

Are You Disappointed with God #5

Series: Epic Journey: From Where We Are to Where God Wants Us

Exodus 4:29-7:13

We're taking this summer to walk through the book of Exodus, which is the Epic Journey of how the Hebrew people were rescued from slavery in Egypt and brought to the edge of the Promised Land. God was taking them from where they were to where He wanted them to be. **Our big idea for this whole series is that God does the same thing for us, *if we're willing*. He takes us from where we are to the better future, He has for us.**

So, in many ways, the story of the Israelites is our story.

And that's especially true with today's passage because it deals with **disappointment**. What a terrible feeling it is, to be disappointed. Isn't it? When you're hoping for something, and expecting something, and it doesn't happen.

In April 2013, an article in the USA Today Money section reported that Apple's stock has been struggling. According to the article, "The Apple stock crash is reaching a historic order of magnitude, shaking the faith of investors who piled on in large part on Jobs' showmanship." Shares were down 44 percent, and the crash has obliterated \$291.2 billion in shareholder wealth.

What precipitated Apple's stock crash at that time? The causes may be complex, but the article focused on one primary factor—the death of co-founder Steve Jobs on October 5, 2011. Research has shown "the fact that a sick or dying CEO is generally a big problem right away for stocks." The article noted that when a CEO leaves a company the "short-term shock" turns into "long-term disappointment."

When Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples might have been excused for seeing it as a crisis. Yes, they had been commissioned, yes, they had been taught, yes, they had spent three years in His presence.

Like the Apple crisis, one might have thought the disciples did not have much hope without their leader. However, Jesus had commissioned them to preach

to the world, but he had also said, ***“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.”***

The radical change was that Jesus himself, in the person of the Spirit, would inhabit their ordinary lives. Ordinary fishermen and tax collectors would be indwelt by the very Spirit of Jesus himself.

There are four powers we need to truly live: The power of the incarnation, which is the power of God ***with*** us; the power of Christ's resurrection, or the power of God ***for*** us; the power of sanctification, which is the power of God ***in*** us; and the power of vocation, or the power of God working ***through*** us.

God is with us. God is for us. God is in us. God works through us. But here's the clincher. Without love, all four powers remain elusive. Through love, all four flourishes.

After forty years, Moses encounters God in the burning bush, and God tells Moses his calling in life is to go back to Egypt and set his people free. And last week we talked about the deep doubts Moses had.

We're covering a lot of ground this morning, so I'm not going to read every verse in this section. I want to get the flow of the story, so, I'm going to divide it up into four parts. **The first Part, I'll call Promising.**

Moses has met up with his brother Aaron near Midian, and the two of them have made the long journey back to Egypt, and beginning in Exodus 4:29, it says; ***“29 Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, 30and Aaron told them everything the Lord had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, 31and they believed. And when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.”***

I imagine the elders were kind of suspicious at first, but the more Moses and Aaron talked, and especially after they saw the signs God had given Moses the power to perform, and heard what God had said, they felt hope. **Isn't that what we feel when we read the bible and the Holy Spirit gives us a word of encouragement. [Give Examples]**

I love their response: they bowed down and worshiped. Nothing had changed yet! They were still slaves! They were still in Egypt, but they had received a promise from God, and they chose to believe God's word, rather than what their eyes could see. **They believed in their hearts what they couldn't yet see with their eyes.**

For each of these four parts, I'm going to ask you a question. Question #1: **Are you finding hope in God's Word, despite the circumstances? Do you believe in your heart what you can't yet see with your eyes.**

The longest book in the bible is the Psalms. Out of 150 Psalms, 67 of them are Psalms of lament or sorrow. I know, that sounds depressing, but it's not when you consider that in almost every one of these Psalms, King David starts out saying to God, things like my life is a disaster. My soul is in anguish. People are trying to kill me. **BUT** I know God is going to come through.

They're brutally honest about the difficulties and disappointments of life, but they always have a turning point where they say, despite what I see and what's happening, I know it's going to end well, because God is good. And it's not just the Psalms! The core of the Bible is about a cross followed by a resurrection. For all God's people, the story ends well!

The more you saturate your mind with Scripture, the more of a heavenly perspective you will have. You'll be able to see beyond whatever crisis or circumstance you're going through right now. Saturate yourself in the Word of God. Read it. Meditate on it. Memorize it. Let it make you a person of hope.

Napoleon was right when he said "Leaders are dealers in hope." So whether you're a teacher, or a coach, a mentor, a boss, a pastor, or a parent, the number one job is to give people hope that is rooted in the Word of God.

