

Exodus 1: Fear Factor
Exodus: Out of Slavery
Week 1: February 8, 2015

Intro/welcome

Great week to joined us, we're kicking off a brand new series this week in the book of the Bible called Exodus, it's the second book of the Bible

There's a movie that just came out a couple months ago now loosely based on Exodus called gods and generals, didn't get great reviews

Hopefully this series of messages will get much better reviews than the movie did!

We're going to spend these next 6 or so weeks in the first half of Exodus because throughout the Bible,
this story and these events are the signature story of the formation of how God works among his people Israel

And what you find is that throughout the Bible, this Exodus story gets echoed over and over and over again—it gets cited and subtly re-enacted over and over again

Including and especially Jesus—we're going to be in Exodus leading up to Easter and as we get closer to Easter, we're going to see more and more how Jesus is re-enacting this Exodus story, living out this Exodus story and in many ways how he's the perfect fulfillment of this Exodus story

Exodus is like one of those keys that starts to unlock big chunks of the Bible and small little resonances that helps to make the whole thing make sense

And this story is so formative for the nation of Israel because it's the FIRST place where they as a group and collectively meet God.

So this chapter in Israel's history is like one of those childhood events that shaped you forever.

I grew up in a military family and the summer before my 10th grade year we moved from Southern Spain to the Northern Virginia/ Washington DC area

And I went through culture shock and a whole bunch of other transition woes and that first year especially I really struggled to figure out who I was, what I was doing, and struggled to get my footing

I probably had some depression mixed in there, it was just a hard time in my life

My family had always been church people and we found a great church and a good youth group that really accepted me and loved on me

And in the midst of this, as I was kind of lost in this move, in desperation I started reading my Bible and praying every day.

So I'm a 15-year-old, and I'm reading and praying every day, asking God to help me, asking God to help pull me up out of this emotional and relational pit and loneliness that I felt

I started reading the Bible as an overwhelmed 15-year-old who didn't know where else to go for help and I haven't stopped reading it ever since

That was a formative chapter in my life that I refer back to over and over again and that has significantly shaped my life ever since

And it was especially formative because it was the first time that I started to meet God personally for myself and get to know who he was and what he was about

Exodus is that event in the life of this nation of Israel, right here at the formation of this nation. And as we see God interact with these people, we're going to see how he wants to interact with us as well.

So if you've got a Bible, turn with me to the book of Exodus, it's the second book in the Bible.

If you don't it'll be on the screen behind me, and if you don't have/own a Bible, we've got free Bibles on our book table, love for you to take one for joining us today

Exodus 1 jumps into a history and a story already in progress, here's how it opens:

1 These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: 2 Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; 3 Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; 4 Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. 5 The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy^[a] in all; Joseph was already in Egypt.

The book of Genesis on the pages right before this closes with an epic story of a man named Joseph—Joseph was the youngest son of this large family and he's sold by his brothers into slavery to the Egyptians

I have a younger brother as well and I think that there were periods growing up with my brother where if I'd had the opportunity to sell him off to some traveling slave traders who just HAPPENED to be passing by, it would have been really, really tempting

Joseph's in Egypt for a long period of time and eventually God opens doors and gives him power and opportunity to interpret a bad dream that the Pharaoh, king of Egypt has

And the dream is a warning that there is going to be a famine in the land for 7 years, so they better get ready. Joseph explains all this to Pharaoh and he's so taken by Joseph's wisdom that he basically makes him Prime Minister of all Egypt, 2nd only to himself

The famine is far-reaching and Joseph's family back in Palestine, those same brothers who sold him into slavery, are starving and they've heard that Egypt has food

So they all end up coming to Egypt to get food and Joseph forgives his brothers in a crazy dramatic way that you should check out for yourself sometime

And then all of Joseph's family moves to Egypt—his dad is named Jacob but God changes his name to Israel, so he gets called both as we see here in this passage

So all of this family moves to Egypt where there's food, and the family is saved—about 70 of them total are saved from a severe famine that would have destroyed them

And Joseph declares to his brothers “what they intended for evil in selling him into slavery to the Egyptians, God intended and used for good”

But here's what happens on the other side of that deliverance:

6 Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, 7 but the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them.

8 Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. 9 “Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. 10 Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.”

11 So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. 12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites 13 and worked them ruthlessly. 14 They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.

