal Reading of the Exodus Story*. (Participants will get the most out of the conversation if they have read the book, but the one-hour session is designed so that you can welcome and include guests who haven't done the reading.)

This book and other Lutheran Voices titles may be purchased by calling (800) 328-4648, in Canada: (800) 265-6397, ext. 215. Discounts are available for bulk purchases of as few as five books of a single title.

Key Points

- As the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, we are enslaved by whatever sins rule our lives and world. But as God heard the cries of the Israelites, God hears our pleas for freedom.
- The struggle for freedom may confront powerful forces and even our own hardheartedness, but God persists and prevails.
- As the Passover lambs were sacrificed in order that the Israelites might be spared from the angel of death and flee slavery, so Jesus was sacrificed that we might be delivered from sin and death.
- Looking honestly at the pain in our past can open us to God's healing in those areas of our lives.
- Fear can focus us on immediate difficulties, rather than God's big picture, while praise and thanksgiving turn our attention to God's greatness.
- Life in the wilderness of our journey to freedom can be good as we employ spiritual disciplines, build relationships, and learn to trust God.
- God's purpose does not end with freeing us; freedom is meant to bring us to God, where we live in obedience to the One who created and redeemed us.
- We may feel stuck in our old ways, but God is faithful and continues to prepare us for the Promised Land.
- Through scripture, we have glimpsed a Promised Land in which we live fully in God's presence and as a caring, connected, worshiping community.

"The Lutheran Voices series is tapping into the rich resources of the church and bringing us together to talk about issues and ideas that shape our present and future."

Mark S. Hanson, Presiding Bishop of the ELCA

Single-Session Plan

The following ideas suggest how to use the **Participant Handout** in leading a one-hour discussion of *From Slavery to Freedom: A Personal Reading of the Exodus Story*.

Opening (2 minutes)

Introduce yourself and welcome the participants. Pray the opening prayer together, or invite someone to lead the prayer.

Getting Started (10 minutes)

Invite the participants to briefly introduce themselves and to answer this question: When you hear the word *freedom*, what comes to mind first? If the group is large, have participants introduce themselves and respond to the question within smaller groups of 4–5 people rather than to the entire group. Either way, the focus is on inviting everyone to speak, not on giving the “right” answer.

Points to Ponder (45 minutes)

Use questions from the Participant Handout as a framework for discussion.

- *Questions 1–2 (5 minutes)*: Some participants may have studied Exodus in depth already; others may have learned about the Exodus story mainly from popular movies. Question 1 helps you identify how familiar the group is with the story and how much you will need to explain. After hearing ideas in response to question 2, explain that the author of *From Slavery to Freedom* is reading the story as a way to see how God relates to God’s people—and, by extension, how God relates to us as God’s people today. **Option**: Develop this concept by asking participants to think of situations where they have used their experiences with another person to learn about the person and predict how the person will behave in the future.
- *Questions 3–9 (20 minutes)*: These questions aim to establish the problem faced by the Israelites as a compelling problem and to help participants see “slavery to sin” as a real-life crisis, not just a slogan used in church.
 - To prepare for question 3, you might want to read Genesis 45 for the back story of Joseph, the son of Jacob (also called Israel), bringing his family to Egypt so they would have food during a famine.
 - Questions 5–7 look at the same issue from different angles; if participants quickly grasp how they are slaves to sin and what damage results, you may want to skip some of these questions. For question 8, list the ideas on the board for all to consider. (Krogstad’s introduction, pp. 9–12, offers a variety of examples to get you started.)
 - For question 8, allow some time for reflection, and then invite participants to share examples if they wish.
 - If time is limited, skip question 9 to free time to consider the remaining questions in the next part.
- *Questions 10–11 (10 minutes)*: Possible answers: God promised the Israelites freedom from slavery, a life of prosperity in the Promised Land, and most important, that the people would live in a covenant relationship with God. Divide the passages in question 11 among individuals, pairs, or small groups, allow time to read, and then ask them to share with the group what they learned. The passages illustrate God’s mighty and miraculous ways, God’s concern for the people’s needs, God’s protection in perilous situations, and the people’s difficulty in learning to trust God. Participants may also note the long 40-year journey, which not only suggests that learning to live freely in relationship with God may require patience and endurance, but also shows God’s faithfulness in continuing to provide for the people during that entire time.
- *Question 12–15 (10 minutes)*: Note that although we face struggles and changes, ultimately freedom is God’s gift to us.
 - Possible answers for question 12: God is mightier than sin, God intervenes creatively in our lives, God is patient with us, and although changes come slowly and perhaps surprisingly, we can trust God to act.
 - Possible answer for question 14: The “Promised Land” in both contexts involves living faithfully under God’s rule.
 - If the group wishes for more time to explore questions 10–15, note that these issues are addressed in more detail in the deeper study of Exodus (“Digging Deeper”).

