

Exodus 5 & 6

How To Face Tough Times

Life can be tough. A woman sent this in to her local newspaper: When you think you have a bad day, remember this ...I was taking a shower when my 2-year-old son came into the bathroom and wrapped himself in toilet paper. Although he made a mess, he looked adorable, so I ran for my camera and took a few shots. They came out so well that I had copies made and included one with each of our Christmas cards. Days later, a relative called about the picture, laughing hysterically and suggesting I take a closer look. Puzzled, I stared at the photo and was shocked to discover that in addition to my son, I had captured my reflection in the mirror ---wearing nothing but a camera!

That's a bad day. But sometimes life is a whole lot tougher than that. Sometimes our troubles are no laughing matter at all. Whether it's our marriage, our kids, our job (or lack of one), our finances, our health, our aging parents, or our overdue mortgage payment, life has it's share of tough times.

How do we face those tough times? What's going to not only get us by, but what's going to allow us to grow through our problems?

We're in a study of the life of the man, Moses from the OT book of Exodus. So far we've seen the hand of God at work. Remember it's a whole lot easier for us to see God's hand because we're getting a bird's eye view of events that took place over centuries.

Moses and the Hebrew people had to live it out over their life times. We get the condensed version.

God called a man Abraham out of a polytheistic, pagan culture to be a worshiper of the true and living God. God made promises to Abraham that involved his descendants who would be the Jewish people.

By the time we come to Moses over 400 years have past and Abraham's descendants have grown to be the Hebrew nation. They're enslaved by the Egyptians and Moses is chosen by God to be their deliverer.

Unfortunately Moses tries to do things his way instead of God's way and ends up murdering an Egyptian and having to flee for his life.

We want to pick up today in **Exodus chapter 5, pg 53**

Moses has lived in Midian as a sheep herder for 40 years. When the time was right God appears to him in the burning bush and sends him back to Egypt.

This time Moses is committed to doing things God's way instead of his own way. Moses is going to do things God's way but the result isn't going to at all be what we would expect. It certainly wasn't what Moses expected.

I'd like us to focus in on three points that can help us when we have to face tough times.

I. Some Times We're Doing Everything Right But Everything Seems to Turn Out Wrong

We won't read every verse of chapters 5 & 6 this morning, but I want us to get the sense of what takes place.

To set the stage, back up to the end of Chapter 4. **Read 4 29-31**

God had spelled out some specific instructions for Moses. He had told him to take his brother Aaron and to go to Egypt and speak to the Elders of Israel. He was to tell them that God had sent him to lead the Hebrews out of slavery. God had said, "they'll listen to you," and they did.

They not only listened but they worshipped God. This was looking good for Moses. God was going before him to prepare the way.

But now look at how quickly things can change. **Read 5:1-2**

So far this is going just like God said it would. The people will listen but Pharaoh will refuse.

Read 5:3-8

Straw was used in making bricks as a binder and to make them more durable. Up until this point the Egyptians had cleaned the stubble out of the fields after harvest and drop off the straw at the place where the Hebrew slaves made bricks. Now the Pharaoh, who we believe to be Amenhotep II, commands the Jews to not only keep up with their brick-making quota, but to get their own straw.

What happened? Every nation had its own gods. Yaweh wasn't the God of Egypt. The gods of Egypt were the powers and forces within nature, like the sun and moon. Pharaoh didn't recognize the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, as the God that he owed any obedience and honor to.

In fact, to Pharaoh, the fact that the Egyptians ruled the Jews meant that the Egyptian gods were bigger and badder than the Hebrew God. The last thing Pharaoh was going to do was give the Jews a three day religious holiday.

You can just see Pharaoh sneering *"Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go."*

Now remember, God had prepared Moses for this much: *the king of Egypt will not let you go...*

What God didn't prepare Moses for was what happened as a result. He went in there to help and he just made everything worse. The Hebrews were slaves but they were surviving. Now with the bricks and staw thing, their suffering just intensified 10 fold.

