

EXODUS 25: LIVING WITH GOD

SERMON-ALIGNMENT CURRICULUM

by Kevin McGill

I. God's Invitation: "Let Them Make Me a Sanctuary" (vv. 1–9)

Like any future husband, God is now explaining: "I want you to know what it will look like for us to live together." If you're engaged or just married, the question is, Where are we going to live? That's where God is with Israel: "We're about to be married. I want you to know what it will be like for us to dwell together."

This matters. At first, love feels like a honeymoon, but over time, what happens when you come home late? Who will you meet—someone welcoming or dismissive, angry or joyful? Even outside marriage, we know the feeling: walking in from school or work, wondering, What's the mood of the family today? Who am I about to meet? God wants Israel to know: when you dwell with Him, you'll meet a God who loves you and wants to be with you.

There's an old story from the early 1800s. A man needed to cross a deep river. Without a bridge or horse, he saw a group of riders arrive. He scanned their faces and asked one for a ride. That man agreed, and they crossed together. When they reached the other side, the others scolded him: "Don't you know who you just asked? That was the president, Thomas Jefferson!"

The man replied, "I didn't know it was Jefferson. I only knew this: on every other face was written no. But on his face was written yes. So I asked him."

That's how we live life—we move toward the yes and away from the no. And here's the beautiful thing about God: "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst" (Exodus 25:8).

When you walk into God's dwelling place, His face says yes.

The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me" (Exodus 25:1–2). God begins collecting resources for the dwelling place He wants built—gold, silver, bronze, blue and purple yarns, fine linen, goat's hair, ram skins, acacia wood, oil for the lamps, and precious stones (Exodus 25:3–7).

It's like going to Home Depot with a shopping list. God tells Israel, "Start gathering materials. We're about to build a special place for you and me." He continues, "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst" (Exodus 25:8). The purpose is clear: God wants to be with His people. Moses is then shown the pattern for the tabernacle and all its furniture (Exodus 25:9). The word furniture is important. When we set up our first home, furniture is central. It communicates something about who we are. In the same way, God's furniture would communicate who He is.

This reminded me of Steve Jobs. When he and his wife moved into their home, it took them eight years to buy furniture. Why? Jobs said he couldn't buy a sofa until he understood its purpose. That might seem intense, but it highlights something true: furniture communicates meaning. Think about your own home. Is it casual and inviting, where anyone can relax? Or is it orderly and structured, communicating a different value? Furniture says something about the people who live there. In the same way, every piece of God's tabernacle furniture had meaning. Each item communicated something about Him. And at the center of it all was this message: "I want to dwell with you" (Exodus 25:8; John 1:14).

Group Discussion Questions:

The story of the man who asked Jefferson for a ride shows how we move toward faces that say yes. How does it encourage you to know that God's "face" toward you is always yes (2 Corinthians 1:20)? Whose "face" do you most often look to for affirmation, and how might you turn instead toward God's yes?

II. The Ark and the Mercy Seat: God Dwells in Mercy (Exodus 25:10–22)

Today we're looking at three pieces of furniture in the tabernacle: the lampstand, the table of showbread, and the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25–26). Each of these communicates something about our relationship with God.

The ark was essentially a box, made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold (Exodus 25:10–11). It was designed to hold "the testimony"—the Ten Commandments—God's covenant with His people (Exodus 25:16). Think of it like a vault or safe where you keep important documents. Inside were the life promises Israel made to God. Every time they entered His dwelling, those promises were present—yet broken promises would stir guilt.

Above the ark sat the mercy seat, made of pure gold, with two cherubim overshadowing it (Exodus 25:17–22). In Hebrew, the word is kapporeth—"place of atonement." Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest sprinkled the blood of a goat on the mercy seat as payment for the people's sins (Leviticus 16:14–15). Here's the picture: inside the ark are broken promises, reminders of our sin. But over it is blood, covering those sins. And in the space between the cherubim—above both covenant and sacrifice—God Himself promised to meet with His people (Exodus 25:22).

This foreshadows Christ. Hebrews 9 and 10 tell us that unlike the repeated sacrifices of goats, Jesus offered His blood once for all. His sacrifice covers our broken promises and opens the way for God to dwell with us. So when we think of the ark, we see both the weight of our failure and the wonder of God's mercy. The broken law, the blood of atonement, and the presence of God all converge here—fulfilled perfectly in Christ (Hebrews 10:19–22).

Group Discussion Questions:

1. The ark held the Ten Commandments—reminders of Israel's broken promises to God (Exodus 25:16). How does it shape your view of God to know that He doesn't ignore our failures, but keeps them in full view? When guilt surfaces in your own life, do you tend to hide from God or bring it before Him?

