

2022 Theme - Extraordinary God + Ordinary People = Transformed Lives

Sermon Series - Transformed Leadership (Moses)

Sermon Title - Transformed Leadership Through Adversity

Sermon Text - Exodus - Exodus 15:22-17:8

Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

Full Sermon Notes:

"I've never known a love like Yours So constant, so powerful And I've tasted, I've seen, and nothing comes close I've never known a love like Yours"

Is that really how we feel about God or are those just words in a song? What happens when we face trials, tribulations, difficulties, discouragements, and even tragic losses? Do we trust His powerful love to get us through? Do we trust His powerful love to give us strength? Do we trust Him with the unanswered questions that sometimes flood our thoughts and minds? What do we do when we find ourselves in a wilderness of life and soul? Let's pray and I'm going to talk with you about this. Pray!

Some people are under the misguided thinking that if they have enough faith, big faith, and if they are walking with God then they will never face adversity and if they do then it must mean they didn't have enough faith or were not walking with God. If we're honest, we all have our moments no matter how long we've been walking with the Lord in faith! Today we're going to see how our faith and our leadership can be transformed through adversity. Moses sure faced adversity as a leader and as a man of faith! It wasn't easy for him, and at times it must have seemed he just couldn't catch a break, but he endured and God used him in powerful ways to accomplish amazing things. In the past eight Sundays we've seen Moses make some very crucial decisions in his life to turn from the things of this world and to follow God! He decided to find his identity in God rather than in his adopted position as the son of Pharaoh's daughter and he walked away from wealth and from the pleasures of sin, which, by the way, only last for a season and then come the consequences! Trust me on that one! Trust God's Word on that one! Anyway, we also studied the lengthy conversation God had with Moses through the burning bush where God promises to be with Moses on his mission. Moses is obedient! We then see God use Moses mightily to get the Children of Israel out of Egypt, across the Sea on dry ground, and last week we studied the elements of the song they sang when they realized they had miraculously escaped the wrath of the Pharaoh of Egypt by the hand of God! But what happens next is surprising! They face adversity in the wilderness and their faith wavers. There are several aspects of adversity we need to examine and understand if we are to let God transform our lives and leadership during difficult times. Let's pick up our story in Exodus 15 verse 22...

Thirst! When life is bitter!

Exodus 15:22 Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water.

Exodus 15:23 When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.)

Exodus 15:24 So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?"

Exodus 15:25 Then Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became fit to drink. There the LORD issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test.

Exodus 15:26 He said, "If you listen carefully to the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you."

Exodus 15:27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.

Have you ever noticed that it was just three days after the miracle of the crossing of the sea, the people started grumbling about not having good water to drink. Just three days after God's amazing deliverance! The water was bitter and they were not happy about it! The Hebrew word "Mar" was used in the Bible to describe the water in our text and was once used in relation to some foods and for wormwood in Proverbs. However, most often the adjective "mar" was used to speak of a bitter soul, or the bitterness of death. In our story, God tells Moses to throw a piece of wood into the water and the water becomes sweet. Commentator Roy Honeycutt states that...

"Apparently, the tree possessed purifying qualities, and the Lord utilized the created order for the fulfillment of his own purposes. The latent energies of the world came to life under the responsible direction of a man committed to the will of God, and Israel was delivered."

Here's the life lesson for us: Sometimes life is bitter! Sometimes life is really hard and sometimes life is depressing! We've got to decide whether we will trust God to get us through or whether we will give up on God and quit. We have to decide if we are going to listen and obey God or not. God never promised the Israelites or us that once we trust Him all of our problems would magically disappear, but He did say this to them...

Exodus 15:26 He said, "If you listen carefully to the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you."

In other words, if the Children of Israel continued to listen and obey the Lord they would not face the same kind of judgment that Pharaoh and the Egyptians had faced. But God didn't tell them everything would be a walk in the park. In fact, our text says...

"There the LORD issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test."

God gave them instructions and the test would be whether or not they would obey! God won't tempt you to sin, but He will put you to the test when it comes to obedience in doing the right things for the right reasons! Isaiah 48:10 says...

