

GOD OF FREEDOM

A STUDY OF EXODUS 19–40

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jen Wilkin is an author and Bible teacher from Dallas, Texas. She has organized and led studies for women in home, church, and parachurch contexts. Her passion is to see others become articulate and committed followers of Christ, with a clear understanding of why they believe what they believe, grounded in the Word of God. Jen is the author of *Ten Words to Live By: Delighting in and Doing What God Commands*, *Women of the Word*, *None Like Him*, *In His Image*, and Bible studies exploring the Sermon on the Mount and the Books of Genesis, Exodus, Hebrews, and 1 Peter. You can find her at JenWilkin.net.

FOREWORD: HOW SHOULD WE APPROACH GOD'S WORD?

OUR PURPOSE

The Bible study you are about to begin will teach you an important passage of the Bible in a way that will stay with you for years to come. It will challenge you to move beyond loving God with just your heart to loving Him with your mind. It will focus on answering the question, “What does the Bible say about God?” It will aid you in the worthy task of God-discovery.

You see, the Bible is not a book about self-discovery; it is a book about God-discovery. The Bible is God's declared intent to make Himself known to us. In learning about the character of God in Scripture, we *will* experience self-discovery, but it must not be the object of our study. The object must be God Himself.

This focus changes the way we study. We look first for what a passage can teach us about the character of God, allowing self-discovery to be the by-product of God-discovery. This is a much better approach because there can be no true knowledge of self apart from knowledge of God. So when I read the account of Jonah, I see first that God is just and faithful to His Word—He is faithful to proclaim His message to Nineveh no matter what. I see second that I, by contrast (and much like Jonah), am unjust to my fellow man and unfaithful to God's Word. Thus, knowledge of God leads to true knowledge of self, which leads to repentance and transformation. So are confirmed Paul's words in Romans 12:2 that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Most of us are good at loving God with our hearts. We are good at employing our emotions in our pursuit of God. But the God who commands us to love with the totality of our hearts, souls, and strength also commands us to love Him with all of our minds. Because He only commands what He also enables His children to do, it must be possible for us to love Him well with our minds or He would not command it. I know you will bring your emotions to your study of God's Word, and that is good and right. But it is your mind that I am jealous for. God intends for you to be a good student, renewing your mind and thus transforming your heart.

OUR PROCESS

Being a good student entails following good study habits. When we sit down to read, most of us like to read through a particular passage and then find a way to apply it to our everyday lives. We may read through an entire book of the Bible over a period of time, or we may jump around from place to place. I want to suggest a different approach, one that may not always yield immediate application, comfort, or peace, but one that builds over time a cumulative understanding of the message of Scripture.

READING IN CONTEXT AND REPETITIVELY

Imagine yourself receiving a letter in the mail. The envelope is handwritten, but you don't glance at the return address. Instead you tear open the envelope, flip to the second page, read two paragraphs near the bottom, and set the letter aside. Knowing that if someone bothered to send it to you, you should act on its contents in some way, you spend a few minutes trying to figure out how to respond to what the section you just read had to say. What are the odds you will be successful?

No one would read a letter this way. But this is precisely the way many of us read our Bibles. We skip past reading the "envelope"—*Who wrote this? To whom was it written? When was it written? Where was it written?*—and then try to determine the purpose of its contents from a portion of the whole. What if we took time to read the envelope? What if, after determining the context for its writing, we started at the beginning and read to the end? Wouldn't that make infinitely more sense?

In our study, we will take this approach to Scripture. We will begin by placing our text in its historical and cultural context. We will "read the envelope." Then we will read through the entire text so that we can better determine what it wants to say to us. We will read repetitively so that we might move through three critical stages of understanding: comprehension, interpretation, and application.

STAGE 1: COMPREHENSION

Remember the reading comprehension section on the SAT? Remember those long reading passages followed by questions to test your knowledge of what you had just read? The objective was to force you to read for detail. We are going to apply the same method to our study of God's Word. When we read for comprehension, we ask ourselves, *What does it say?* This is hard work. A person who *comprehends* the account of the six days of creation can tell you specifically what happened on each day. This is the first step toward being able to interpret and apply the story of creation to our lives.