See what happened. Moses came back and rallied the troops. The people were excited. They were worshipping God. This was it. Finally, after 400 years of slavery God had heard their prayers.

The, instead of being set free their slavery became even worse.

Some Times We're Doing Everything Right But Everything Seems to Turn Out Wrong

What do we do then?

We Often React Instead of Act When Things Don't Go As We Planned

Read 15-21

When the Hebrew people figure out what's going on they're angry and hurt. Life was bad but now it's intolerable.

They say in verse 21, *"you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh..."* Literally the Hebrew says, *"you have made our odor to stink..."*

When Moses and Aaron returned, the people embraced their message of deliverance. They believed God was concerned about them, and they worshiped. Life was good.

Then, immediately after believing and worshiping God, life gets worse - a lot worse. This is worse than unfair; this is absurd. God announces his plans to deliver them, and life gets worse.

Now, from our perspective, this is a cosmic contradiction. Pain speaks louder than the word of God, and a lot of times it's the pain that gets our attention.

What do we do, then? We get angry. What do we do with our anger? The same thing that people have been doing from the beginning: look for someone to blame. Israelites think. First they blame Pharaoh; then they blame Moses and Aaron.

We don't have to look very hard for someone to blame: "My parents didn't love me. This man abused me. This teacher didn't choose me. This man abandoned me. This woman never wanted me. This church didn't encourage me. This employer didn't hire me. This friend didn't appreciate me. This person betrayed me. That one lied about me. The other one misunderstood me."

Listen, pain is real. No one's trying to deny that. But there are two other players that the Israelites overlooked: God and themselves. The same is true for us. We forget about God, who wants to free us, and we forget about ourselves, who need freedom but don't necessarily want it.

Scott Grant writes: *There is only one way to be free from this fantasy world: to be miserable in it. In order to be delivered from sin, we have to want to be delivered from it. No one wants to be delivered from what he or she perceives to be a comfortable place. It is only when it becomes uncomfortable that one wants to leave.*

But, now look at this: **Read 5:22-23**

When everything seems to be working out I hear people say, "This must be God's will." When tough times come all of a sudden people say, "I guess God is closing the door on that one."

Never judge life strictly by circumstances. In the NT, one of the most godly leaders in Christianity, the Apostle Paul said this:

But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. In the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus...

He's in an unbelievably pagan environment in a city in Asia Minor called Ephesus. God's opened up an opportunity to start a church there. But there's all kinds of trouble in town.

He doesn't say, "Whoops, this is too tough, I'm out of here." He says I'm hanging around here because it's what God called me to do."

Moses isn't there yet spiritually. Moses is angry and confused. Last time he tried to deliver the Hebrews he had to run for his life. Everything fell apart. This time everybody's mad at him.

They're like, "Thanks Moses. You're a big help. Every time you show up things get worse.

Why are we surprised when stuff like that happens? God says, "Provide things honest in the sight of all men..." So we are honest and someone cheats us. Someone else is dishonest and they make a bundle of money.

We are gracious and truthful and we don't get the contract, someone else lies and they get the job.

We work to pay off our debts and struggle, our ex spouse is constantly pulling something but always has the new car and lives in luxury.

We forgive someone who deeply hurts us and they go back and do it all over again.

There's always going to be "many adversaries." We're always going to face tough times.

There's always a spiritual battle going on. Why shouldn't we expect the difficulties if we're in a war?

This is why the disciples of Jesus had such a tough time. It looked like the more Jesus did that was good the more people wanted to kill Him.

In John 12 it says: *Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.*

Jesus raises a guy from the dead and the enemies of Jesus want to kill him too since he's the reason so many more people are becoming followers of Jesus!

You'd think they would have said, "Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. That proves Jesus is the Son of God, let's all believe in Him."

But it all went from bad to worse and soon Jesus is in the hands of his enemies carrying His cross to His execution.

The disciples fell apart but Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen. Jesus had complete trust in His heavenly father's plan.

This was the way forgiveness would come to the world. In fact it was the only way God's forgiveness could come.

