

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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Moses

“God Is in the Details”

Exodus 2:1-10

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A couple had two boys, 8 and 10, who were always getting into trouble. The parents were certain if any mischief occurred in the community that their two young sons were involved. They were at a loss as to what to do about their behavior. Then the mother heard about a pastor who'd been successful in helping troubled children, so she brought the boys to him. The pastor asked to see the boys individually, and the youngest went first. The pastor sat the boy down and asked, “Where is God?” The boy made no attempt to answer. The question was repeated in a sterner voice but still no answer. Then the pastor, losing patience, shook his finger at the boy and asked in an even sterner voice, “Where is God?” At that the boy ran from the room and into a closet and slammed the door. His older brother followed him in and asked what happened. The younger brother replied, “We're in trouble this time. God is missing, and they think we did it!” Sometimes when we are going through tough times it may feel like God is missing and we might honestly ask, “Where is God?” Yet when we look at God's Word, time and time again, God reminds His people and we see in the stories of the people of God that God is always with us, in the good and the bad, and God is in control as He is working out all the details of our lives.

WHERE IS GOD IN THE NIGHTMARES OF LIFE?

Approximately 400 years before the birth of Moses, the Hebrew man by the name of Joseph moved his Jewish family to Egypt and saved them and the Egyptians as he worked for the Egyptian government. In those 400 years, the Israelites stayed in Egypt and quickly grew larger and more influential. Then along came a new Pharaoh who cared nothing about the great Joseph and the work he did to save everyone. Instead, the new Pharaoh felt threatened by the growing number and power of the Israelites. He quickly took action to remedy this and somehow was able to make all the Israelites slaves. The problem was the more they oppressed the Israelites, the more they grew. Pharaoh then had another plan to slow down the growth of the Israelite nation as he commanded two midwives to kill all the male Hebrew babies when they were born. This didn't work because the midwives feared God and not Pharaoh and so they lied and said those Hebrew women were so tough that they had their babies before the midwives could help in the delivery. Finally, out of desperation, Pharaoh ordered the unthinkable - every newborn Hebrew baby boy was to be killed by being thrown into the Nile River.

Imagine the nightmare that then ensued as all these newborn baby boys were thrown into the Nile to either drown or be taken by the crocodiles. I honestly cannot relate to something that horrible. Yet, life for us today can deal us difficult blows.

Every marriage has its share of trials and troubles. But imagine going off on your honeymoon and getting victimized by six natural disasters! That's what happened to newlyweds Stefan and Erika Svanstrom when they left Stockholm, Sweden, for their 4-month honeymoon in December 2010. First, they were stranded in Munich, Germany, when Europe was hit by one of its worst snowstorms. Then the couple went to Australia. In the city of Cairns, they were struck by one of the most ferocious cyclones in Australia's history. They headed south to Brisbane but discovered the city had experienced massive flooding. So they traveled across the country to Perth. There, they narrowly escaped raging bush fires. Next, the couple flew to Christchurch, New Zealand. Unfortunately, they arrived just after the city was devastated by a magnitude 6.3 earthquake. Later on, the couple went to Japan. But a few days after their arrival, Tokyo was rocked by Japan's largest earthquake on record. The family returned to Stockholm on March 29, 2011, after a much calmer visit to their last destination, China. Looking back on the trip, Mrs. Svanstrom said: "To say we were unlucky with the weather doesn't really cover it! It's so absurd that now we can only laugh." But Mr. Svanstrom noted the marriage was still going strong. He said, "We've certainly experienced more than our fair share of catastrophes, but the most important thing is that we're together and happy." Instead of beginning their marriage with a much anticipated, romantic, once-in-a-lifetime honeymoon, the couple probably felt like they were living in a nightmare.

Have you ever been there in life where nothing seems to be going right, or maybe you are really struggling in your marriage, or your child is not at a good place in her or his life and it's just tearing you apart, or a loved one has died and you feel lost and brokenhearted without that person, or you've lost a job or you hate your job, or you are struggling financially, or maybe you were just diagnosed with a serious or chronic condition, or possibly you are quietly and privately dealing with emotional struggles that are almost crippling. In the midst of whatever we are facing we may have even asked, as I would imagine the Jewish parents did seeing their baby boys die while they were powerless as slaves to do anything about it, God where are you? Let's see in Exodus 2, where God was in the midst of this horrific nightmare.

