

Creekside Community Church
"The Rhythms of Redemption" the book of Exodus
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Moving from Immature to Mature Faith (Exodus 5:22-7:5)

One of my favorite stories comes from ancient China; because it is both simple and profound. The only horse a poor farmer owned ran away; and when the farmer's neighbors heard about it, they came to commiserate with the farmer. "How unfortunate!" they said. "Maybe" replied the farmer. The following day, the horse returned and brought seven more wild horses with him. "How fortunate!" the farmer's neighbors said. "Maybe" replied the farmer. The next day, the farmer's son tried to ride one of the wild horses, and was thrown off and broke his leg. "How unfortunate!" the farmer's neighbors said. "Maybe" replied the farmer. The following day, an army conscription officer arrived in the village with orders to take all the young men of the village to serve in the army because the nation was going to war; but he left the farmer's son behind because of his broken leg. "How fortunate!" the farmer's neighbors said. "Maybe" replied the farmer. Alan Watts, a British philosopher specializing in Eastern thought, made an interesting observation about this story. Watts writes, "The whole process of nature is an integrated process of immense complexity, and it's really impossible to tell whether anything that happens in it is good or bad — because you never know what will be the consequence of misfortune; or you never know what will be the consequences of good fortune." If we replace the word, "nature" with "God", we see one of the great themes of Scripture. God's plan is far more complex than we could ever imagine and what looks like misfortune often turns out to be quite fortunate — and vice versa. Faith is trusting in the Lord with all our heart and not relying on our own understanding because we realize that we're not in a position to see what is fortunate or unfortunate and so we must trust that God knows what He's doing because He is all-wise and all-good. Immature faith tries to tell God what we think He should do. Mature faith trusts that He knows what He is doing, not matter how it looks to us at the moment. This morning we're going to talk about how we move from immature to mature faith as we look at another conversation between God and Moses; and how to become more like the Chinese farmer and less like his neighbors.

We are in the Old Testament book of Exodus which we've entitled *The Rhythms of Redemption*. The Bible isn't a collection of stories; it is a single story and Exodus summarizes that story as God delivers His people from 400 years of slavery in Egypt and leads them to the land He has promised to give to them. Exodus is a picture of salvation and the life of faith and so many of the themes in this book will reappear throughout the rest of the Bible. At this point in the story, God has called Moses to go to Pharaoh and tell him to free God's people. Moses obeys and the whole thing goes badly. Pharaoh says he doesn't know who the Lord is and will not release the Hebrew slaves. And to squelch any further foolishness like this, he orders that the straw which the Hebrew slaves need to manufacture the bricks they are required to produce is to be withheld. They'll have to find it themselves but they will still be required to produce the same number of bricks each day. And when production suffers, they're punished severely. Moses obeys God and everything gets worse for God's people and for Moses. Pharaoh won't listen to Moses, his people are mad at him, their faith in God is wavering and Moses' own faith is being challenged; which brings us to another conversation between God and Moses. Moses is a man of faith but his faith is still immature. This morning I want you to see the difference between immature and mature faith — and how our faith only grows when we realize that:

- A. God's plan is better than my plan.
- B. God's purpose is larger than my purpose
- C. God's ability is greater than my inability.