So, for the first time in a long time, the people of Israel were hopeful. They heard the word, and they worshiped.

Part 2, I'm calling: Push Back.

Exodus 5:1-9: *Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness.'"*

2Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go.”

3Then they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword.”

4But the king of Egypt said, “Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work!” 5Then Pharaoh said, “Look, the people of the land are now numerous, and you are stopping them from working.”

6That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and overseers in charge of the people: 7“ You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. 8But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don’t reduce the quota. They are lazy; that is why they are crying out, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to our God.’ 9Make the work harder for the people so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies.”

Go down to verse 15: 15 Then the Israelite overseers went and appealed to Pharaoh: “Why have you treated your servants this way? 16Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told, ‘Make bricks!’ Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people.” (NIV)

17Pharaoh said, “Lazy, that’s what you are—lazy! That is why you keep saying, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.’ 18Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks.”

19The Israelite overseers realized they were in trouble when they were told, “You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day.” 20When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, 21and they said, “May the Lord look on you and judge you! You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.” (NIV)

Any time you have high hopes you're setting yourself up, because either your hopes will be fulfilled, or end in disappointment. In this case, the hopes of the Israelites were shattered. Pharaoh had absolutely no regard for God, and he

doesn't just say, "No"; he amps up the misery: same brick quota, but now it's BYOS: "bring your own straw." AND the Israelites turn on Moses and Aaron! **"What are you doing to us? You have put a sword in their hand to kill us."**

At this point, the people are devastated; Moses and Aaron feel defeated. They had got their hopes up, and now life was worse than ever.

Here's the question: **Are you expecting push back from the enemy for following God? [You Should]**

In Acts 14, Paul and his companions planted several new churches; in the process they've been attacked and stoned and run out of town. And here's what it says in Acts 14:21-22... ***21They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.*** (NIV)

Paul was telling them the truth that following Christ is sometimes hard, especially in a culture that's becoming increasingly secular. We would rather hear that God wants to make us happy, and give us victory, health, and prosperity, [**which He does**], but Paul says, **"There are lots of hardships."**

I'm telling you this because any time you step out in faith, there will be pushbacks from the enemy. One of our former Sunday School teachers used to say, **"new level...new devil."** I want you to be ready for that!

Do you remember the old 'Far Side' cartoons? One of my them had two deer standing in the woods, and one of them has a target right on his chest that looks like a bull's eye. And his friend says, **'That's a bummer of a birthmark.'**

When you take God at his word and step out in faith, like Moses, you become a target for criticism, complaining. You become the focus of people's disappointments and unmet expectations.

The very people he's trying to help turn on him. If you step up and lead, there will be times you'll be admired and thanked and praised...but there will be other times when you'll be misunderstood and slandered and attacked.

Part 3: Setback.

Exodus 5: 22 Moses returned to the Lord and said, 22Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me? 23Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and you have not rescued your people at all." (NIV)

Chapter 6, verse 1: 1Then the Lord said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country." (NIV)

Go down to verse 6: "Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. 7I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. 8And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.'"

9Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and harsh labor. 10Then the Lord said to Moses, 11"Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his country."

12But Moses said to the Lord, "If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips." (NIV)

God re-affirms his promises to Moses: "Moses, it's okay. I got this. Stay with the plan." At first, Moses seems ready to believe, and give it another shot. But then he goes back to the people. And verse 9 says, "**they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and harsh labor.**"

The Hebrew literally says, "**They did not listen to him because of shortness of breath.**" Isn't that a strange thing to say? Think about it: what

happened to them was like a punch in the gut; it knocked the wind out of them.

You got your hopes up about something, and it went so badly, you feel like you can't breathe.

And sometimes deep discouragement sets us back. We say, "I'm not going to get burned again. I'm not going to get my hopes up again. It's not worth the pain."

When Moses hears how the people react, it knocks the wind out of his sails. And he goes back to self-doubt mode. He says to God, "If my own people won't listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen?"

Here's the question for all of us at this juncture: **Have you allowed past disappointments to rob your future? Have you had some major setbacks, and so now you're playing it safe, because you're afraid to get disappointed or hurt again?**

Did you notice how many times in this passage, God says, "I am the Lord"? Over and over again, "I am the Lord." In other words, "I'm the one who's going to do this! Trust me."

Remember, a few years after this, the people of Israel are on the border of the Promised Land. They send in 12 spies to check out the land. And they come back to report what they found. Ten of the guys say, "No way. The place is filled with giants. We'll get crushed." But two guys, Joshua and Caleb, stand up and say, "Let's do this. Our God is big enough."

