



Taking Difficult Steps of Faith for God

Chapter 5

Bro. Chris Lawrence

We are continuing in our series of Exodus. We pick up with Exodus chapter 5. Let's read verses 22-23.

Scripture

"Then Moses turned to the LORD and said, 'O Lord, why have You done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people, and You have not delivered your people at all.'"

In this text, basically everything is going downhill in flames. It is just bad. As I meditated on this text, I asked myself how I have handled difficult times in my life. I think that is where we are in this text. Moses has taken steps of faith that has put him with difficult people and he finds himself in a difficult spot. A fitting quote that fits with this sermon comes from a book called The Insanity of God, by Nick Ripken. He was a missionary from Kentucky. In the 1990's, he was in Somalia when the war was going on over there. It was a horrific time period, and he was one of the very few missionaries over there. He fed and served thousands of people, and

prayed for people to come to Christ. Finally, there were a few people who came to know the Lord, and soon after were killed because of their faith in Christ. A little later on, his sixteen-year-old son died over there from health issues. This man has taken all these steps of faith for the glory of God, and he dealt with difficult people for the glory of God. He found himself in a difficult spot for the glory of God and he wrestled with it. Here is a quote from him halfway throughout the book: "I finally understand how Jesus' disciples must have felt on that dark, despairing Saturday between the cross and the empty tomb. Even in my own dark time, I did not doubt the depths of Jesus' love and His willingness to die for me on the cross. And even in my dark time, I did not doubt Jesus' resurrection. But here was my struggle; I could not see the relevance of the power of Jesus' resurrection in Somalia land. I couldn't point to any evidence of good overcoming evil. I couldn't see where love was overcoming hate."

I think in moments where we are struggling, whatever the issue might be, we can feel that, can't we? The evil, the hate, and the sin of the world asking, where is the good, where is the hope? That is what we are going to try to deal with. When we are in those situations, how do we handle those situations and how is God using those situations?

Moses' Steps of Faith

In chapter 5, we see Moses in Egypt. Let's review for a few minutes. When we look at Moses, he sort of gets a bad rap because he doesn't know if he can do the job. But in reality, this man took amazing steps of faith just to get where he was at that point. Let's think through this...

1. He is old.

First, he is taking a major step of faith to leave the wilderness to go to Egypt as an old man. He is in his eighties!

2. He is moving his family to the city of Egypt.

Secondly, he is moving. He is going from the wilderness to Egypt, going from the country to the city. My wife and I moved from the big town of Alto, KY to Murray, KY this past year. It is just a couple of miles down the road. We prayed, we sought the Lord, and we were just moving two miles!

It was literally in the same town, but it was a big deal. Moses is taking his entire family from the wilderness to Egypt; that is a big step of faith.

3. He had a bad reputation in Egypt.

Moses had been to Egypt before, and he does not have a good reputation there. When I walk into a place and I know there are a few people who did not like me, I immediately feel uncomfortable. It is not a good feeling, especially when I have done something to deserve it. It is not pleasant. You are probably dreading walking into the building. Moses is going back to a place where the people he is supposed to lead, the Israelites, don't like him. In exodus chapter 2, some Israelites ask him right before he was getting ready to take off, "who made you prince? Who made you judge? You killed somebody." Because Moses was a murderer, Pharaoh was looking to kill Moses!

4. Israelites did not want his leadership.

Another step of faith is that the people that Moses has to come into contact with do not like him and do not want his leadership.

5. Pharaoh wanted him dead.

He has to take another step of faith by talking to Pharaoh, who is the most powerful person in the country, and as far as he knows, he might just want to kill him on the spot.

6. He would be rejected by Pharaoh.

Oh, and to make things a little more complicated, another step of faith is that in the previous chapter, God told Moses that when he goes to see Pharaoh he will reject him. And the reason he will reject him is because God is going to harden his heart! I don't know what it is like for you, but I don't like rejection. I still get nervous thinking about asking my wife out on our first date. It is just a fear of rejection. Moses knows he is literally going into a place where he is going to get rejected by the most powerful person in the country.

Difficult Steps

Let's review. Moses is old. He is moving his family to a place where people do not like him. He has to go to a king who does not like him, and he gets rejected. If you are Moses, how excited are you to take these steps of faith? If I were Moses, I would be having some insecurities, some doubt, some struggles, and fear knowing I will be rejected and it will be very, very difficult. The reality is that it is! By the end of the story, Pharaoh is looking to kill him, and the people were out of control. It was very, very difficult. But I think there is something to be said here; God calls us to take difficult steps of faith that will be difficult. They will be hard.

My dad started a business a little over 34 years ago, and still doing it today. He had this great job, but he quit to start the business. The very first week he put an ad in the newspaper that said, "We are amazed by the amount of business that we have received." What he didn't tell in the ad was the reason he was amazed was because he received absolutely no business at all! In that moment, he had taken that step and realized how hard the step was and is.