Isaiah 48:10 See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.

So it is about perspective! Having the perspective that God is going to use whatever comes your way for ultimate good gives us the strength to endure some pretty tough things in this life and to be victorious in the end. But here's the crucial question: Will we trust God and rely on God, and let God help us when we face adversity? The Psalmist said it so well...

Psalm 94:17 Unless the LORD had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death.

Psalm 94:18 When I said, "My foot is slipping," your unfailing love, LORD, supported me.

Psalm 94:19 When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy.

And here's a powerful word for us from the New Testament about going through trials and suffering in this life...

1 Peter 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1 Peter 1:4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,

1 Peter 1:5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Peter 1:6 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

1 Peter 1:7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1 Peter 1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

1 Peter 1:9 for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

So when we are going through really tough times and may even be suffering, we must remember that we can greatly rejoice because our victory in the end will result in praise, glory and honor for our Lord and we know that the salvation of our soul is absolutely secured! Thank You Jesus! But our faith and our resolve will be tested. More on this in just a moment. The last verse of chapter 15 says this...

Exodus 15:27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.

According to theologian Roy Honeycutt...

“The name ‘eylim is related to ‘el (God), and may indicate that the site was a holy place for a considerable period of time. Both the fresh water and the grove of trees would have conveyed sanctity to such a place.”

Roy L. Jr. Honeycutt, “Exodus,” in Genesis–Exodus, ed. Clifton J. Allen, Broadman Bible Commentary (Broadman Press, 1969), 395.

So God brings them to this place with fresh water and gives them a respite, a resting place, and some time to just be still and know that God was with them. Sometimes when we are in a spiritual wilderness, we need the emotional, mental and spiritual refreshment symbolized by clean water and the palm trees. Maybe we should sing with David the song he sang when in the desert of Judah...

Psalm 63:1 You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.

Psalm 63:2 I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.

Psalm 63:3 Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.

Psalm 63:4 I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.

Once again we must ask ourselves these questions: Will we trust God to get us through or will we give up on God and quit? Will we listen and obey God and let Him transform our lives and our leadership abilities in times of adversity? Adversity in life will cause us to thirst for relief, but we should realize that our greatest thirst should be for the one who has the living water! Jesus told the woman at the well this...

John 4:13 ... “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,

John 4:14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

And this leads us to a second aspect of transformed leadership through adversity.

Hunger! When life is unsatisfying!

Exodus 16:1 The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt.

Exodus 16:2 In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.

Exodus 16:3 The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

Isn’t this unbelievable? After all God had done for the people to set them free from their slavery and then working the miracle to fix the bitter water at Mirah and then taking them to Elim where there were 12 springs of good water and palm trees, and yet they lose their minds! This next leg

of their journey to the mountain of God at Sinai, takes them to the desert of Sin. Now this is not referring to sin as when a person sins, but is the Hebrew word for a geographical region. But when you see how the people acted you might be inclined to think it was named the desert of Sin because of the people's sinful actions towards God and Moses and Aaron. Once again the theologian Roy Honeycutt weighs in saying this...

“the murmuring motif is not designed to express a disgruntled complaint. Quite the contrary, it describes an open rebellion.”

Roy L. Jr. Honeycutt, “Exodus,” in Genesis–Exodus, ed. Clifton J. Allen, Broadman Bible Commentary (Broadman Press, 1969), 395.

The whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. Talk about leadership in times of adversity! Moses and Aaron were certainly experiencing major adversity as the people were so angry and upset. The people said they would rather die than not have pots of meat and all the food they wanted! Is it not amazing how quickly people are willing to give up their freedom for pleasure? We are seeing this in our society today. People are willing to surrender their spiritual freedom and even their political freedom if they can only have their pleasures! A sober, thinking, rational, moral and Godly society is not easily controlled, but a society given over to their fleshly pleasures and desires can be manipulated with little effort. Just give them what their sinful nature desires and you will own them! Think about it. The Israelites would rather stuff their faces in Egypt as slaves rather than live for God and find true freedom in the wilderness! And if they had trusted God they would have made it to the promised land so much sooner! In one of the Veggie Tale movies about this, the adult veggies are talking about how good it was in Egypt and one of the kid Veggies says, “But we were slaves!” And guess what...