STAGE 2: INTERPRETATION

While comprehension asks, *What does it say?*, interpretation asks, *What does it mean?* Once we have read a passage enough times to know what it says, we are ready to look into its meaning. A person who *interprets* the creation story can tell you why God created in a particular order or way. She is able to imply things from the text beyond what it says.

STAGE 3: APPLICATION

After doing the work to understand what the text says and what the text means, we are finally ready to ask, *How should it change me?* Here is where we draw on our God-centered perspective to ask three supporting questions:

- What does this passage teach me about God?
- How does this aspect of God's character change my view of self?
- What should I do in response?

A person who *applies* the creation story can tell us that because God creates in an orderly fashion, we, too, should live well-ordered lives. Knowledge of God gleaned through comprehension of the text and interpretation of its meaning can now be applied to my life in a way that challenges me to be different.

SOME GUIDELINES

It is vital to the learning process that you allow yourself to move through the three stages of understanding on your own, without the aid of commentaries or study notes. The first several times you read a passage, you will probably be confused. In our study together, not all the homework questions will have answers that are immediately clear to you. This is actually a good thing. If you are unsure of an answer, give it your best

shot. Allow yourself to feel lost, to dwell in the “I don’t know.” It will make the moment of discovery stick. We’ll also expand our understanding in the small-group discussion and teaching time.

Nobody likes to feel lost or confused, but it is an important step in the acquisition and retention of understanding. Because of this, I have a few guidelines to lay out for you as you go through this study.

1. **Avoid all commentaries** until *comprehension* and *interpretation* have been earnestly attempted on your own. In other words, wait to read commentaries until after you have done the homework, attended small-group time, and listened to the teaching. And then, consult commentaries you can trust. Ask a pastor or Bible teacher at your church for suggested authors. I used the following commentaries in creating this study: *Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* by Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: A Mentor Commentary* by John L. Mackay, *Exodus: Saved for God’s Glory* by Philip Graham Ryken, and *The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage* by J. A. Motyer.
2. For the purposes of this study, **get a Bible without study notes**. Come on, it’s just too easy to look at them. You know I’m right.
3. Though commentaries are initially off-limits, here are some **tools you should use**:
 - **Cross-references.** These are the Scripture references in the margin or at the bottom of the page in your Bible. They point you to other passages that deal with the same topic or theme.
 - **An English dictionary** to look up unfamiliar words. A good online dictionary is: *merriam-webster.com*.
 - **Other translations of the Bible.** We will use the English Standard Version (ESV) as a starting point, but you can easily consult other versions online. I recommend the Christian Standard Bible (CSB), New International Version (NIV), New American Standard Version (NASB), and New King James Version (NKJV). Reading more than one translation can expand your understanding of the meaning of a passage. Note: a paraphrase, such as *The Message*, can be useful but should be regarded as a commentary rather than a translation. They are best consulted after careful study of an actual translation.
 - **A printed copy of the text, double-spaced, so you can mark repeated words, phrases, or ideas. For certain lessons in this workbook, portions of the text will be provided for you to mark. If you find it helpful to mark other sections of the text, you should print them and do so.**

STORING UP TREASURE

Approaching God’s Word with a God-centered perspective, with context, and with care takes effort and commitment. It is study for the long-term. Some days your study may not move you emotionally or speak to an immediate need. You may not be able to apply a passage at all. But what if ten years from now, in a dark night of the soul, that passage suddenly opens up to you because of the work you have done today? Wouldn’t your long-term investment be worth it?

In Matthew 13 we see Jesus begin to teach in parables. He tells seven deceptively simple stories that left His disciples struggling for understanding—dwelling in the “I don’t know,” if you will. After the last parable, He turns to them and asks, “Have you understood all these things?” (v. 51a). Despite their apparent confusion, they answer out of their earnest desire with, “Yes” (v. 51b). Jesus tells them that their newfound understanding makes them “like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old” (v. 52, NIV).