Exodus 2:1-10

About this time, a man and woman from the tribe of Levi got married. ² The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She saw that he was a special baby and kept him hidden for three months. ³ But when she could no longer hide him, she got a basket made of papyrus reeds and waterproofed it with tar and pitch. She put the baby in the basket and laid it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile River. ⁴ The baby's sister then stood at a distance, watching to see what would happen to him.

⁵ Soon Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe in the river, and her attendants walked along the riverbank. When the princess saw the basket among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it for her. ⁶ When the princess opened it, she saw the baby. The little boy was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This must be one of the Hebrew children," she said.

⁷ Then the baby's sister approached the princess. "Should I go and find one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" she asked.

⁸ "Yes, do!" the princess replied. So the girl went and called the baby's mother.

⁹ "Take this baby and nurse him for me," the princess told the baby's mother. "I will pay you for your help." So the woman took her baby home and nursed him.

¹⁰ Later, when the boy was older, his mother brought him back to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him as her own son. The princess named him Moses, for she explained, "I lifted him out of the water."

GOD IS IN CONTROL!

Exodus 2 gives us a glimpse of the horror and desperation one family felt in the midst of this horrific genocide. A Jewish family from the tribe of Levi disobeyed Pharaoh and hid their newborn baby boy for the first three months of his life. To keep a newborn hidden for its first three months of its life is indeed a miracle. But then when it wasn't possible to keep him hidden anymore, they did as Pharaoh commanded, but in a slightly different way. They took a papyrus basket and waterproofed it and then put the baby boy in it and placed the basket in the reeds where it was shallow, almost camouflaged, and safe from the deeper, rougher waters where the crocodiles mainly were found. In Egypt this was the equivalent to someone giving up their baby on the hospital steps for someone to take care of their child. In this instance, the baby boy's older sister, Miriam, followed the basket and saw it was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter. Pharaoh's daughter knew it was a Hebrew baby who should have been killed but instead she decided to rescue the baby and keep him for herself. Then Miriam, the boy's sister, asks if Pharaoh's daughter would like for her to find someone to take care of and nurse the child for her. All the pieces are falling into place as Pharaoh's daughter agrees and Miriam then arranges for her mother to take care of him. And Pharaoh's daughter even arranges to pay for the childcare. Moses is back in the arms of his mother under the protection of Pharaoh's daughter.

This story is nothing short of miraculous as God took care of all the details. Sometimes when we are going through tough times it may feel like God's is missing and we might honestly ask, "Where is God?". Maybe when the family was in the midst of all the details of the story, they did not see God's hand at work but I'm sure as they looked back in hindsight, they easily had seen God's hand at work in the details. It is hard for us to always see God's hand at work in our lives when we are going through tough times, but God is in control working out the details of His plan. God worked it out that Moses is

now protected by those who wanted him dead and eventually, Moses would be the undoing of Pharaoh and the Egyptians when he leads the people out of captivity. God had it all in control the entire time.

One of the great quandaries and debates down through the years of church history is how much does God control what happens? One of the more extreme viewpoints is called Deism, which views God as the Creator who is not involved in the details of His creation. Another, called determinism, views God as being like a chess player and we are the chess pieces whom God moves us without us having a free will. It is a mystery as to how much God controls and how much our free will comes into play. Undoubtedly, God in His infinite wisdom knows just how to mix His handiwork and our free will together just right. Listen to what the Bible says in *Psalms 139:1-18* about God's presence and work in the details of our lives, *"O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my every thought when far away. You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD. You both precede and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to know! I can never escape from your spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me. I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night-- but even in darkness I cannot hide from you. To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are both alike to you. You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous-- and how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. How precious are your thoughts about me, O God! They are innumerable! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up in the morning, you are still with me!"*

God is all-knowing of past, present, and future and everywhere at the same time and in his loving, all-wise, and infinite power, God is in control. God is God! God is intimately involved in every area of our lives, guiding, protecting, providing, nurturing, healing, caring, correcting, and so much more bringing about His master plan. Think of it this way: A basketball coach could call a time-out for any number of reasons at any different point in a ball game. For example, he might see a flaw in the opponent's defense that he thinks his team could exploit with a hastily designed play. The coach might want to stop a flurry of momentum or a hot hand by one of the opposing players. He might use it to try icing a free-throw shooter. He might use it to stop the clock near the end of the half or regulation. The coach might use it to force an instant-replay review of a questionable call by the officials. That's six different options right there. And they're all determined not by fixed logarithms but by the flow of the game, the nature of the opponent, the time left on the shot clock or the game clock—any of these factors and many others could

dictate his purpose in asking for a timeout. It is all dictated by the coach's unique, personal knowledge of his players, his awareness of what each of them can do, what makes them perform best, what puts them in the best position to win the game. God is our coach, and we are the players in real life. *Real life is much more complex than a basketball game, but this illustration can show how a wise "coach" can make good decisions that we may or may not understand. Of course, there is one crucial difference: basketball coaches make mistakes; God doesn't.* God has a much larger and wiser plan for the way he rules the world and guides our lives. Now the question is, what is our role as the players in the game of life that God is coaching?