They were not happy in Egypt either!

God's Word tells us in Exodus 2:23-25...

Exodus 2:23 During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God.

Exodus 2:24 God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.

Exodus 2:25 So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

How soon we forget!! I've just got to quote Dr. Honeycutt again. He says...

“Characteristically, the attitude of the people toward Moses and Aaron fluctuated with changing fortunes—believing in them when the sea was crossed (14:13), repudiating and murmuring against them as adversity replaced benediction.”

Roy L. Jr. Honeycutt, “Exodus,” in Genesis–Exodus, ed. Clifton J. Allen, Broadman Bible Commentary (Broadman Press, 1969), 396.

Isn't that just like us? I was talking with Jay about today's message as we were on our way to our staff retreat Friday. Jay had this to say about the subject and I quote:

"We've been set free but there's a journey out of our bondage! Sometimes we return to what we know instead of trusting God's promise. We give up before we get there! And when things get tough we start looking back!"

Powerful words Pastor Jay! And you know what, somehow Satan is such a crafty liar he convinces us that we were better in our slavery! Better in our addiction! Better in our bondage! Better in our lostness! And sometimes we're just foolish and gullible enough to buy the lie and we go back! How tragic and sad! But God pleads with us to trust Him to get us to the promised land and He promises to provide for us on the way. In fact God was so gracious to the children of Israel that He does this...

Exodus 16:4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.

So God is going to rain down bread from heaven for the Children of Israel! How about that? But then He gives some instructions and says there will be a test to see whether they will follow His instructions.

Most people hate tests! I never liked them either. In fact I dreaded them and was always nervous, especially when I had not studied like I should! And I hated it when one of my seminary professors prayed before we took our test. He prayed that God would grant us clear recall of all the things we had studied and prepared for! I was thinking I needed a little grace for the things I hadn't studied for! But tests are not all bad. Tests help us prepare for the times when we will need to apply what we have learned. Tests help us remember what we've learned. Tests help us know what we know! And when we've passed a test we gain great confidence because we are prepared! God uses this confidence to transform us into the Godly leaders He wants us to be and that the world needs us to be! And as we look at our story we see that God was very gracious and gave the people so many chances to pass the test! He also was very giving and even gave them twice the bread they would need the day before the Sabbath so they could rest on the Sabbath and not have to work to gather food. And He also gave them more than bread! Check this out...

Exodus 16:8 Moses also said, "You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD."

Exodus 16:9 Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.'"

Exodus 16:10 While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.

Exodus 16:11 The LORD said to Moses,

Exodus 16:12 "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.' "

Exodus 16:13 That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.

Exodus 16:14 When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor.

Exodus 16:15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat.

So God gives them water, bread, and to top it off, he gives them quail meat! And they didn't even have to go hunting. The quail just fell out of the sky like the manna and they picked it up! You would think that the children of Israel would have been ecstatic and that they would begin to pass the tests of faith but it just seemed like they never learned. Each time they faced a trial they forgot all that God had done for them in the past and immediately began to complain or fear or even rebel against God! King David would later write a song to encourage the people of God not to forget all that God has done for them!

Psalms 103:1 Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

Psalms 103:2 Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—

Psalms 103:3 who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,

Psalms 103:4 who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,

Psalms 103:5 who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Psalms 103:6 The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

And what about verse 3 for those who have not been healed of a sickness? Obviously King David is not still with us and we will all face death someday. Sometimes God chooses to heal us because we still have work to do in this world! Sometimes God heals us by allowing us the privilege of going home to be with Him in glory where, as John tells us in the book of Revelation...

Revelation 21:4 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Revelation 21:5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

We read these words in 1 Kings chapter 1...

1 Kings 1:1 When King David was very old, he could not keep warm even when they put covers over him.

But on his deathbed he said this...

1 Kings 1:28 Then King David said, "Call in Bathsheba." So she came into the king's presence and stood before him.

1 Kings 1:29 The king then took an oath: "As surely as the LORD lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble,

1 Kings 1:30 I will surely carry out this very day what I swore to you by the LORD, the God of Israel: Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place."

