



## TIME OF GRACE®

# *Am I Strong Enough? God Really Works Through Ordinary Me?*

## Study Notes

### *Summary*

One of history's most famous men was born during terrible times. His life is proof that God is working out great plans even when we cannot see them. What might God be doing during our hardest days?

- God uses the \_\_\_\_\_ to do the \_\_\_\_\_.
- **Exodus 1:1-17,20:** <sup>1</sup> These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: <sup>2</sup> Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; <sup>3</sup> Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; <sup>4</sup> Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. <sup>5</sup> The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all; Joseph was already in Egypt. <sup>6</sup> Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, <sup>7</sup> but the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them. <sup>8</sup> Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. <sup>9</sup> "Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. <sup>10</sup> Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country." <sup>11</sup> So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. <sup>12</sup> But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites <sup>13</sup> and worked them ruthlessly. <sup>14</sup> They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly. <sup>15</sup> The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, <sup>16</sup> "When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." <sup>17</sup> The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. <sup>20</sup> So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous.
- **Exodus 2:1-10:** <sup>1</sup> Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, <sup>2</sup> and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. <sup>3</sup> But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. <sup>4</sup> His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. <sup>5</sup> Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to

the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. <sup>6</sup> She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said. <sup>7</sup> Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" <sup>8</sup> "Yes, go," she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. <sup>9</sup> Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him. <sup>10</sup> When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."

- Three Applications:
  1. God uses the ordinary to change \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
  2. God uses the ordinary to change \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
  3. God used the ordinary to change \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

### *Points to Ponder*

1. What ordinary people, places, and things has God used to bless you in extraordinary ways? (For example, an ordinary church that first told you the good news about Jesus' forgiveness.)
2. Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. Why does God prefer to use the ordinary, the weak, and the ignored? What implications are there for your life?
3. Meditate on 1 Timothy 1:15-17. What connection can you see between today's message and the apostle Paul's words?

### *Homework for Next Week*

Read Exodus 3:1-14.

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Am I Strong Enough? God Really Works Through Ordinary Me?**  
Exodus 1:1-17,20; Exodus 2:1-10  
October 3, 2021

*Pastor Mike Novotny*

Brothers and Sisters, we have an extraordinary God. And he offers extraordinary blessings and he still has great plans to do extraordinary things through me, through you and through us. But, please... please, do not forget this one thing. In the days of Moses and the days of Jesus and our day today, ordinary is how God ordinarily works.

And we're kicking off a brand new series about the book of Exodus and the life of Moses. And the big idea of this series is that God doesn't just work through the strong people, the impressive people, the amazing people, he works through ordinary people and average people and below average people, and surprising people, and really, really surprising people. God works through people like me, and like you.

So, I want to kick off this message in this series, with an honest confession. And the confession is that, I often daydream about my own death. And it is extraordinary! It normally happens here at church, I'm sitting down in the seats, tons of people are worshiping God, and I notice someone who's looks a little bit fidgety and he stands up, and I notice he has a gun, and he's pulling it out. But, before he could get off a shot, I sprint. And, like the linebacker I never was, I form tackled him to the ground, but I try to wrestle it out of his hands -- I screamed for help, but before you come and help me disarm him, he gets off a shot.

And I put my hand to my stomach, and I'm bleeding, and it's bad. And I try to speak but I can't get out the words, so I looked at my fingers covered in blood, and right in the ground, I start to write. I write the initials of my wife and my kids. The initials of some of my friends, especially those who don't believe the things I believe about Jesus. And, next to each initial, in my own blood, I start to write, quickly, references to Bible passages that I've memorized over the years. My parting words to my bride, my daughters is to trust in something bigger than a temporary man like their father. Pleading through those passages with my closest friends to give up anything that's so temporary and to hold on to Jesus so they could be with me and see his face forever. And once the last chapter and verse is written on the ground... I'm dead. Should I see a therapist? No?

I heard a pastor once say, "You can tell a lot about your heart by the stuff you dream about when your brain is on empty." I think I probably should, but actually, there's a bigger problem to my daydream than just maybe the pride that comes behind it. The problem is that, if I really want to give these three women in my life comfort and strength and hope, and if I really want to share my faith with my friends who maybe don't believe in Jesus just yet, if I'm waiting for some dramatic moment, some viral video, newspaper -- If I'm waiting for extraordinary things through

some extraordinary circumstance, guess what? It's not going to happen. And maybe if I care about their faith and their hope, I shouldn't wait for some extraordinary thing, I should take advantage of the ordinary days that God gives me.

And I want to share that with you today, because I think the enemy of Jesus, the devil -- I think he kind of likes extraordinary Christianity. Like, when you hear those amazing stories about amazing Christian people -- the Mother Theresa's of the world, who go around the world and give up every comfort to serve the poor, and the sick, and the orphaned. When you have those friends who just, you know, somehow they can share their faith and get people to come to church in 30 seconds or less? When you meet these incredible Saints of God who can pray for an hour straight -- I mean, these are moving stories, we love them, we applaud, we cry, we like, we share.