A number of years ago our house got broken into while we were gone for the weekend—miserable feeling to come home to a house that’s just thrashed and trashed

And what everyone says about it is true: you do have that feeling of being violated and you feel more fear

 this sort of thing doesn’t just happen to other people, it can happen to you, too

There’s an ancient proverb that says “break into my house once, shame on you, break into my house twice, shame on me”

So we got an alarm system to ward off and deter any future thieves and it has worked well, haven’t had a break-in since

Pharaoh here is also afraid of something—he’s afraid of the growth of the number of Israelites.

That if there’s some sort of war, and Egypt had many enemies, then the Israelites might join with their enemies and rebel

 This kind of thing happened in ancient times all the time, this was a reasonable fear

So Pharaoh is afraid of the Israelites and he doesn’t have the option of getting a security system like I did, so he does what he thinks he has to do: he oppresses them ruthlessly

Last week we were talking about friendships and how FEAR is a major obstacle in friendships that makes us act in one of two ways:

 we either get defensive and retreat or withdraw and self-protect

 OR we get aggressive and we bully and we push away in order to self-protect

Both of these are all about self-protection and here pharaoh chooses door #2: in his fear, he gets aggressive and deals oppressively and ruthlessly with the Israelites.

 His actions by any measure are cruel and unjust.

Fear does not just make us defensive or aggressive in friendships, it makes us defensive or aggressive in every area of our lives

Fear keeps us from work that God would have us to do

 fear consumes our hearts and minds and our emotional energies in the form of anxiety, which is simply fear applied to a specific unknown situation or outcome.

Fear drives us to do reckless, mean, and foolish things that we end up regretting later

Looking back over your life, can you see or remember something that you regret doing or saying

That if you dig into it a bit, you can see how FEAR was the thing that was driving that whole situation? You made a mistake of being in that relationship because you were AFRAID of being alone.

You made a mistake to take that job because you were AFRAID you didn't have any other options

You were AFRAID of what other people might think so you lied about something and then got caught

You were AFRAID of losing control over something or someone so you exerted more pressure, tried to assert MORE control and in the process it backfired on you.

Whether defensive or aggressive—when we let fear dictate the major decisions in our lives it leads us to pain and regret

All of Egypt is going to regret how this Pharaoh and the next few Pharaohs after him who continue this practice

allow fear to make this particular decision about what to do with the Israelites

Now here's the thing about fear: it's one thing to see how it's not helpful or not healthy for us

But it's also really, really hard to just stop being afraid, isn't it?

"Self! Stop being afraid of heights!" Does it work?

"Self! Stop worrying about my kids! Self, stop worrying about what might happen if that person that I love gets really sick!"

"Self! Stop worrying about what might happen if this doesn't go well or if I bomb the test or presentation or project or work!"

So last week we talked about how the Scriptures offer us another option than a life lived in fear that drives us to living defensive or aggressive lives

We talked about how Scriptures invite us to live lives of WISDOM—that wisdom is the better, life-giving option

And we said that when we come to faith in God, he gives us his Spirit and that Spirit is the Spirit of LOVE—love that displaces and casts out fear in our hearts

and one of the primary fruits of God's love at work in our hearts is this wisdom

And wisdom allows us to act neither aggressively nor defensively but in ways that are right, true, and loving in our situations and in our relationships

we're not hold hostage by fear but instead act courageously and with discernment to match the reality of our situation

And when we do that, our actions bear the fruit of the Spirit, they produce real life

So the love of God and the power of God is one source of wisdom, it's how the Scriptures talk about us growing in wisdom

But there's another source of wisdom that the Scriptures talk about that replaces this UNHEALTHY fear in our lives

and it's what we find in the next set of characters that get introduced in this story

15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, 16 "When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." 17 The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. 18 Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?"

19 The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive."

20 So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

22 Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live."

I had a pastor once who told great stories from his own life—they were always just brilliant and very well told

And one of his techniques was he always gave us the names of the important characters

And not just the first name, he always gave the first and last names of his character.

So his friend from High school wasn't just his friend Dan, it was his friend Dan Catywompus.

And whatever Dan Catywompus did that was hilarious or stupid or illustrated some beautiful and important part from the Scriptures, whenever his name came up, it was never just Dan, it was always Dan Catywompus

if you know someone with the last name like Catywompus, you've just got to say that as often as possible

When you're telling a story, you give names to the major players while the lesser players get only titles: if Dan Caytwompus got pulled over by a police man, the police man remains just the policeman, while Dan Catywompus gets his full name

In this story, we get the names of these two delightful, faithful, courageous women named Shiphrah and Puah.