TRUST AND FOLLOW GOD'S LEAD

The question is not whether God has a master plan for all of humanity and history, the question is where are we in that plan? God is the coach who now gives us the ball to play the game. As we are playing the game, God gives us the freedom to choose whether or not to trust Him and follow His lead every step of the game. God gives us a choice to follow His plan for eternity and for our lives or to do our own thing. Notice in this story of Moses and his family that God does not do all the work alone. God especially uses all these women to save this one boy. God used two midwives who feared God more than Pharaoh as they knew it was wrong to kill these babies. *Hebrews 11:23* points out the fact that *"It was by faith that Moses' parents hid him for three months when he was born. They saw that God had given them an unusual child, and they were not afraid to disobey the king's command."* What is also fascinating is that God even used Pharaoh's daughter, someone whose heart most likely wasn't following God. In God's great master plan, God can use anyone, even those who try to mess up God's plan, but we know that God desires to use those who trust Him and are willing to follow His lead. God uses us knowingly and unknowingly, with or without our knowledge. God uses both those who love Him and those who don't love Him. As C.S. Lewis says, "There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'All right, then, have it your way.'" Which one are we?

Our role then in God's master plan is to do what *Proverbs 3:5-6* says, *"⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. ⁶ Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."* Do we trust God with the details of our lives even when we don't know what God is planning and even don't agree or like what is happening in our lives? Are we willing to follow God no matter where He leads our lives? If we are, God will lead us down the right path. I am thankful for God's grace that is patiently and constantly redirecting me as I get things wrong. I am thankful God can even take my mistakes and use them for good just as *Romans 8:28* says, *"And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them."* The key is in our willingness to follow God's plan for our lives, wanting God's will first and foremost over and above our own will. Many years ago, King George VI of England addressed the British commonwealth on New Year's Eve at a moment in history when the whole world stood on the brink of uncertainty. Despondency and uncertainty filled the air. The king's own body was racked by cancer. Before that year was over, his life ended. Unaware of his own

physical maladies, he uttered these memorable words: "I said to the man at the gate of the year, 'Give me a light that I might walk safely into the unknown.' And he said to me, 'Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the hand of God. It shall be to you safer than the light and better than the known.'" We might feel like we are in the dark at times in our lives. God then invites us to trust Him, hold his hand, and to then lead us into the darkness on the path He has for our lives.

Do we have hearts that desire to join God's plan for our lives no matter what those plans might be? When Jesus came into this world that was His passion more than anything to fulfill God's plan for His life. He did through His life, death, and resurrection. God took what looked so horrible in Jesus' life and brought about the greatest good possible for us.

Icebreaker I – Consider the worst experience you have ever endured? Did you ever wonder where God was?

Icebreaker II – How much do you know about your birth (time, place, weight, etc.)?

1. What is the closest brush you have had with death or grave danger?
2. Why did Moses' parents give their baby up for "adoption"? What does that say about them?
3. What impresses you most about Moses' birth mother?
 - a. Her courage
 - b. Her resourcefulness
 - c. Her love
 - d. Her faith
4. Why did Pharaoh's daughter risk taking in this Hebrew baby? Did she find Moses by accident? By human design? God's design? Why do you think so?
5. What would Moses gain by growing up "royal"? How might this be good or bad for Israel.
6. Pharaoh's daughter felt sorry for the Hebrew baby despite her father's ruling. Have you ever felt love for someone that others oppressed or neglected?
7. What unusual events shaped your place in God's purposes?
8. Do you trust God with the details of your life even when you don't know what God is planning and even when you don't agree or like what is happening in your life? Are you willing to follow God no matter where He leads you?
9. How is it with your soul?
10. What are your struggles and successes?
11. How might the Holy Spirit and Scriptures be speaking in your life?
12. How can this group pray for you this week?