Closing (3 minutes)

Invite the group to pray the Closing Prayer aloud together, using it as a plea to God to be delivered from slavery to sin (a prayer God already has answered) and a statement of our desire to be led to the freedom we received in our baptism.

If you plan to continue the discussion of *From Slavery to Freedom* after this session, announce the place and time for the next meeting. Ask participants to prepare by reading the chapters of *From Slavery to Freedom* you plan to cover at the next meeting. Suggestions for subsequent discussions begin on the following page, “Digging Deeper.”

Digging Deeper

After working your way through the single-session plan, use the following suggestions along with the chapter questions in *From Slavery to Freedom* to dig deeper into the meaning of the Exodus story. These suggestions provide a framework for a chapter-by-chapter discussion of *From Slavery to Freedom*, though it's your decision as to how many chapters to address each time the group meets.

Chapter 1: God Hears Our Cries

- Read Exodus 2:23–3:12. **Option:** Have three people read the passage, with one reading the words spoken by Moses, another reading the words of the LORD, and the third reading the part of a narrator.
- Ask: Why do you think the people groaned and cried out (v. 2:23)? Do you think God would have known and cared about their condition if they hadn't cried out? How did God answer their cries? When do you think the people would have first noticed and appreciated that God was responding to them? What did God promise in this encounter with Moses? (See especially v. 3:12.)
- Ask: When has God sent someone in answer to your prayers? When has God sent you in answer to someone else's prayers? How might God be calling on you now? What prayers do you hope God is answering now? **Option:** Recall the discussion of slavery to sin in the Single-Session Plan, and close with time for participants to pray silently or aloud for deliverance.

Chapter 2: Showdown with Power

- Read Exodus 5:1-23. **Option:** Have four (or up to six) people read the passage, with one reading the words of Moses (in unison with another as Aaron), one reading the words of Pharaoh, one or two reading the words of the Egyptian taskmasters, and one reading the part of a narrator. The rest of the group can read together the words of the Israelite supervisors.
- Ask: What was the initial response to God's words when they were delivered by Moses and Aaron? Why do you think Pharaoh resisted God? In our world today, when do you see resistance to what God wants? Where does that resistance come from? How does that resistance affect you?
- Read Exodus 6:1-9. Ask: How did God respond to the resistance from Pharaoh? How did the people respond? Give the group time to recall earlier conversations about what is oppressing them. Ask: How does your own faith today compare with that of the Israelites in this passage? What message do these verses have for you?

Chapter 3: Hardened Hearts

- Note that God confronted Pharaoh's power with God's own power, displayed through ten plagues, and that this session considers the first nine plagues. Ask whether the participants are familiar with the story of the ten plagues; perhaps some have seen them portrayed in a movie or heard them recalled at a Jewish Passover celebration (Seder). To review the plagues, divide the group into nine individuals, pairs, or small groups, and assign each individual or group to read one of the following passages from Exodus: 7:14-24; 8:1-15; 8:16-19; 8:20-32; 9:1-7; 9:8-12; 9:13-35; 10:1-20; and 10:21-29. Have each report to the whole group what the plague was and how Pharaoh responded to it. List the answers on the board.
- Ask: Why do you think Pharaoh's heart was "hard"? When frightening or wonderful things happen in your life, do you assume they are God's work or that they are nature or coincidence? If you had been an Israelite or Egyptian in Moses' time, how many plagues do you think you would have had to experience before you thought they weren't just a coincidence?
- Ask: In what areas of your life would you like to see God make changes? In what areas might change be difficult? When have you needed to be convinced to change? How can we soften our hearts when God wants to bring change?