And do you know whose name we surprisingly DON'T get in this story, the name that if an Egyptian was writing this story we'd DEFINITELY get? Pharoah.

Pharoah remains just Pharoah. He's just a stock character, a big, scared tyrant who decides out of his fear to oppress the Israelites ruthlessly and to start this program of killing off Hebrew baby boys

Pharoah is just Pharoah, just another monotonous dictator abusing his power, nothing at all special about him or what he does—do you know how many Pharoah's just like Pharoah there have been throughout the ages?

Do you know how many awful, oppressive rulers and kings and dictators and even presidents and prime ministers there have been throughout history who have abused their power and killed people under their power?

They're a dime a dozen. Nothing special about this Pharoah, he's just another scared, aggressive bully doing what scared, aggressive bullies with power do

And as Moses and his scribes are recording this story many years after it had happened, they are not going to waste their ink on Pharoah, there's nothing special about him

You know who's unique and special in THIS story? Who does the rare and uncommon thing here? Shiphrah and Puah—we get THEIR names, while Pharoah simply remains Pharoah

Now, rebelling against a tyrant isn't actually all that unique or rare, either. That kind of thing happens all the time as well.

What's rare and unique about Shiphrah and Puah is 1. how they rebel and 2. what motivates their rebellion

Shiphrah and Puah are women, they have no position of power or authority by which to act or galvanize others to action and they do not rebel against the king through violence

Instead, Shiphrah and Puah are two women who have been perfectly positioned by God to save and build his nation through their courageous faithfulness

Now, six months earlier, before the king issued this edict, did it LOOK like Shiphrah and Puah have been divinely placed by God for massive influence?

Nope—just ordinary mid-wives, a great and noble calling, but not a place that from the outside looks like it's a place to change the world from

But my friends, what God loves to do from time to time is take unlikely people, position them in seemingly insignificant place
and if they are willing to go all-in on a life dedicated to him, he just might employ them in his own work of *disproportionate impact*

In our lives it might NOT look like bringing salvation and redemption to an entire nation, in our lives it might be on a slightly smaller scale
but then again you never know what God might do through faithful men and women who are ready to serve him no matter what, no matter where.

Question for you this morning: what if God wanted to do this through you?

What if God has put you in whatever place he's put you, doing whatever it is you're doing
and RIGHT NOW, it just looks like a normal job, just looks like a normal work, it just looks like caring for your kids or punching the clock
and maybe you love it and maybe you don't really but hey, it's a job

And TODAY, right now, it doesn't look all that spectacular
but what if something's about to change or has already changed that's going to open up a whole new world of influence and opportunity to serve God in a way that has disproportionate impact?

What if God is writing Shiphrah and Puah's story into your life?

An old friend of ours had a son who had some significant reading challenges, dyslexia and other processing issues

She was a stay-at-home mom and decided to roll up her sleeves and really figure out how best to help her son

And over the years she developed an incredible array of activities and approaches that really made a difference

And now her kids are grown and she spends much of her life pouring into other families and kids with the same kinds of challenges and bringing her skills and expertise to bear

She was in a great position as a mom to impact her own kids, but now because of her faithfulness, she's having disproportionate impact on many, many kids and families

What if God's got a Shiphrah and Puah-like work for you to do. Are you open to that? Are you ready for it?

There's so much here we can't control—we can't control where God puts us, we are called to trust that and follow his lead in that

And we can't control how the circumstances will play out around us

But there is ONE thing that we have power to do in this whole dance and it's what prepares these women to act courageously and boldly in the face of Pharaoh and his threats

And that is, we can cultivate a healthy and holy *fear of the Lord*.

Twice Shiphrah and Puah are described as "God-fearers"—they feared God more than they feared Pharaoh, and so they went against the commands and orders of Pharaoh and let the Hebrew boys live

This kind of fear of the Lord doesn't just happen suddenly, does it?

They didn't hear the commands of Pharaoh to kill the baby boys and THEN decide if they should fear God or not

At that point, if they hadn't been PRACTICED in the fear of the Lord, they would have folded and buckled under the pressure

Shiphrah and Puah have cultivated a holy fear of the Lord in their hearts over time so when their moment comes that God has positioned them perfectly for, they are all in and ready to do exactly what they need to do in this moment because their time has come to shine

I've had a number of conversations around this whole concept of "fear of the Lord" over the years—and it's important to understand this because it's used regularly in the Scriptures

And it's been abused terribly by some churches throughout the centuries, including by some of the churches some of you have attended over the years.