Like Moses, King David had faced his share of adversity and troubles in life and many were of his own making, but God got him through every trial and tribulation and allowed him to accomplish his God-given purpose in life! He, like Moses, was transformed by adversity into a powerful and Godly leader and example to others. In fact, listen to the wisdom he gave to his son before he died...

1 Kings 2:1 When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son.

1 Kings 2:2 "I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. "So be strong, act like a man,

1 Kings 2:3 and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go...

And how does all of this talk of adversity in the life of Moses and King David apply to our lives? James, our Lord's brother tells us this...

James 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, James 1:3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

James 1:4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

He goes on to say this in verse 12 and 13...

James 1:12 Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

James 1:13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;

So we are tested by God but not tempted by God! Tests are not bad and God gives us the strength and the wisdom to pass every test if we will trust Him and depend on Him and follow His instructions! But Pastor Larry, how can I do that when it seems like the trials and tribulations just keep on coming? The Israelites faced the same challenges.

Despair - When life is desperate!

Exodus 17:1 The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.

Exodus 17:2 So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?"

Exodus 17:3 But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"

Exodus 17:4 Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."

Exodus 17:5 The LORD answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.

Exodus 17:6 I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel.

Exodus 17:7 And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Exodus 17:8 The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim.

So the Israelites face another water shortage and then they get attacked by the Amalekites. You can see that life was desperate for them, but after all that God had done for them in the past, and very recently, you just have to wonder why they were still asking the question, "Is the LORD among us or not?" Moses doesn't know what to do with the people. Here's a question or two for us...

Are we not sometimes just like the Children of Israel? Do we trust God in the good times and not the bad? Are we Fair weather friends?

There are numerous examples of Christian artists or pastors that sing of faith and preach faith, that we are to trust God at all times, but when a trial or a tragedy hits them, their home and their life, they decide very publicly they don't believe any more. I'm not going to mention any of their names! But I will mention the name of one who had a tragedy hit his home and he stayed true to his faith and all that he had sung and preached to others! Toby Mac, one of my favorite artists! His son died tragically and while he grieved deeply and certainly had his questions, he has remained strong and true to his confession of faith. If you haven't heard the song he wrote about his son, it's powerful. It's called "21 Years." Toby Mac remains a leader in the contemporary Christian music world and his adversity has only made his leadership stronger!

I woke up the other night and God was speaking to my heart this comparison of the children of Israel and us. They had the Red Sea crossing and the pillars of smoke and fire and water from a rock and manna from heaven and quail dropping out of the sky. And what do we have? We have the gospel story of Jesus and what He did for us on the Cross! The writer of Hebrews reminds us...

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,

Hebrews 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

You've heard this Scripture in this series before because there is a theme, a pattern of our extraordinary God working with ordinary people and transforming their lives. The joy that was set before Jesus was that you and I could be saved and reconciled to the Father! Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father! And what is He doing there? He is interceding for you and for me!! And The Holy Spirit is doing the same thing in words and groans we cannot fathom or understand! So when you face the trials, the tribulations, the adversity, don't do like the Hebrew children and grumble and complain, rather, remember the awesome work Jesus did at the Cross! That was our Red Sea moment where our enemy Satan, who was out to destroy us was defeated because as Moses lifted his staff and the waters rolled over Pharaoh and his army, Jesus was lifted up on the Cross and shed His blood which became a spiritual wall of water on the left and on the right to wash away our sin, our shame, our filth and to overcome the enemy of our soul, Satan! And three days later Jesus defeated death and the grave and the power of sin when He rose victoriously from the grave and appeared to over 500 people to show and to prove His victory. Those of us who have accepted His work and sacrifice done on our behalf have been raised to walk a new life in Christ and after we've had some years of experience of walking with Jesus through the wildernesses of this old fallen world, and the adversities of this life, we have stories, experiences, and examples of God's amazing power, provision, peace and presence in our lives! We can testify how God has used adversity in our lives to transform the way we lead with our lives! Paul put it beautifully...

2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

2 Corinthians 4:18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Let's pray!