2. Once a year, the priest sprinkled blood on the mercy seat to cover the people's sins (Leviticus 16:14–15). What does it mean for you personally that Jesus' blood was offered once for all (Hebrews 9:12)? Where do you still live as if more sacrifices—or your own effort—are needed to make you right with God?

3. God promised to meet His people above the mercy seat, in the space between broken law and atoning blood (Exodus 25:22). How does this picture deepen your understanding of His mercy? How could remembering this truth change the way you enter prayer or worship this week?

III. The Table of Bread: God Provides Sustaining Fellowship (Exodus 25:23–30)

God instructed Moses: “You shall make a table of acacia wood, overlay it with pure gold, and set the bread of the Presence on the table before me always” (Exodus 25:23–30). This small table held twelve loaves of bread—representing the twelve tribes of Israel—set before the Lord.

Why bread? In the ancient Near East, bread was a source of true sustenance. Unlike today’s bread, it was rich in protein, fiber, and nutrients. If someone gave you bread, you knew you were cared for and could live on it for days. Bread was life. The bread also symbolized fellowship. The priests ate it in God’s presence, much like sharing a meal with a close friend. And it symbolized continuity, because each week the bread was replaced, showing it would always be there.

So what was God saying? When you enter My dwelling, you will find sustenance, friendship, and permanence. “I will sustain you. I will be your friend. I will never break fellowship with you.” Friendship is central in our lives, yet good friends are hard to come by. Some relationships bring drama, others are self-centered, combative, or draining. And at times, we ourselves are that friend. But God’s message is clear: no matter what, He will always be there and always be for you (Deuteronomy 31:6).

This table foreshadows Christ. Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). He sustains us, shares fellowship with us, and His presence is unending (Matthew 28:20). For Israel, the bread of the Presence reminded them they always had God. For us, it points to Jesus—our sustainer, our faithful friend, and the one who will never leave us.

Group Discussion Questions:

- 1. The bread of the Presence reminded Israel that God would always sustain them (Exodus 25:30). How does it encourage you to know that God promises to provide not just physically but spiritually through Christ (John 6:35)? Where in your life right now do you most need to depend on God’s sustaining presence?**
- 2. Eating bread in God’s presence symbolized fellowship and friendship. What does it mean to you that God doesn’t just provide for you, but also invites you to share life with Him (Matthew 28:20)? How could you make more space this week to enjoy fellowship with God as a friend, not just approach Him with requests?**
- 3. The bread was replaced weekly as a sign that it would always be there. What does this teach you about God’s faithfulness, especially when human friendships can sometimes fail (Deuteronomy 31:6)? Can you think of a time when God’s faithfulness carried you even when others let you down?**

IV. The Lampstand: God’s Eternal Presence and Light (Exodus 25:31–40)

The last part of this chapter is the golden lampstand—the menorah (Exodus 25:31–40). Made of pure hammered gold, it had a central stem with six branches, decorated with almond blossoms. Seven

lamps were set upon it to give light to the space before the Lord. The lampstand was the only light source in the tabernacle. We often take light for granted, but in the ancient world it was precious. Only the wealthy could afford to keep lamps burning. Light also meant protection—it kept predators and thieves away. It wasn't just convenience, it was defense. Light filled the entire space, enabling people to see clearly.

Why seven lamps? In Hebrew thought, seven symbolized completion and perfection. God was saying: I am your light, your protection, your fullness, and My presence will never end. Think about the other two furnishings. The ark reminded Israel of forgiveness through atonement. The table of bread reminded them of sustenance and fellowship. But the lampstand emphasized presence—God's enduring nearness.

Presence may be the most powerful gift. Donald Miller once shared how his father left when he was young. Later in life he was asked what makes a good father. His answer: "Eighty percent is just being there." Presence matters more than performance. This truth is echoed in Psalm 27:1: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" Jesus fulfills this when He declares, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). The menorah reminds us: God's presence is constant. He doesn't only forgive and sustain—He stays. And sometimes what we need most is not more words, not more gifts, but simply His presence in the room.

Group Discussion Questions:

- 1. The lampstand was the only light in the tabernacle, reminding Israel that God alone is their source of light and protection (Exodus 25:37; Psalm 27:1). How does this deepen your understanding of what it means for God to be your light? Where in your life do you most feel like you're "walking in the dark," and how could you invite God's light into that place?**
- 2. Seven lamps symbolized completion and perfection. God was saying, "My presence will never end." How does this promise encourage you when life feels incomplete or uncertain? What is one situation right now where you need to trust God's constant presence instead of your own sense of control?**
- 3. Presence may be the greatest gift. Donald Miller said what he most needed from his father was simply for him to be there. How does it change your view of God to know He is not distant but present with you (John 8:12; Matthew 28:20)? Who in your life needs you to show up with presence more than words or performance—and how can you do that this week?**