First, **God's plan is better than my plan.** Ex 5:22-23 *Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have You brought harm to this people? Why did You ever send me? "Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done harm to this people, and You have not delivered Your people at all."* Why is Moses struggling with his faith? Things aren't going the way he expected. Apparently Moses thought that once he announced to Pharaoh that God commanded him to release the Hebrews, Pharaoh would immediately comply. But when Pharaoh not only ignores God but makes Israel's situation even more intolerable – and the Hebrews blame Moses, Moses' faith in God is shaken. "Your plan isn't working at all. Why did you send me if You weren't serious about delivering Your people?" Immature faith wants to tell God how He should behave. Have you ever been convinced that God is calling you to do something and so you step out in faith – confident that He is with you and will give you success – only to suddenly find yourself seemingly on your own and failing big time? 30 years ago, when I began to realize not only that God has called the church to continually be starting more churches but that He was specifically calling me to plant a church, I was surprised but so excited. I never intended to become a pastor and when Laurie and I left the campus ministry to pursue an opportunity to serve the local church, I had no idea of where it would lead. However God made it clearer and clearer that He was calling us to start a church to reach people who didn't feel comfortable in traditional churches. There had only been a couple of other instances in my life when God had led so clearly and I was thrilled; even though this was a completely different career path than I had planned on. I talked to my boss, Randy Roth, the senior pastor at First Covenant of Oakland where I had been serving as Director of Evangelism and Discipleship about what I thought God was saying and Randy was super-encouraging. He said the first thing I needed to do was to put together a plan for how we could begin a new church and submit it to the church board for approval. I thought, "Wow, God is opening doors already." Not so much. I wrote a simple plan for starting a new congregation, submitted it to the board for review and then began meeting with a small group of couples every Sunday evening to read through the New Testament, and asking the question, "If we start a church, what kind of church will it be? What kind of church would Jesus want it to be?" We just began with a blank slate, as if we were reinventing church and went back to the instructions to see what we should do. It was really exciting and what we learned in those Sunday evening sessions became the basis of Creekside. However, when the church board read my plan, they liked it but they thought, "Maybe we should have a long range plan too." So they decided to delay making a decision about planting a new church until they could put together a 5 year plan for First Covenant; and if you've ever been part of the leadership of a large church, you know how long that process takes. Everybody has to be brought into the process, every opinion needs to be heard and vetted, study groups appointed, consultants consulted; the rough draft of the plan written and then revised and then presented to the church to be voted on. Our little group was ready to launch right now but we were sitting on our hands, waiting for the church to finish their plan before they could give us a decision on ours. It was frustrating. I felt like God had commanded me to go yet the church said, "Not yet." People from our little core group were saying, "Let's just leave and start a church on our own. We don't need their permission to do what God has called us to do." Yet I didn't feel right about doing that, knowing how divisive and hurtful it would be to First Covenant. I had no choice but to wait for the process to work itself out. But I did have some conversations with God similar to the conversation Moses has here. "What's the deal? I step out in faith to do what You've called me to and nothing is working and I look like a weak compromiser to my team. Were you just playing with me when You called me to start a church?" Ex 6:1 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for under compulsion he will let them go, and under compulsion he will drive them out of his land."* "Moses, did you think this was going to be that easy; that Pharaoh would say, "Of course you can leave. I don't want to be on your God's wrong side?" This will be a bigger struggle than you anticipated but you will see how this is going to result in My glory and in My people's good." The first lesson Moses must learn about mature faith is that God's plan is better than Moses' plan. "This isn't turning out the way I thought it would." "And...?" "But You didn't do what I wanted You to do?" "So...?" The difference between immature and mature faith is the difference between the farmer and his neighbors. The neighbors assumed they knew what should happen; the farmer did not. Immature faith tries to

get God to help us with our plan; real faith trusts God's plan. Most of the struggles we have in trusting God come from assuming that we know how God should do what He's promised to do. Moses struggles with his faith when God doesn't deliver Israel the way Moses thought He would and I struggled with my faith when roadblocks and obstacles kept me from moving forward in doing that I knew God wanted me to do. If you are struggling with your faith today, you might ask yourself, "Am I struggling with what I believe God can do or with how I think He should do it?" The path we're on is essential to get us where God wants us to go; even when we can't see it and that brings us to the second step in moving from an immature to a mature faith.