A storeroom, as Jesus indicated, is a place for keeping valuables over a long period of time for use when needed. Faithful study of God’s Word is a means for filling our spiritual storerooms with truth, so that in our hour of need we can bring forth both the old and the new as a source of rich provision. I pray that this study would be for you a source of much treasure and that you would labor well to obtain it.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jen Wilkin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Jen Wilkin

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This workbook is designed to be used in a specific way. The homework in the workbook will start you in the process of comprehension, interpretation, and application. However, it was designed to dovetail with small-group discussion time and the video teaching sessions. You can use the workbook by itself, but you are likely to find yourself with some unresolved questions. The video teaching sessions are intended to resolve most, if not all, of your unanswered questions from the homework and discussion time. **You'll find detailed information for how to access the video teaching sessions that accompany this study on the card inserted in the back of your workbook.** With this in mind, consider using the materials as follows:

- If you are going through the study **on your own**, first work through the homework, and then watch the corresponding video teaching for that week.
- If you are going through the study **in a group**, first do your homework, and then discuss the questions your group decides to cover. Then watch or listen to the video teaching. Some groups watch the teaching before they meet, which can also work if that format fits best for everyone.

Note: For Week One, there is no homework. The study begins with a video introduction. You will find a Viewer Guide on pages 14–15 that you can use as you watch the introductory material.



You'll find detailed information for how to access the video teaching sessions that accompany this study on the card inserted in the back of your workbook.

HOW TO USE THE LEADER GUIDE

At the end of each week's homework you will find a leader guide intended to help facilitate discussion in small groups. The leader guide includes questions to help group members compare what they have learned from their homework. These questions are either pulled directly from the homework, or they summarize a concept or theme that the homework covered. Each section covers content from a particular day of the homework, first asking group members to observe and then asking them to apply. The observation questions typically ask group members to report a finding or flesh out an interpretation. The application questions challenge them to move beyond intellectual understanding and to identify ways to live differently in light of what they have learned.

As a small group leader, you will want to review these questions before you meet with your group, thinking through your own answers, marking where they occur in the homework, and noting if there are any additional questions you might want to reference to help the flow of the discussion. These questions are suggestions only, intended to help you cover as much ground as you can in a 45-minute discussion time. They should not be seen as requirements or limitations, but as guidelines to help you prepare your group for the teaching time by allowing them to process collectively what they have learned during their homework.

As a facilitator of discussion rather than a teacher, you are allowed and encouraged to be a colearner with your group members. This means you yourself may not always feel confident of your answer to a given question, and that is perfectly OK. Because we are studying for the long-term, we are allowed to leave some questions partially answered or unresolved, trusting for clarity at a later time. In most cases, the video teaching time should address any lingering questions that are not resolved in the homework or the small-group discussion time.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Once again, I am deeply grateful to Jenni Hamm for her editorial help on this study. Her insights, attention to detail, and love for the Lord and His Word have been indispensable to me. "Let her works praise her in the gates" (Prov. 31:31).

NOTES

WEEK ONE | VIEWER GUIDE NOTES

Introduction | A Call to Worship

Who wrote the Book of Exodus?

When was it written?

To whom was it written?



To access the video teaching sessions, use the instructions in the back of your workbook.

In what style was it written?

What is the central theme of the book?

WEEK TWO:

The Covenant Declared

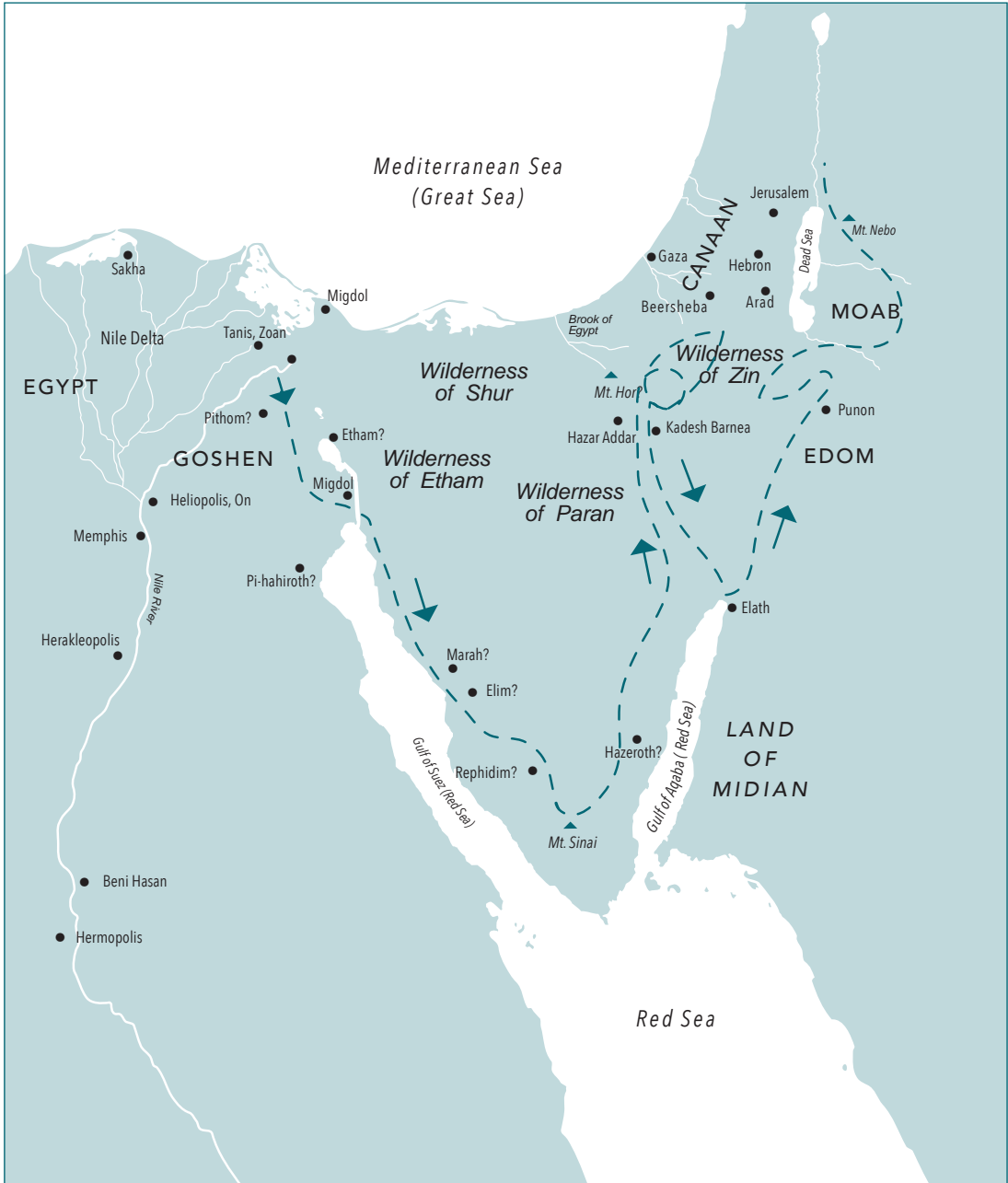
Exodus 19–20:21

Throughout the plagues on Egypt, God made clear His intent for His people to be set free so that they might worship Him. At last, having arrived at Mount Sinai, the time has come for the newly-birthed nation of Israel to learn how her God is to be approached in worship.

DAY ONE

READ EXODUS 19–20:21.

1. Summarize chapter 19 in two to three sentences.
2. Summarize chapter 20:1-21 in two to three sentences.
3. The map on the opposite page shows a commonly proposed map of the exodus route. Mark the following:
 - Circle Mount Sinai.
 - Highlight the path the Israelites have taken thus far in their journey out of Egypt (from Goshen to Mount Sinai).
 - Circle the location of Canaan (the promised land) in the upper right-hand corner of the map between the Great Sea and the Dead Sea.



NOW LOOK BACK AT EXODUS 19:1-9.

4. Forty-five days have passed since Passover and the exodus. Look back at Exodus 3:12. What promise did God make to Moses that is now about to be fulfilled?

5. In 19:3-6, God tells Moses what to say to the people of Israel regarding the covenant He will make with them, which will become known as the Mosaic Covenant.
 - What is to be Israel's motivation for committing to the covenant (v. 4)?

