

Leader's Guide

The House of Worship

By ascribing to God his attributes, we draw near to the place where he is.



Scripture: Exodus 20:18–21; 2 Samuel 6:12–15; Psalm 29:1–2

Based on: "Four Best Places to Live" sermon series,
by Mark Buchanan, PreachingToday.com

Needed for this lesson: A large assortment of magazines
that include a lot of photos, a whiteboard or poster board
and marker, pen and paper for everyone.



Get Started

As people arrive, direct them to a large stack of magazines that include a lot of pictures. Ask them to find a photo of the kind of place they would like to live. It can be a house, a piece of land, or a picture of a town or city. When everyone has found a picture, ask the group to be seated and give them each an opportunity to share the photo and explain why they chose it.

When everyone has finished, read:

Where is the best place to live? Every year, the UN asks this question about countries, and every year they release their recommendations in the Human Development Report. Canada topped the list for the first three years of the new millennium and then slipped to third last year, nudged out by Norway and Australia. The UN uses only three basic criteria to determine the world's most hospitable and inhabitable countries: life expectancy, educational level, and annual income. Countries whose inhabitants live the longest, know the most, and earn the most, win. Underneath the simplicity of those measuring sticks is a complex evaluative grid that touches on issues of politics, economics, cultural institutions, and the like.

So where are the best places to live according to the Bible? What are God's criteria for determining that? The criteria might be: Where do we become most alive, most fully ourselves? Where do we find the greatest joy, peace, and wisdom? Where do we experience the deepest sense of belonging? Where is it safe and yet abounding with adventure? Where do true riches reside?

For example, take just one of the UN's three criteria for determining Best Place: longevity, or life expectancy. According to the UN, this benchmark is determined by quality of and access to health care, a societal stress index, ecological and dietary factors, and so on. Basically, rich people surrounded by doctors, gyms, and ample leisure fare best. But consider what the Bible says in Psalm 92:12–15.

The Bible says righteousness is the best prescription for a long life. Indeed, consider the country of Kenya. Kenya does not rate high on the UN scale, but there are at least two pastors well past 100 years of age who are still active in ministry. One says his secret is: "I eat well. I walk every day. And I always obey my God."

What are the Bible's four best places to live? One of them is the House of Worship.



Dig into Scripture

1) Worship requires our whole being. Read Exodus 20:18–21.

God, as validation of his law, orchestrates a demonstration of fearsome power from atop Mount Sinai.

There's a scene in the movie *Ocean's 11* where a large hotel in Las Vegas is imploded—the massive structure brought down, in a plume of smoke and dust, through an intricate, precisely-timed series of detonations, so that it caves in like a spiral of dominoes. Two men are in a hotel across from the demolition site. One stands at the window and watches the event live. The other sits on the couch and watches it on television. The man watching out the window asks the one watching on television why he'd choose to behold this spectacle second-hand, scaled down to the size of a toy, when he could take a few steps and see the thing in all its colossal power and raw immediacy. “This is easier,” the man responds.

That's always the attitude of idolatry—why we would choose God scaled-down, God second-hand, over a real encounter. It's easier. It demands less of us. It calls for no engagement on our part. It requires nothing of us—not emotion, not intellect, not action. That seems to be the attitude of the Israelites toward God in this passage in Exodus. They would rather meet God scaled-down and second-hand. They'd rather reduce any encounter with the Almighty to rumor, to an edited sound bite delivered in a speech by someone who was there, than behold for themselves the terror and the wonder of meeting the living God. It's easier, yes. It's just not best.

Who would want to live in that place of listless blandness, where you depend on someone else to tell you what God is saying and what he is like? Do you really want to have that when you could take a few steps and see God as he is? Annie Dillard ends her book *For the Time Being* with the story of a British explorer named James Taylor who, in the 1930s, carved a runway in the mountain highlands of Papua New Guinea and, to the utter astonishment of the tribes people there—who until then had no contact with the outside world—flew his little two-seater plane in and landed. When he prepared to leave, an old man from the tribe came forward and fixed himself with vines to the fuselage of the aircraft. He explained to his frightened and bewildered family that, no matter what happened to him, he had to find out where this thing came from. What courage—a man who, no matter what happened to him, had to make the journey.

[Q] If you had to describe God to someone who had never heard of him, what would you say?