God's purpose is larger than my purpose. The reason God's plan is usually different than my plan is because His purpose is larger than my purpose. Moses is focused only on getting Israel out of Egypt. However God has a larger purpose. Ex 6:2-8 *"God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD;(a phrase which God repeats throughout this conversation and is literally "I am Yahweh," the most common name for God used in the Old Testament. The Jews believed the name Yahweh so sacred that it was never uttered and so in the Hebrew Bible, whenever the letters YHWH appear in the text, the Jews would substitute the Hebrew word Adonai or Lord. When the Old Testament was translated into English, the Hebrew word Yahweh is similarly translated as Lord. Yahweh – the name which God revealed to Moses means I Am.) and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but {by} My name, LORD, (Yahweh) I did not make Myself known to them. (God is revealing things about Himself to Moses and to the Hebrews which He did not reveal to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who knew Him as God Almighty – El Shaddai: the God who provides and protects – as they saw how He protected and provided for them. They did not know Him by His name, Yahweh. Now that doesn't mean that God never used His name with them because we can read in Genesis that He did. What God means is that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not understand what His name, Yahweh, revealed about God. Theologians call this progressive revelation. The further we go in the story of the Bible; the more God reveals about Himself; and the point God is making to Moses is that He will reveal Himself to Israel in a new way as He frees them from Egypt.) I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned. Furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. (Many believe that God's name, Yahweh, means that He is the covenant keeping God; that "I Am" means that He is always true and faithful and cannot lie or change and therefore He always keeps His promises. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob knew that God promised to bless their descendants in the land He promised to give them; but they weren't in a position to see Him keep those promises. However now 400 years later, the children of Israel will see God keep the covenant He made with their ancestors.) Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you {for} a possession; I am the LORD.'"* God's purpose is not simply to rescue the Hebrews from their slavery in Egypt. He is going to reveal Himself to them as Yahweh, the God who always keeps His covenant that they might know Him, His character and His power. And He is going to make them His people and bring them to the land He has set aside for them for their possession. And He intends to bless them as His people so that other people will know Him as well. His purpose is larger than Moses' purpose and that's why His plan is different than Moses' plan. To reveal Himself to His people and to the surrounding nations, Pharaoh must resist His commands so that God can display His great power, proving not only that He exists but that He is more powerful than all the gods of Egypt. The second step in moving from an immature to a mature faith is understanding that God always has a larger purpose for what He does than we can see in the moment. It took more than 2 years of us to finally launch Creekside but because we waited until First Covenant was ready to send us out, we left with a far larger group of people who were excited about winning new people to Christ by starting a new church than we would have if we had left when I wanted to leave. What I didn't know at the time was that the Bay Area is a graveyard for new churches and that the vast majority never make it past first few years before they disband and disappear. What looked like an unfortunate delay to me turned out to be a very fortunate preparation. Because it took us years to actually begin Creekside, more people at First Covenant had the chance to hear about what we were going to do and to pray about joining us and we took a much larger group of people with us from Oakland to San Leandro than I ever anticipated; which meant that we were financially independent and self-supporting from day one. And it meant that we had far more

trained and mature leaders than we would have had if we had left when I wanted to leave. Most importantly, I wasn't ready to lead a church when I first realized that was what God was calling me to do. I was too proud, too independent, and too impulsive. I needed to be humbled, learn to submit to authority and learn how to wait on the Lord – all lessons which have proved indispensable in our history as a church since then. Here's the point. Whatever you're going through today, God has a larger purpose for it than you realize; whether it is illness or unemployment or a strained relationship; His plan for you is only good and He alone knows all that it will take to achieve that plan. Trusting Him means saying, "I don't know why this is happening but apparently it's necessary and so I'll trust You." A mature faith understands that God's plan is better, that His purpose is larger and finally

God's Ability is Greater than My Inability. An immature faith limits God to my own limitations while a mature faith knows that God can do whatever He wants through whomever He wants. Have you noticed that it is easier to believe God to work as long as we don't have to be involved? Do you believe that God changes lives through community groups? I know He does. Well, would you like to lead one? No way. If I'm the leader, failure is guaranteed. Well, how about teaching a children's class? I'm bad with kids. How about visiting somebody in the hospital? Believe me, they will feel worse if I show up. We believe that God can do anything; just not through us. So who are we really trusting – God or ourselves? Ex 6:9-13 *So Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses on account of {their} despondency and cruel bondage.* Why did the Hebrews refuse to listen to Moses? "We listened to you once and look where that got us." *Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the sons of Israel go out of his land." But Moses spoke before the LORD, saying, "Behold, the sons of Israel have not listened to me; how then will Pharaoh listen to me, for I am unskilled in speech?"* Moses not only blames God for what's happened, He blames himself. "If I was a better speaker, Pharaoh would have listened to me and we wouldn't be in this mess. Moses limits what God can do to his own limitations. Ex 6:13 *Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and gave them a charge to the sons of Israel and to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt.* God replies, "Just tell the sons of Israel and Pharaoh what I tell you to tell them. I'll take care of the details." Now this conversation will continue in vs. 28; but beginning with vs. 13 Moses reviews his own genealogy. Why? Moses is making the point that God is not limited by our limitations. Moses says, "If God can use me, He can use anybody. Just look at my family." Then Moses lists the three oldest sons of Jacob; Reuben, Simeon and Levi from whom Moses is descended - three men who each sinned in a big way. Reuben slept with the mother of several of his brothers and Simeon and Moses' ancestor Levi murdered an entire village because the son of the village leader raped their sister. Moses isn't bragging about his family tree, he's confessing it. That's why he closes with vs. 26-27, "*This was the very Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said, 'Bring the Israelites out of Egypt by their hosts.' They were the very ones who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt to bring the Israelites from Egypt—that was this same Moses and Aaron*" "If God can use losers like Aaron and me, He can use anybody." Moses knows that he and Aaron come from a long line of scalawags. And now that God is about to do something unprecedented in the story of the Bible, Moses wants to remind his readers to not forget who the real hero of this story is. "Not only was I a crummy public speaker, I came from a loser family." Don't ever think that your family you or your weaknesses or failures disqualify you from being used by God. He uses whomever he wants to use for His glory and He is the hero of the story of Exodus – not Moses. Now back to our story...