 - What are the requirements of the covenant (v. 5a)?

 - What are the privileges of the covenant (vv. 5b-6)?

6. Why does God promise Israel will be a "treasured possession" versus a possessor of treasures (v. 5)? What is the difference?

7. Why does God promise Israel will be a "kingdom of priests" versus a family of priests or a community of priests (v. 6)? What is the difference?

8. Why does God promise Israel will be a "holy nation" versus a great nation (v. 6)? What is the difference?

9. Look up 1 Peter 2:9-10. Peter addresses both Jews and non-Jews in these verses. Why does he use the description he does? What does he want these New Testament believers to understand about their relationship to God and His promises to Israel?

10. How do the Israelites respond when Moses tells them the words the Lord gave him to speak (Ex. 19:7-8)?

11. **APPLY:** When entering into a solemn agreement, why do we say “I do” or “I will” rather than “I’ll try my hardest” or “I’ll give it my best shot”?

Have you ever hesitated to give your full verbal commitment to a key relationship because the requirements seemed too difficult? Is it sinful to commit verbally to a covenant we have no chance of fulfilling perfectly? Why or why not?

DAY TWO

NOW LOOK AT EXODUS 19:10-15.

12. What is Moses told to do in verse 10?

“Go to the people and _____ them today and tomorrow” (ESV).

Look up the word you wrote above in a dictionary or thesaurus. Write a definition for it that best fits the context of the verse.

13. What instructions are given to the people to prepare them for their encounter with God? Note Moses’ instructions with regard to:

Clothing (vv. 10,14)

Where they can and can’t go (vv. 12-13)

What activities they are to avoid (v. 15)

14. Why would God give such specific instructions for how He is to be approached? How would wearing clean clothes, refraining from sexual activity, and keeping a safe distance impact the way the Israelites perceive their encounter with God?

15. **APPLY:** Does God no longer care about how we approach Him because of the blood of Christ? Explain your answer.

How are we sometimes guilty of approaching worship in a casual manner?

DAY THREE

NOW LOOK AT EXODUS 19:16-25.

16. Describe in your own words the scene on the morning of the third day at Mount Sinai. Which of the five senses would have been impacted by the circumstances described?

17. How do the people respond to God's physical appearance before them (vv. 16-18)?

18. What do you think God intends to communicate to the people through this display of His power? Why not choose a softer approach?

19. **APPLY:** Think of a time when God's power was displayed for you in a way that made you tremble. Write about it below. Why is standing in awe of and trembling before God's power good for His children?

DAY FOUR

NOW LOOK AT EXODUS 20:1-17.

We will spend the next two weeks looking at the Ten Commandments in closer detail. This week we will look at them from the standpoint of their role within the Mosaic Covenant.

The Mosaic Covenant follows the standard pattern of sovereign-vassal treaties (or suzerain-vassal treaties) common in the ancient Near East. A suzerain-vassal treaty was a formal agreement entered into by a lord and his servant. These covenants followed the following pattern:

1. Introduction of the sovereign by his royal title(s);
 2. Historical prologue, outlining the history of the relationship between the two parties;
 3. General requirements of the agreement;
 4. Specific requirements of the agreement.
20. In the left-hand margin next to each of the treaty elements above, note which verse(s) in Exodus 20:1-17 represent each of the first three elements. The fourth element (specific requirements) is detailed in 20:23–23:33 and will be covered in Week Five of our study.

21. As you read through each of the Ten Commandments, note in the chart provided what they tell you about the character of God. What does He value? What does He hate?

	COMMANDMENT	CHARACTER TRAIT OF GOD	WHAT GOD VALUES	WHAT GOD HATES
1	Have no other gods before Him.			
2	Don't make carved images.			
3	Don't take the Lord's name in vain.			
4	Keep the Sabbath holy.			
5	Honor your father and mother.			
6	Don't murder.			
7	Don't commit adultery.			
8	Don't steal.			
9	Don't bear false witness.			
10	Don't covet.			