Ask yourself: Am I just reacting and responding to the mood of the people I lead, or am I initiating vision and movement based on where I believe God is calling us to go?

Okay, last Part, we'll call: Unmoved.

Exodus 7, starting in verse 8: ***"The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 9'When Pharaoh says to you, 'Perform a miracle,' then say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh,' and it will become a snake."***

10So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded. Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. 11Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts: 12Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. 13Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had said." (NIV)

You might be thinking, 'This is a sad ending to a sermon' because Moses and Aaron go back to Pharaoh, his heart is still hard and unyielding. Another failure! But that's not the point.

They have seen promises turn into push-back and then face a set-back, but they are unmoved.

The most important verse in this last section is verse 10: *So, Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded.*

That's huge. Even though they had a really bad experience the first time. Even though their own people were frustrated. Despite all that, they did what God told them to do. They didn't let the disappointment break them. And they took a step of trust in God.

Isn't this how we grow, spiritually? By taking risky steps of obedience based on faith. Like Peter stepping out of the boat, to walk on water with Jesus. **Were Moses and Aaron crazy to go back to Pharaoh.? No, they were obedient.**

Let's leave Egypt for a moment and fast forward a few hundred years.

Do you know what it is like to have a mountaintop experience and then come down hard when necessity forces you to get back to reality?

That's what it must have been like when Jesus, Peter, James, and John came down from the mountain in Mark 9:14–29. Imagine the letdown it must have been for them. They have just had a glimpse of heaven. Jesus was transfigured.

Moses and Elijah appeared. The disciples were enveloped in a cloud of God's glory and heard the voice of God. The experience was so moving that Peter wanted to stay indefinitely.

So, they make their way down the mountain again. And what do they see when they reach the bottom? They see the crowd. They see the religious leaders, the theologians and guardians of tradition, who always seem so angry and accusing when Jesus is around. And there at the center of it all, are the disciples, embroiled in some kind of argument with the theologians.

There is a lot of shouting and finger-pointing. Questions are being asked, and the disciples, it seems, are having trouble coming up with answers.

Suddenly, someone at the back of the crowd spots Jesus, and there is a rush of movement as the crowd rolls toward him. But Jesus doesn't stop. He passes through the swelling crowd like Moses striding between the walls of water at the Red Sea, until he reaches the spot where the disciples are.

"What are you arguing with them about?" he asks.

There is silence for a moment as the religious leaders glare at Jesus, and the disciples look uneasily at one another. A tired looking man steps forward. With drooping shoulders and a haunted gaze, he seems like one who has had to carry a heavy burden a long way and sees no rest in sight. When the man speaks, there is a touch of hysteria in his voice. "Teacher, I brought my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech.

Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."

The theologians stand with arms folded in smug superiority and wait for Jesus to provide an explanation, while the disciples flush red and look nervously at each other—like someone who is trying to think of an excuse when they know they have none.

Finally, Jesus breaks the silence: "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

It doesn't take long. The boy is disheveled and dirty, no longer a child but not quite a man yet. Then in a moment, he snaps to life and the crowd's murmur of sympathy turns to a gasp of fear as the boy falls to the ground, twitching and foaming at the mouth.

Once the boy is still, Jesus begins to question the father, sounding like a physician diagnosing a patient. "How long has he been like this?" Jesus asks. "From childhood," the father answers.

The anger that was on his face a few minutes ago is now gone. He just looks tired and desperate. "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him" the father says. "But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

'If you can...' Everything is possible for him who believes. Jesus says this without contempt. He turns to face Jesus again and begins to weep. "I do believe," he cries. "Help me overcome my unbelief!"

"You deaf and mute spirit," Jesus declares. "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." The words split the air like a crack of thunder, and the boy heaves like someone in the throes of death. The father covers his ears in terror, trying to block the unholy shriek that has just emanated from his lips.

The father weeps and the boy lies in the dirt so pale and still that the crowd thinks he is dead. But the boy opens his eyes. This time, instead of a vacant stare, there is a look of comprehension and relief. The boy fixes his eyes on Jesus, who reaches down, takes him by the hand, and raises him to his feet.

It isn't until later, after they have put the crowd behind them and gone indoors—out of range of listening ears and prying eyes—that someone gets the nerve to ask the question that is on their minds.

"Why couldn't we drive it out?" they ask. "This kind," he says, "can come out only by prayer."

The thing that I find so gripping about this story is not the miracle—as marvelous as that is—but the disappointment. The skepticism of the theologians. The despair of the father. The confusion of the disciples.