There is something else to be said here as well. We can be living in obedience to the Lord, taking great steps of faith, but the blessings might not come when we are taking those steps. So many times we hear these testimonies of people taking these steps and the blessings come. A person takes a step of faith for their spouse, now their marriage is healed. A person takes a step of faith for their children, now their children are angels. A person takes a step of faith at work, now their income has doubled or quadrupled, and everything is just going great. Yet at times, when you hear those stories we think they are great and we want more of those stories. But there are times we get into situations, maybe when a friend gets married, and we wonder when it will be our time. We have a friend whose marriage is doing great and we are struggling. We have a friend who is getting a pay raise, and we are getting our income cut. In those moments, those times in our hearts, we ask God what we did wrong. What is wrong with me? Why am I in this situation? What have they done that I haven't done? I haven't received a blessing yet, what is going on here? This is so hard; this does not make sense! Where is the sin, what do

I need to repent of? I would make this statement; in those moments, God might have you exactly where He wants you. I would say this as well; God is right there with you.

Difficult People

As we think through this, I think what also makes this difficult is that when we take difficult steps of faith we have to deal with difficult people. That makes it so hard. I would argue that God gives us difficult people. He puts difficult people in our lives.

- **Pharaoh**

Take a look at Moses in the very beginning of exodus chapter 5, *"Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go." Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword." But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get back to your burdens."*

Paraphrasing the king, he is saying a few things:

1. I don't know who your God is.
2. I don't care who your God is.
3. I don't care about your people.

He is saying, "All I care about is my kingdom. You are messing up my kingdom trying to deal with these people. And because of that, I am going to put burdens on your people, burdens that they cannot meet. When they cannot meet them, I am literally going to beat them to the point of almost death because of what you have done today. By the way Moses, get out of here, go back to your work, go back to being a slave." That is who Moses has to deal with. That is pleasant...

- **Israelites**

The other people he has to deal with are the Israelites. At the end of chapter 4, it looks good. When Moses comes up on the scene, the people are praising God. In chapter 4:31, it says, "And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped." That is how we left off last week. They are worshipping the Lord! Now Moses talks to Pharaoh, persecution is heating up for the people, and the leaders are beaten. Did the leaders call out to God for help? Did they go to Moses and ask for help? No, they are fickle. Instead of praising God, they go to the king who does not care about them, wants nothing to do with them, and wants to beat them. In Exodus 5:15-16, it says, "*Then the foremen of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, 'Why do you treat your servants like this? No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, 'Make bricks!' And behold, your servants are beaten; but the fault is in your own people.'*" So instead of going to God or Moses, they are going to the king, Pharaoh, who is beating them and they say we are your servants three times. They say we need your help. God's people, instead of going to God, are going to the false king saying, "We bow down, we are your servants." Just the chapter before they are bowing down to God. They are so fickle! And how do they handle Moses? After the conversation with Pharaoh, they say in verse 20, "*The LORD look on you and judge...*" Basically, they are telling Moses they want God to judge him for what he has done to them. So Moses has to lead. He has to lead a Pharaoh who has a hard heart, does not care about God, does not know God, and wants to persecute God's people. That is who he has to deal with. He also has to deal with a group of people who are fickle, who change their minds when things get hard, and they want Moses to be judged. How are you feeling if you are Moses?

- **Ourselves**

I believe God puts difficult people in our lives, and without God, we are difficult as well. This week I was out of town, and I had to stay at a hotel one night. I was in the lobby and saw that things were getting heated with the girl behind desk. She is yelling to someone who stayed in the hotel.

They go back and forth for twenty to thirty minutes. I mean, it is hot! There are people all around listening and feeling awkward and uncomfortable. Do you know what they were fighting about? The customer had left her phone charger in the hotel room, and they were fighting about who was going to pay the postage for the charger to be mailed back to her. Was the hotel going to or the person staying in the hotel going to do it? That is what they were fighting about for twenty or thirty minutes, about who was going to pay for postage!

We can be the same exact way in our marriages and in our relationships close to us. We can have people in our lives, and if truth be told, if we talk about some of the fights we have had with people close to us, we would probably be a bit embarrassed or shamed if we had to tell what we had fought over. Without Christ, we can be difficult. And when difficult people come into our lives, we can respond two ways; we can become more difficult ourselves, or we can repent. I look at all the people in my life, and the people I have learned the most from are the difficult people. I have seen the sin in my own heart more in those relationships with difficult people. When those relationships come up, we can rebel, or we can repent. I believe that God puts those people in our lives so that we will not be like Pharaoh, so that we will not be like the people of Israel, but so we will truly be like Jesus. It is easier said than done, I know. You can say, "Yeah, but you don't know who I'm married to. You don't know my kid. You don't know who I work with; every time I walk into work I clench my fist and want to hit them in the jaw!" Yes, you can have those thoughts and emotions. It can be so hard you don't know how you can get through another day at the house, or at work. But in those moments, when it is so hard, God is still there with you.