Ex 6:28-30 *"Now it came about on the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, that the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "I am the LORD; speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I speak to you." (Vs. 28 continues the conversation which we left in vs. 13.) But Moses said before the LORD, "Behold, I am unskilled in speech; how then will Pharaoh listen to me?"* Ex 7:1-5 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I make you {as} God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. (God will tell Moses what to say to Pharaoh and Moses will tell Aaron – so Moses' lack of confidence in his public speaking becomes irrelevant because Aaron will*

do the talking. Nobody is good at everything but everybody is good at something and just because something needs to be done doesn't mean you're the best person to do it. That's why we need to work together rather than to fly solo. However in this case, it doesn't really matter who talks because Pharaoh's not going to listen. *"But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments. The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst."* When Moses limits what God can do through him because of his own limitations, God replies that Moses' inability to speak actually fits right into His plan. No human will talk Pharaoh into releasing Israel from slavery. God will. In fact, God says that He will ensure that Pharaoh will refuse to listen to Moses so that God can reveal His power to the Egyptians and to the Hebrews. Here is what mature faith realizes. God is not only not limited by our limitations, He uses those very limitations to accomplish His purpose. If you are a disciple of Jesus, you know Christ calls you to follow Him in fishing for people and sharing the gospel. Yet most people who consider themselves disciples don't do it. Why? We're afraid we'll mess it up. A person's eternal destiny hangs in the balance. This is more serious than brain surgery; so the safe thing is to keep my mouth shut and leave it to evangelists and pastors and professional Christians who know what they're talking about. God can't work through me. I can't explain stuff or answer questions. I'll look like an idiot and turn them off from ever wanting to know about Jesus. Yet in my experience, you are the best person to share about what Christ has done for you. You're not slick or professional or an expert – but those aren't limitations in the hands of God. You're relatable and real. Paul wrote that when I'm the most weak, I'm the most strong because that's when I depend upon the power of Christ. My limitations not only don't limit God but actually make me useful to God – if they drive me to trust in Him rather than in myself.

A mature faith knows that because we are not in the position to know what is truly fortunate or unfortunate, God's plan is better than our plan, His purpose is larger than our purpose and His ability is greater than our inability. Notice the results of a mature faith. *Ex 7:6-7 So Moses and Aaron did {it;} as the LORD commanded them, thus they did. Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they spoke to Pharaoh.* A mature faith obeys. If I truly believe God, I will obey God and if I don't obey, I don't believe. We're not saved because we obey. We're saved by faith in what Christ has accomplished for us in His crucifixion and resurrection. He died the death that we deserved to die that God could forgive all our sins by punishing Him in our place and He rose from the dead in our place so that we could live forever. And when we believe that good news, God gives us eternal life. However, if I don't obey Jesus, I have no reason to think that I really believe in Him. So here's a simple test to see if you believe and how mature your faith is. How large is the gap between the time something happens and the time you respond to it? The bigger the gap, the greater the faith; if my horse runs away or someone cuts me off on the freeway or a family member says something mean; and I immediately get mad and say "How unfortunate! (or something more colorful) where is my faith? I assume that I know the way life is supposed to work and this isn't it. But when those things happen and I take time before I react to consider God and what He is doing and what He wants me to do; and refuse to make a snap judgment about the situation but concentrate instead on how He wants me to respond, that's faith. Patience is just a longer gap between what happens and how we respond and patience is the evidence of a mature faith. How mature is your faith? How does it need to grow? What will you do?