Everybody in this passage, it seems, is disappointed with somebody. The boy's father is disappointed with Jesus. Jesus is disappointed with the disciples. And the disciples, I think, are disappointed with themselves.

In the end, it all boils down to the same basic problem—this Christian thing doesn't seem to be working. I wonder how many of you feel this way.

In fact, the title of my message this morning is: **Are you disappointed with God?**

There is disappointment enough to go around, but Jesus knows the remedy. He knows that when life pulls the rug out from under you and when this Jesus-thing doesn't seem to measure up to your expectation, and when the church falls short and those who claim to be God's people fail, it's time to put wishful thinking aside and get back to reality.

First, the reality is that our **disappointment does not negate God's power.**

Jesus sees more than one person needing help. Jesus is interested in helping the boy, but the father also has a BIG problem.

Listen to the father's response in verse 24: ***"Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!'"***

Notice how the father's request changes from **"help us"** to **"help me."** The father suddenly sees that his son isn't the only one in need. A minute ago his request was, "Help my son." Now it's, "Help my disbelief." These two are clearly related.

Most of us would be inclined to place them in a different order. We would say, "Jesus, just fix the son, and the father's faith will fall into place."

But Jesus deals with the deeper problem first. Jesus gives this man the only thing that will really help him at this point. By pointing out this man's need, Jesus also assures him that, secondly, **doubt does not diminish God's potential.**

When those who should help you don't, when those you thought could help you can't, and when you know what you need but don't have the strength to reach for it, you turn to the only one who really can help. You turn to Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."

What was true of this father is also true of us. The fact that we struggle with doubt and disappointment does not put us beyond God's reach. This father's cry is our cry: Lord, we believe— but help our unbelief!

Some of you have grown weary and lost heart. I mean, you're here in church, but you're not all here. You've been burned; you've been discouraged; you've been kicked in the gut, you won't say it, but you're disappointed with God.

Let me show you one more passage. 2 Corinthians 4:8-10: ***"8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body."* (NIV)**

Every time we get hurt, or burned, or disappointed, it's like a little death...and we identify with the death of Jesus. We share in his cross. But then we realize: Jesus didn't stay dead!

He rose again! And he's alive, and he's living in me. So, the resurrection of Jesus fills us, so we can get up again, and walk forward in obedience.

Hebrews 13:8 says, ***"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever."*** ***Do you really believe that?*** I personally think we have no trouble with Jesus Christ being ***"the same yesterday"***—His birth in Bethlehem, His miracle-working ministry across Galilee and Judea, followed by His sacrificial death and His divine resurrection—and I don't think we have trouble with Jesus Christ being ***"the same forever"***—as we proclaim His return to earth, the rapture, the Second Coming, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and eternity in heaven.

I think the problem most of us have is with “Jesus Christ today.”

In John 11 we find Lazarus dead. His sisters had sent word to the Lord four days ago when He was just sick. When Jesus arrived, Lazarus’ sister Martha rushed to meet Him. “Lord, if you had only been here!” she exclaimed. “He would not have died. You could have done something.” **She believed in Jesus Christ yesterday.**

A moment later, she said, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” **She believed in Jesus Christ forever.**

There was something else Martha said in between those two statements. She said, “But even now I know that what you ask of God, God will give you.” Even now, at this moment, I believe you can do anything. She believed in Jesus Christ TODAY. **And in a few short moments she saw her brother Lazarus raised from the dead.**

Here's the final question: Where is God calling you to forget past disappointments, and step forward in faith?

Maybe it's a ministry thing. You stepped up and tried to be a leader in kids ministry. And it didn't work out. So now, not only are you not doing kids' ministry anymore, but you're also not doing any ministry. You're like, "I'm not going through that again." And God is saying, "Get up. Come on. You have the life of Christ in you."

Or maybe it's a relationship thing. You got badly hurt and had your heart broken or dreams crushed. And it so rocked your world. And you're thinking, "I will not get my hopes up again. It's not worth the pain."

And God is saying, "Don't let the past rob you of the future that I have for you. You have the life of Christ in you. Get up and go forward."

When Moses left the palace that day, the situation hadn't gotten any better. Pharaoh said 'No,' a second time. Pharaoh's magicians somehow duplicated the signs that Moses did. The people of Israel were still wandering around looking for straw. Moses still had a big target on his chest. Nothing had changed yet!

BUT Moses had one thing going for him. God was with him. And he chose to walk in faith and obedience to God. And at the end of the day, that's all God asks of us.

What about you? You have God's promises and you've stepped out in faith, but you've faced some push back and some setbacks. Where is God calling you to forget past disappointments, and step forward in faith?