So let me see if I can illustrate it

This past fall, my family and I took a great trip to the Grand Canyon, a very, very generous gift from my in-laws for whom I am very grateful

Upon arriving at the Grand Canyon, I experienced a mixture of emotions:

1. Wonder and awe at how big it was—it was really too much to take it all in, it was so big, so beautiful, so just enormous and vast and dizzying
2. I felt privileged and grateful to see/experience this much beauty

There will be people all around the world who will never see or experience something that vast and beautiful in their whole lives.

I had a deep sense of unique gratitude for that day, for that moment, the unique power and wonder of being in that moment, absorbing something so glorious.

I felt this deep sense of being loved and being given a great gift, in part because of the generosity of my in-laws who had provided the gift for me and my family

3. My smallness: I was reminded in the face of something so big that has been there for so very long, that my life is a vapor and that I'm just a speck in the universe

I'm a beloved speck in the universe, but I'm just a speck nonetheless.

4. This thing could kill me. Literally, at various points I'm two dumb steps away from falling to my certain death.

This is not something to be trifled with, there's a sober-mindedness to how I experience this thing

This was not a meeting of equals and we did NOT have a reciprocal relationship of equals

this was little me meeting something much larger and more powerful than I was

All of that:

wonder and awe and gratitude and privilege and being beloved
and our my own smallness

and the reality that this thing had a power over me to literally end my life and I did not the same power BACK over IT

All of that was all happening at the same time, swirled together with the fear of the Grand Canyon

I think that's something of the fear of the Lord. It's not cowering fear, it's not a timidity, it's not God as a cosmic police officer in the sky waiting to punish you for the least thing

It's being more captivated by the wonder and bigness of God than being caught up in all the little stuff that we get so easily tangled up in

It's a healthy and holy fear of the Lord--that's something of what empowers Shiphrah and Puah to stand firm and stand up to a bully of a Pharaoh

We talked about how WISDOM is the better option than FEAR in our hearts, the Scriptures declare this about where wisdom comes from and how we GET wisdom

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." -Proverbs 1:7

[TABLE/CHART HERE]: Pharaoh fears the Israelites, things of this world, acts on that aggressively because that's what Pharaohs tend to do
And the result is pain, cruelty and death

And eventually before this story is over, ALL OF EGYPT will REGRET what Pharaoh does here.

Shiphrah and Puah have cultivated the fear of the Lord and they act on that wisely & courageously because that's what fear of the Lord does in our lives
And the result is acts salvation

And by the end of this story, all of Israel will celebrate their courage and sacrifice and be blessed by them.

Which life would you rather live? Who would you rather be?

We talked earlier about how hard it is to just STOP being afraid of stuff, right? That we can't seem to just talk ourselves out of being afraid of things

Maybe that's because that fear gear is SUPPOSED to be there. But because we've got sin that gunks up the our hearts and our minds and our imaginations

What was supposed to bless us and all those around us with the fear of the Lord now gets hijacked, mis-directed, into all of these other lesser fears

What if we're not supposed to STOP fearing altogether because that's actually impossible and we weren't made for it?

What if instead we are supposed to re-direct our fear and re-purpose our fear from all this stuff we can see to the God who is God over all of it and who is in control over all of it?

In firefighting, especially when they're fighting a forest fire, sometimes they set back-fires and literally they fight fire with fire

What if the only way to really fight fear is with a better, cleaner, purer fear?

Pharoah sees the Israelites, does the math, and responds from an earthly fear that results in pain and death

Shiphrah and Puah they see the earthly realities that they're facing but they respond from the fear of the Lord that results in REAL power, courage, and life

These two women are my heroes—I hope I can be like them when I grow up.

They have spent their lives cultivating the fear of the Lord in their hearts so when their time comes to make a difference for God's plan to create an entire nation, they're ready.

We can't control where God POSITIONS us but we do have some control over the POSTURES of our hearts when we get there.

So what does it mean, what does it look like for us to cultivate this fear of the Lord?

First, for most of us, all of this starts with the battle for belief and the work of belief.

We have a Devotional that we email out here 5 days a week, gotten great reviews since we launched it in the fall and if you're not getting it you can fill out your connect card in your bulletin and give us your email and we'll get that to you

But a couple of weeks ago we were talking about work and one day we posted about the WORK of belief.