Chapter 4: Foreshadowing Salvation

- Read Exodus 11:1-10. Ask: What warning did God give to Pharaoh through Moses? (See verses 4-8.) How did Pharaoh respond? In this situation, how would you rate Pharaoh's leadership of the Egyptians? See if participants can think of other situations in which followers have suffered because of an unyielding leader. Examples may come from cruel, stubborn, or foolish leaders of history, in the news, or even in life experiences of some people.
- Invite participants to recall prior discussion of how sin has held them captive. Ask: Are the forces behind these kinds of sin as cruel to you as Pharaoh's behavior was to his people? (For example, participants might think of being subject to the forces behind addiction, racism, greed, or bitterness.) Does this image of Pharaoh help you think about the consequences of having a cruel master who doesn't care about your welfare? What is the price of being subject to such a leader?
- Read Exodus 12:1-13, 21-36. Ask: What do you think it felt like to be the Israelites in this situation? Do you think they would have seen the price of their freedom as high or low? In what ways was the crucifixion of Jesus like the passover sacrifice of lambs? (See, for example, "without blemish," v. 5; salvation from death, v. 13, and the discussion on pp. 34–36.) How would you describe the price paid for your freedom from sin? How do you feel about claiming that freedom?

Chapter 5: Joseph's Bones

- Read Exodus 13:17-22. On a historical map, compare the direct route eastward through the land of the Philistines with the route actually taken toward the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula. (If you don't have a wall map, historical maps are available in many reference books and study Bibles, including on p. 2099 of the *Lutheran Study Bible*.) Ask: Why do you think God didn't have the Israelites take the most direct route? (For two explanations, see Exodus 13:17-18 and 3:12.) How did the Israelites know that God was with them? (See vv. 21-22.)
- Invite participants to recall times when they felt God was leading them in a direction that didn't seem to make sense. Ask: Did you feel confident that God was with you? Why or why not? Did you follow in spite of not understanding? What happened?
- Ask: According to verse 19, what did the Israelites carry with them? For background on the bones of Joseph, son of Jacob, who had brought the Israelites to Egypt to survive a famine in their home country, read Genesis 50:24-26. Ask: How do you think it would have felt to have that additional burden of an ancestor's bones? Why was it important to honor Joseph's memory and wishes? What people and memories from your past and your family help you cope with life's challenges today? When have you understood something better as a result of talking over the past with family and friends? What parts of your past do you need to carry with you, and what do you need to leave behind?

Chapter 6: God's Big Picture

- Read Exodus 14:1-14. **Option:** Have one person read the words spoken by Pharaoh, another person read the words of Moses, a third person be the narrator, and the rest of the group read together the words of the Israelites. Ask: In this passage, what facts and possibilities did Pharaoh see? What did the Israelites see? What did Moses see? What did God see? When you have been in difficult situations, how has your way of handling the situation resembled that of the people in this passage? How have you considered that God has a bigger view?
- Read Exodus 14:15-31. Ask: What do you find most amazing about how God acted in this situation? How do you think the Israelites felt toward God in this situation? How would the Israelites' and Egyptians' understanding of the situation and of God have been different if the Israelites had simply experienced a peaceful walk away from Egypt?
- Point out that in Exodus 13:18, the Israelites left Egypt "prepared for battle." Ask: When they were stuck between the Red Sea and the approaching army, what options do you think they could identify? Do you think they expected the option that God chose to use? Recall again the ways that participants have felt enslaved by sin. Ask: What options do you see? How open are you to the idea that God might see another option? How can we figure out what God wants us to do (or not do)?

Chapter 7: We're Free! Or Are We?

- Read Exodus 15:1-3 and 19-21. If this discussion is separate from the discussion of chapter 6, verify that everyone understands what events the people are celebrating. If some don't recall, invite others to summarize the story. Ask: When has God done something good in your life, and how did you thank God and celebrate? Did you praise God alone or with others? Invite the group to share how celebrating with others deepened their gratitude and helped them appreciate God's work.
- Ask: How do you think the Israelites felt about their freedom at this point? Do you think they expected the next part of their lives to be easy? Read Exodus 15:22-27. Ask: How was facing challenges different for the Israelites as a people free to serve and follow God than it was for them to face challenges as slaves in Egypt? How does it affect us today to know that when we encounter difficulties, we are people freed from sin to follow God? How do we handle that freedom?
- Ask participants to identify favorite hymns or songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. If the group needs ideas, have them look at the hymns in the "Praise, Thanksgiving" section of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (hymns 819–886), a similar section in another hymnal, and/or Psalms 8, 34, 47, 148, and others (many study Bibles list psalms by topic; see, for example, pp. 849–50 of the *Lutheran Study Bible*). Read a Psalm responsively and/or sing a song of praise, using your group's facilities and talents, such as a piano, guitar, or recorded music.