22. What relationship is protected in commandments 1-4?
23. What relationship is protected in commandments 5-10?
24. Look up Matthew 22:34-40. When asked which command was the most important, does Jesus respond with any of the Ten Commandments? Explain your answer.
25. **APPLY:** Our relationships with others are always tied to our relationship with God. Think of a person you currently find hard to love. How is your unwillingness or inability to love that person an indicator of a deficit in your love for God?

DAY FIVE

NOW LOOK AT EXODUS 20:18-21.

26. What do the people fear will happen to them if Moses does not act as their intermediary (v. 19)? Is their fear justified? Why or why not?
27. How would you paraphrase Moses' words in verse 20? What does he want the people to understand about fear?
28. We think of fear as an undesirable thing. Look up the following verses and note what desirable things accompany a fear of the Lord:
- Psalm 25:14
- Psalm 86:11
- Psalm 111:10
- Proverbs 3:7
- Proverbs 8:13
- Ecclesiastes 12:13
29. **APPLY:** Christians live in the tension between trembling at God's power and drawing near to Him as our Abba Father. What potential danger is there in over-emphasizing one of these truths at the expense of the other?

Is your own approach to God unbalanced by either being overly fearful or overly familiar? How can you return to a more balanced view of God?

WRAP-UP

What aspect of God's character has this week's passage of Exodus shown you more clearly? *(Note: Each week we will end our homework by focusing on what the text has revealed about God. A list of God's attributes can be found in the back of your workbook on pages 168–169 to help you think through your answer to the wrap-up questions.)*

Fill in the following statement:

Knowing that God is [REDACTED] shows me that I am [REDACTED].

What one step can you take this week to better live in light of this truth?

NOTES

WEEK TWO | GROUP DISCUSSION

1. OBSERVE: (question 9, p. 21) Look up 1 Peter 2:9-10. Peter addresses both Jews and non-Jews in these verses. Why does he use the description he does? What does he want these New Testament believers to understand about their relationship to God and His promises to Israel?

APPLY: (question 11, p. 21) When entering into a solemn agreement, why do we say “I do” or “I will” rather than “I’ll try my hardest” or “I’ll give it my best shot”?

Have you ever hesitated to give your full verbal commitment to a key relationship because the requirements seemed too difficult? Is it sinful to commit verbally to a covenant we have no chance of fulfilling perfectly? Why or why not?

2. OBSERVE: (question 14, p. 22) Why would God give such specific instructions for how He is to be approached? How would wearing clean clothes, refraining from sexual activity, and keeping a safe distance impact the way the Israelites perceive their encounter with God?

APPLY: (question 15, p. 22) Does God no longer care about how we approach Him because of the blood of Christ? Explain your answer.

How are we sometimes guilty of approaching worship in a casual manner?

3. OBSERVE: (question 17, p. 23) How do the people respond to God’s physical appearance before them (Ex. 19:16-18)?

APPLY: (question 19, p. 23) Think of a time when God’s power was displayed for you in a way that made you tremble. Why is standing in awe of and trembling before God’s power good for His children?

4. OBSERVE: (question 24, p. 26) Look up Matthew 22:34-40. When asked which command was the most important, does Jesus respond with any of the Ten Commandments? Explain your answer.

APPLY: (question 25, p. 26) Our relationships with others are always tied to our relationship with God. Think of a person you currently find hard to love. How is your unwillingness or inability to love that person an indicator of a deficit in your love for God?

5. OBSERVE: (question 26, p. 27) What do the people fear will happen to them if Moses does not act as their intermediary (Ex. 20:19)? Is their fear justified? Why or why not?

APPLY: (question 29, p. 27) Christians live in the tension between trembling at God's power and drawing near to Him as our Abba Father. What potential danger is there in over-emphasizing one of these truths at the expense of the other?

Is your own approach to God unbalanced by either being overly fearful or overly familiar? How can you return to a more balanced view of God?

6. WRAP-UP: (p. 28) What aspect of God's character has this week's passage of Exodus shown you more clearly?

Fill in the following statement:

Knowing that God is shows me that I am .

What one step can you take this week to better live in light of this truth?

WEEK TWO | VIEWER GUIDE NOTES