Difficult Spot

This lead to a third point. God calls us to take difficult steps of faith, which puts us with people who are difficult, and that puts us in a very difficult spot. That is exactly where Moses is. He knows the promises of God, just as we do. He had the burning bush experience. He knows God's plan. Yet at the end of chapter 5 in verse 22, he Moses asks two questions, "Then

Moses turned to the LORD and said, "*O Lord, why have You done evil to this people? Why did You ever send me?*"

I think when the heat of life comes at us we can ask those two questions. The marriage is difficult, "Lord, why are You allowing this to happen? Why did You put me in this situation?" The job isn't working out as planned, "Why are You allowing this to happen? Why did You put me in this situation?" You are having health issues, "Why are You allowing this to happen? Why did You put me in this situation? Why did You send me here? Why?" But I believe that when you are questioning and wrestling, God is still there.

Here Moses is in this situation. He is in this moment when he is questioning God's plan, when he is questioning himself, and when it looks like everything is hopeless and there is nothing to live for. Though we are only covering chapter 5, I just want us to see the first few words in chapter 6, "But the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see..." God has brought Moses to this spot where now, he will truly see who God is.

- **Leads to Understanding and Joy**

Here is the thing...when we are taking this difficult step of faith, dealing with these difficult people, and been put in a difficult spot, and here is where it gets good, when we turn to the Lord, in those moments we start seeing and understanding Jesus in a whole new way. We start seeing and understanding when we read in the gospels that Jesus came and said, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!" Basically, he is saying that all the earth, to the universe, to Satan and his powers, "Let My people go!" It is not an option here. His people are coming to Him. He is saying He understands what it is like to deal with difficult people. He understands, even though He is sinless. He understands what it is like to be an outcast. In John chapter 12, Jesus has just raised Lazarus from the dead, this amazing miracle. People are saying Blessed, Hosanna; they are calling Him the king, giving Him all the praise, glory, and honor! Six days later, they are saying crucify Him! Crucify Him! Dealing with those difficult people, taking difficult steps of faith, He hangs on the cross for all the difficult people, for you and for me. At that moment and time, Jesus says,

"Why have You forsaken Me?" But He is not questioning the Father. No, He is fulfilling the prophecy of Psalm chapter 2. When He has been completely abandoned, taken all these horrific steps to get to that point, the agony and the pain, He still trusts in the Father. The result of that is the resurrection. When we look towards that and understand what He did for us, understand that He is with us; the result is that we can endure. We can endure. When we really endure, we really understand who we are. We won't question who we are; we understand who we are.

So look at the Israelites. They are God's chosen people, but they are also slaves. I am reminded of 1st Peter where he calls the church "elect exiles." In one sense, that is what we are. We are exiles, we are different, we are aliens, we are strangers, and we are slaves to this world. In other words, we are outcasts. No one wants anything to do with us. They want to persecute us and put us in difficult spots. But at the same time, in Christ, we are elect, chosen, precious, holy, and honorable to God. Peter goes on to say that despite our situation, despite our trials, despite our difficulties, we have "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, reserved in Heaven for you, who through faith are protected by God's power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." That is what is coming our way! The goal is that we get our salvation, and our salvation is that we meet Jesus and be with Him for eternity. When we understand that, we can endure. We understand that no matter how hard life is being in exile; we are elect. And in those moments, when we turn to Jesus and realize He can give us the strength to endure the marriage, the children, or the job; when we trust in Him, we just want to worship Him with joy that is inexpressible. It leads into knowing who we are; we are children of God, and suddenly our hearts are forever changed.

In Nick Ripken book, he tells that he leaves Africa and goes on a world tour. He goes to all these different countries where people have been persecuted and put in jail for their faith. He starts to realize that in the midst of persecution and suffering, we can see God's glory in a new way. As crazy as it sounds, it will lead into joy. I want to read another quote towards the end of his book, "Before persecution, a person's faith might look a certain way. After persecution and suffering, however, that faith

might look very different. In fact after persecution, the believer might not even look like the same person, and interestingly, the change might be cause for celebration." It is celebration because we know who our God is and we have experienced His power in Him.

My question is where are you right now? I would venture to say that everyone has at least one difficult person we are struggling with, whether it is in our house, our work, or our community. Maybe your life is so hard and it is the most difficult time in your life. Whatever your situation might be, where are you? Are you like Pharaoh? You don't care about God or His people; all you care about is yourself. Are you like the Israelites? One minute you are crazy about God; the next minute you are going to the worldly leaders and forgetting about God. Are you like Moses, questioning and crying, calling out what in the world is going on right now? Or are you like Jesus, enduring, trusting in His Father? Where are you right now? Our goal is that as we endure, we remember who our God is and give Him glory. And though we are exiles, slaves, we are elect and we are chosen. My prayer is that we call out to Him, experience His glory and honor, and that it leads into worship. While we are here on earth, God will call us to take difficult steps of faith. God will put difficult people in our paths. God will put us in difficult spots. But at the same time, He will use it for His glory and honor that we might be more like Him and it will lead into more worship and inexpressible joy.