Chapter 8: Into the Wilderness

- Read Exodus 16:1-31. **Option:** Have one participant read the words spoken by Moses, another the words of the LORD, a third the narrator's part, and everyone else the words spoken by the Israelites. Ask: How did the Israelites discover that they were going to have to depend on God in the wilderness? How do you think that felt? When have you felt completely dependent on God in some area of your life? How did that feel?
- Allow time for reflection on when participants have experienced "wilderness"—times of change, difficulty, and dependence on God. Invite examples. Review Jeffrey Krogstad's list of "hard lessons we learn in the wilderness" (pp. 56–58). To discuss each lesson, list it on the board, invite comments on what it means, and then ask participants to share examples of when that lesson has applied in their own wilderness times. Invite the group to add other lessons to Krogstad's list.
- Ask: How has God blessed you during your own wilderness times? What encouragement can this passage offer you when you find it difficult to follow God?

Chapter 9: The Battle Is Not Over

- Read Exodus 17:1-7. Ask: What had God already provided the Israelites up until this point? (See, for example, Exod 14:30; 15:25; 16:4, 13-14.) Given that God provided so amazingly, are you surprised that the people were still frightened and angry? What did they still need to learn in order to live as God's people? How was their reaction similar to or different from yours when you face major changes, uncertainty, or difficulties?
- Read John 8:37-39. Ask: How does God provide "living waters" for our wilderness times? How has God prepared you to face difficulties?
- Read Exodus 17:8-13. Ask: What role did each of the following play in Israel's victory: God, Moses, Moses' staff, Aaron and Hur, Joshua, the Israelite army? What forces of evil have you ever had to battle with? (Some examples might be addictions, hurtful habits, misplaced fear or anger that chokes off good actions or relationships, hurts from the past, and powerful people who cause harm in abusive relationships.) What resources—including other people—does God provide to you for this struggle? What spiritual practices have strengthened you? What additional ones might you want to consider trying?

Chapter 10: Living in Relationships

- Read Exodus 18:1-12. Ask: How did Moses and Jethro's relationship bless each of them? When you want help and encouragement, where do you turn? What resources in your congregation, such as small groups or fellowship events, could help you develop more friendships where you can encourage each other?
- Give each participant two index cards, and have each participant write his or her name on the two cards, then hand one card to the person on his or her left and the other card to the person on his or her right. (Afterward, everyone should have two cards, each with a different person's name.) Encourage participants to pray for the people on their cards each day until the group's next meeting. **Option:** If participants might enjoy building relationships through phone calls, cards, or notes, they could also write their home or e-mail address and phone number on the index cards.
- Read Exodus 18:13-27. **Option:** Have one person read the words of Jethro, another the words of Moses, and a third the narrator's part. Ask: How did Jethro's advice help Moses? When have you received advice that helped you serve God better? Who provided that advice? How do you decide when advice is helpful, hurtful, or just distracting?

Chapter 11: Meeting God

- Read Exodus 19:1-6. Ask: When God freed the people from slavery, what was God's purpose? That is, what does God want for the people besides simply freedom? (See vv. 4-6 and p. 73 of Krogstad's book.) When Jesus died for us and freed us from sin, what was God's purpose and desire for us? How will receiving the law help the Israelites fulfill the goal of living as God's people? How does the law help us today?
- Read Exodus 19:16-25. Ask: What does this passage tell you about God? (For more insights about this scene, read Exodus 3:12.) How do you feel about this description of God's holiness and power? Can you think of any areas of your life, or any areas of suffering and injustice in the world, that really *need* this degree of holiness and power to bring freedom and justice?
- Ask: What do you think it felt like for the Israelites to be waiting at the foot of the mountain for God to speak and for Moses to bring the words back? How long do you think you could have waited patiently? Why is it important to wait for God to speak? What stands in the way of your listening today?