The Bible says, *For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.*

A perfect God says, "All have sinned and come short of my glory." The perfection of God is the standard, and we've all, fallen far short. He goes on to say, *The wages of sin is death.*"

We sin by nature and by choice. God judged that sin and pronounced us worthy of death. Then God in His grace sent His Son, Jesus Christ to die that death in our place.

The cross wasn't a mistake. It was the only way for God to maintain His holy standard and yet be free to show us grace.

Now God says to us, *Come unto me and drink of the water of life freely. He that believes on me has everlasting life.*

The disciples were confused. Moses was confused. We get confused.

Here's the key. Trust God. Believe me, He knows what He's doing.

- I. Some Times We're Doing Everything Right But Everything Turns Out Wrong*
- II. Often Times We Are Surprised At The Results*
- III. What We Must Realize Is, God's Got A Plan*

Just because there's problems doesn't automatically mean that we are not in God's will. God doesn't have to work according to our plans or our timetable. When problems pack your life be careful which way you run. God's plans and purposes haven't changed.

Read 6:1-8

God had a plan all along. It was going to happen in God's time. Actually there's going to be a whole lot more drama to come before God's finished. But it was going to happen because God is a God of His word. He keeps His covenants.

Covenants are an extremely significant part of God's strategy. A covenant is very different from a contract. The Bible calls marriage a covenant.

The difference between a contract and a covenant is like the difference between night and day.

A contract says "if you fulfill your obligations, I'll fulfill mine." A covenant says, "I promise to fulfill my obligations, period." It's not "You do yours, and then I'll do mine."

God made a covenant with the Hebrew people through Abraham. That covenant said repeatedly, "I will." God said, "I will make you a great nation. I will bring you into a land flowing with milk and honey. I will bless the world through you."

Israel had the promises. Moses had the promises. Seven times in three verses here God says, "I will."

Jim Davis writes: God seeks to focus the Hebrews on his covenant promises to Abraham. Too often, we overlook God's covenant with us because we try to make our own covenants with God. We say, "Lord, remove my disappointments and I will believe in you." We say, "Lord give me a healthy baby and I will serve you for the rest of my life." "Lord let me get well and I will serve you." "Lord, make me successful and I will serve you." "Lord, let me win the lottery and I will give half of it to the church."

Restricting God to the limits of our wisdom limits our possibilities. We think it would be more comforting to us because it would put us in control of the situation. Only God knows how to work through the impossibilities we face. God is the one who sets the conditions of the covenant promises.

But now look at the response of the people. **Read vs 6:9**

They were slaves and never knew deliverance. They were in bondage and never knew freedom. They were beaten and killed and never knew help. They were hopeless and never knew hope. Their view of God was limited to what they experienced, not God's Word.

They had both an internal problem and an external problem. They couldn't hear the message of freedom, because of what was wrong on the inside .. anguish of spirit... and what was wrong on the outside... harsh bondage.

People can genuinely feel victimized by all kinds of circumstances: Racism, poverty, lack of education, limited opportunity, sinful families, disabilities, even oppressive religion.

Sometimes it's real hard to see your way out. Especially if you loose hope.

And this is where Moses almost looses his way too. Listen to Moses, about to join this pity party: **Read 6:10-12**

Moses says, "Lord, I can't even get your own people excited about being free. How am I supposed to speak to Pharaoh?"

Talk about tough times. Moses is under orders from God to free the people and they're telling him to get out of town. They're saying, "Leave us alone. Things were bad enough before you showed up. Now they're even worse."

Here's the clincher. God never had to let them go through this in the first place, right? God could have prevented the whole slavery thing. God could have just whisked them into the promised land without any of this.

Isn't that the part that we have the most trouble with?

God didn't have to let me face any pain in life. He could have prevented it all. He could have but He didn't.

That's really the message of the whole Bible. God had a plan. God works out His plan His way. Most of the time people are confused about why things go the way they do.

I can't tell you the number of times I've had people ask me "Why?" Why did God create the world if He knew there would be suffering and pain? Why didn't God stop that accident from happening?