Jesus at one point says that the most important work that God requires of us is that we BELIEVE in him—and we were talking in the post about how for many of us, we feel how hard it is sometimes to believe.

That for many of us, we look around and it feels like everyone else gets this and it comes easy for them

But we wrestle with doubts. We're caught in this crossfire of doubt and questions that sometimes are operating just in the background and sometimes are super-loud

Key and super-important questions like “what if this whole God thing just isn't true? What if we can explain everything just through naturalism and science and God isn't even in the picture at all?”

And questions like

“how can I be certain about Jesus given that I’ve got friends or family or neighbors who co-workers who have very different beliefs from me but who seem to be perfectly decent and happy folks?”

There are these various pressures we feel about belief and doubt
some of us who have been Christians our whole lives as well as the people who are here who are on a journey of figuring out what they think is true

And this post about how it can be hard work to believe generated more comments than any of our posts I think all year.

If you’re here and it’s work for you to believe or if you’re wrestling with questions,
just know that it might look like everyone around you has this all figured out but you’re not alone, you don’t have to pretend, this is a place for honest and good questions and process

And part of what we’re here to do together and part of why we do stuff like small groups is to create a space where we together bear witness to how we’ve met Jesus in our lives, how God’s at work in our midst, to encourage each other in the work of faith.

I’m here as a fellow-traveler with you walking with you to help us all together to see what the Scriptures have to say and how they speak to us about who God is and make a difference in our lives

And the first place we have to go if we’re going to exchange our natural fears of things here on this earth for the Fear of the Lord that actually produces good things in our lives

Is to dig into this work of belief, to be intentional about getting answers to good questions, to not be lazy or apathetic or drifting with these questions that linger in our hearts and minds

But to dig in, study, bring those questions out into the light.

In my own journey, when I’ve brought my own doubts and questions and struggles into the light and gone on a genuine quest to find reasonable answers, I’ve found that the Light can handle my questions

We’ve got a couple of really good books on the book table like “Reason for God” and “Mere Christianity” that have been helpful, clear, wise and thoughtful and careful answers to really good questions that people here have asked

A couple of weeks ago I got lunch with a guy who told me he picked up Reason for God and as he read it he told me that he felt this tremendous relief

it was answering these nagging questions he didn’t even realize he had or hadn’t even fully articulated.

Some of you need to just talk the questions and doubts through with people rather than read a book

But the point is that there's stuff out there, resources and people, that can help you to with this first and primary battle

Whatever question you've got, you're not the first person to wrestle with it and ask it, I promise! And I promise that there is a 99.99% likelihood that someone has a thoughtful Christian response to your issues and questions, whatever they are!

I want to encourage you to enter into this battle for faith and belief, whether you're new to faith, coming back to it after some time away, or you've been a Christian your whole life

In part so that you might get to the gift of the fear of the Lord that would save you from the fear of the things in this world that would rob you of real joy.

Along with that fundamental work of belief is this work of exchanging our earthly fears for the fear of the Lord.

This isn't easy!

So I want to invite you to try this little prayer exercise, even if you're not a prayer person or a God person, see if God might use this in your life to help you exchange your normal fears for the fear of the Lord

The invitation to us is to exchange our earthly fears that result often in regret or pain

For this life-giving fear of the Lord

Making this exchange is a little tricky, but try this this week and see if it might help: try praying and releasing your normal fears by bookending it with whatever you know or think is true about God

1st: Try praying first whatever you know about God that is true, even if you just need to say something like

"God, I don't really know if you're out there, but if you are, I'm pretty sure you're way bigger than me and you're way bigger than these things I'm afraid of."

If your familiar with the Bible, there's lots of great helps in Psalms for this

2nd go on to name and tell God whatever you're bringing to exchange

Don't spend any more time here than necessary or else we'll start just getting stressed out—just name your fears as simply and clearly as you can

3rd And then close with again the truths that you know about God, maybe repeating the same ones you just rattled off at the beginning

God, you're bigger than all those things I just listed, I want to be more captured and in awe of you, help me to release my everyday fears for the great and life-giving fear of you.

My friends, the book of Exodus is all about moving OUT of slavery and into FREEDOM—and we're going to walk that path throughout this whole series

This morning, with Shiphrah and Puah as our guides, the invitation for all of us is to leave a life of EARTHLY FEARS that can only enslave us
and to instead go into FEAR OF GOD training that brings true freedom and prepares us for acts of courage, hope and strength in a world that is full of earthly fears.