Chapter 12: Living in Obedience

- Ask: What's good about rules? Why do athletes need rules for sports, children need rules for behavior, drivers need rules of the road? What kind of people do you want to have making rules for our community, state, and country? What happens when rules are drawn up thoughtlessly or unfairly? Think of an example of a good rule maker, such as a wise legislator or teacher. Why are (were) you glad to have that person making the rules?
- Read Exodus 20:1-17. Ask: In what ways were these rules (the 10 Commandments) a blessing for the Israelites? How did the rules help to carry out God's purpose of bringing the Israelites to God as God's people? (You might note that many of the rules God provided after the 10 Commandments in Exodus are directions for preparing a tabernacle—a tent that would signify God's presence among the people as well as provide a place for worship.) In light of what the Israelites experienced—slavery, escape from Egypt, miraculous provision of food and water, victory in battle—how do you think the Israelites felt upon hearing verses 2-3, God's promise that God would be *their* God? Work as a group to come up with a similar statement of God's promise to be *our* God, describing what God has already done for us through Jesus. Write your ideas on the board as you develop the statement.
- Read Romans 3:21-26. Ask: If we are put right with God as a gift from God, received through faith in Jesus, why do we still need the law? Recall again the earlier discussions of ways in which we have been slaves to sin. Ask: How can obeying rules from God help us experience being free from whatever kept us away from God and God's love? When we fail to obey, what are the consequences? What can we do in those situations?

Chapter 13: Living in Kadesh

- Read Numbers 20:1. (You might explain that Exodus beginning at chapter 20 primarily describes laws and directions from God; the story of the Israelites under Moses' leadership continues in Numbers and concludes in Deuteronomy.) Find Kadesh and the wilderness of Zin on a historical map in the eastern part of the Sinai Peninsula. Notice how close it is to the Promised Land that became Israel.
- Read Numbers 20:2-13. Ask: What was the consequence of Moses' lack of trust and obedience? Compare this situation with Deuteronomy 1:19-40, where the words are spoken by Moses. (Note that the Israelites then remained in the area for almost 40 years; see Deut 2:13-14.) Ask: Although God delivered the people from slavery in Egypt, why do you think God waited for a new generation to enter the Promised Land? (Consider, for example, Krogstad's ideas about God needing a "wilderness people," on p. 83.) What might have been the problems of starting a new nation with faithless people?
- Note that Jeffrey Krogstad says we, too, are living in a time between delivery from enslavement (Jesus' victory over sin) and the full realization of God's promise (see pp. 83-84). Ask: What is hard about this waiting time? What is encouraging about it? How can we encourage one another to remain faithful? Close by praying the Lord's Prayer.

Chapter 14: The View from Mount Nebo

- Read Deuteronomy 34:1-8. Find Mount Nebo northeast of the Dead Sea on a historical map (around the region of Ammon). Ask: Considering that Moses had spent decades leading a difficult but beloved people through perilous situations, how do you think he felt to see the place that God had promised? Read the description of Moses in verses 10-12. Moses never led the Israelites *in* the Promised Land, but he led them *to* the Promised Land. Ask: How would you rate Moses as a leader? Why? Does this final passage about Moses sound more like a defeat or a victory for Moses? For God? For God's people?
- Ask: Throughout the Israelites' journey from slavery to the Promised Land, how did God let the people know that God was with them? How does God let us know that God is with us? Do we usually see the signs? Why or why not? Is God with us even when we aren't paying attention? How might we be better off if we were to pay closer attention?
- Consider once more the kinds of slavery to sin that participants have identified throughout these discussions. Ask: Do you feel completely liberated from these problems yet? If not, what hope have these lessons offered you? What have you learned about the ways in which God works in our lives, even if some of the end results come after death?



Deeper Still: Further Resources to Explore

We hope you enjoyed your study of *From Slavery to Freedom: A Personal Reading of the Exodus Story*. The Lutheran Voices series includes over 40 books focused on faithful living, global issues, healing and wholeness, Martin Luther's teachings, and church revitalization and leadership. Free, downloadable study materials are available for select books. For a complete list of titles, go to www.augsburgfortress.org or call (800) 328-4648, in Canada: (800) 265-6397, ext. 215.