Why didn't God keep my spouse alive. Why did God allow my parents to get a divorce?

And you know what? My answer is the same every time. I don't know the answer to every specific "why" question. But I know this. God created the world knowing that there would be suffering and that He would experience that suffering Himself.

To redeem us meant that God would suffer more than any human being has ever suffered. More than all of us in this room together put together.

At the cross God took the wrath and ugliness of the sins of the world upon Himself. We can't even begin to imagine what that involved. We don't begin to understand the sufferings Jesus was going through when He cried out "My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me." When "He who knew no sin was made sin for us."

I don't need have to know the answer to every "why" question. I just need to know this. *"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"*

Moses and the Children of Israel were going to have to come to the point where they said, "OK, God. We'll do what we're supposed to do and we'll trust you through it."

And you know what? Unbeknownst to Moses or any of these Hebrews, across the Red Sea, in the land of Canaan was a fortified city called Jericho. And living in that city of Jericho was a prostitute named Rahab who was going about her trade. But deep in Rahab's heart was a longing for something. She worshipped her Canaanite gods and goddesses but she ached for something more. She knew something was missing in her life.

Soon after this she would hear something totally amazing. She would hear how Yahweh, God of the Hebrews brought His people out of Egypt and in the process would destroy Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea.

She would have no Bible to read. She wouldn't have heard any of God's prophets. But because she heard of Pharaoh's obstinance and God's mighty power she would reject her entire polytheistic upbringing and become a believer in the living God.

And God would not only use her to help the Hebrews, she would become part of the Messianic line itself. She would end up an ancestor of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why did Moses and the people have to go through all the tough times? I don't believe this side of eternity we'll know the half of it. The sovereign Lord God we worship ultimately does all things for His own glory. From creating us to the cross of Christ, it's all about God.

Moses thought it was all about Him so he whined to God that God's plan wasn't going to work. The Hebrew people thought it was all about them, so they told Moses to leave.

The truth was it was all about God so God just pursued His plan to the end.

We have an interesting English word that etymologically is derived from Moses name. It's the word mosaic.

Mosaic means "a picture or decorative design made by setting small colored pieces into a surface."

In other words, you have a bunch of little pieces that don't look like anything by themselves, that make a pattern when you put them together the right way.

Doesn't that describe life? It describes Moses' life. We put all the pieces together by reading the covenant, Moses birth, his life in Egypt, his 40 years in the desert, his time back in Egypt, leading the people out of Egypt, and leading the people through the wilderness.

We see how all the pieces fit to make the picture. Moses couldn't do that. He had to take it by faith.

Did you know God's working the mosaic of your life? All those little pieces that don't make sense to us would make a lot of sense if we could see the finished picture.

If we could stand back from our lives. And then even further from the generations before and after us. Then even further to eternity the picture would be in perfect focus.

But all we can see is the here and now.

Ellie Wiesel in his book "Night," which recounts his personal experience with the Holocaust, tells of a neighbor in a concentration camp who examined the painful evidence and decided that God was not to be believed.

The man said, "Don't let yourself be fooled with illusions. Hitler has made it very clear that he will annihilate all the Jews before the clock strikes 12, before they can hear the last stroke. ... I've got more faith in Hitler than in anyone else. He's the only one who's kept his promises, all his promises, to the Jewish people."

I don't profess to understand the horror that the Jews went through under Hitler. I would never be so presumptuous as to try to criticize a holocaust survivor.

But I know this: that man couldn't see past his piece of the mosaic. For him his life was like a little shard of broken glass.

He was overwhelmed with the horror he was faced with. And he lost sight of God.

For a while Moses lost sight of God. The Hebrews lost sight of God. But God never lost sight of them.

God hasn't lost sight of you either. Your name was on His heart at the cross. your name is on His heart today as He works the pattern of your life.

How do you face tough times? Realize that God has faced tougher times. In fact, it's like He took a compilation of the tough times of everyone at once, and *reconciled all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.*