But the problem is, is if you think that's the only way that God works, or even the normal way that God works, guess what you're going to do? Nothing. You're going to sit, and watch, and wait, and miss the fact that God wants to do great things through ordinary people. I guess I'm making an assumption about you, that most of you, and most of you, are ordinary. We're ordinary people, but the great thing I want to tell you today, in fact, there's just one thing I want you to remember about this service, is this big idea I want to share with you on the screen.

Here it is, that God uses the ordinary to do the extraordinary. If you're familiar with the Bible, you might know the name Moses. He was the famous prophet with the 10 commandments. He met with God, and kind of get this, like, movie depiction of him that he was some extraordinary guy. But for the next few weeks, we're going to burst your bubble and say, "He wasn't." He was weak, he was whiny, he made excuses, he didn't want to do it. At one point in his mission and calling, he literally said to the face of God, "Just send someone else."

But God wanted to prove a point, that when he wants to do something extraordinary, he does it through very ordinary people. And we're going to learn that right at the start of this journey as we open up to the book of Exodus. Exodus tells a story of how God emancipates, liberates and frees one to two million Jewish slaves from their bondage in Egypt. He parts the Red Sea, he does miracles, he sends plagues, but what you might not have noticed is that, the very start of the story God pushes the first domino, and it's through absolutely ordinary people.

So, let me prove that to you as I open this amazing book, Exodus, and we're going to start with chapter one, verse one. It says, "These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all; Joseph was already in Egypt. Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them."

So, on page 10 or so, of the book, God made an epic promise to a man named Abraham. Heard his name before? And the promise was that God would make Abraham's descendants, like the, like the stars of the sky, like the sand on the sea shore, like, an episode of the Duggars. They're going to have a boat-load o' kids, and this is actually the place where it happens.

Abraham has a son named Isaac. Isaac has a son named Jacob, and then Jacob has these 12 sons who were all listed here by name. And they're a family of about 70, so big, but not like the stars, until this. Until generation after generation, pregnancy after pregnancy, baby shower after baby shower, this people, what we call the Jewish people, or the descendants, the children of Israel, grow, I think the Bible says, to 600,000 men, plus women, and plus children. Millions of people, God keeping his promise to one man.

Listen to verse eight. "Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. 'Look,' he said to his people, 'the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.'" See, Pharaoh worshiped a god called power, comfort, success and control. And when this growing group of Israelite people threatened that, he freaked out. He wasn't so worried about the little Jewish girls, but ladies don't be offended, just wait to see what happens in the story. It was the boys that worried him. When he saw baby boy after baby boy, he envisioned, what if they all grew up, hundreds of thousands of men, betrayed him, joined his enemies and ripped away his kingdom.

Pharaoh couldn't have it. And so, he enacted what is perhaps the first holocaust. He raised two extraordinarily wicked ideas. Verse 11, "So the Egyptians put slave masters over the Israelites to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly."

Pharaoh literally worked these human beings to death. They were his slaves, and he put a whip to their back until they fell over in the Egyptian sand, dead. And that was good in his mind. Build my cities, you die, my kingdom, less of yours. It was his diabolical win-win plan. And then it got worse. Verse 15, "The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, 'When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.'"

I mean, though this is an ancient story, but this isn't just a story, this actually happened in human history. Can you imagine being there? Can you imagine the moment after making love, wondering if she was pregnant, and what the chromosomes of that baby would be? Could you imagine trying to be excited about a baby, but in the days before ultra-sound, not knowing if that baby's life would be threatened from the second it came out of your womb? Could you imagine trying to encourage your own daughter or sister, or being there during that final push, when the gender was revealed and the mother saw the look on the midwife's face. Can you imagine trying to raise a baby boy without your neighbor or your boss or the Egyptian next door knowing what it was?

And the book of Exodus tells this story, that God would break Pharaoh's hard heart. He would send miracles and plagues and a man named Moses. He would divide the sea to save his people

from that misery, but do you know how it all started? With absolutely ordinary people. Let me prove it to you. Verse 17, "The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous."

These two ordinary women, and what do they do? Something extraordinary. They stood up to the most powerful man on earth, a guy who thought he was a god, and they saved these little boys' lives. Was Moses born during that time? If it wouldn't have been for their courage? Their justice? Their passion for righteousness? That the man who saved Israel wouldn't have been saved himself?

Ah! But God isn't done. Jump to chapter two. "Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. 'This is one of the Hebrew babies,' she said. Then his sister, the baby's sister, "asked Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?' 'Yes, go,' she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.' So the woman took the baby and nursed him. When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, 'I drew him out of the water.'"

God used ordinary people to save this extraordinary man, who'd carry out his extraordinary work. But friends, you shouldn't be shocked. Because ordinary, is how God ordinarily works. Actually, a great proof is right here in this book. Did you know that in the mid-1800s, most Bible scholars thought that the Greek New Testament, the original language of the New Testament, was extraordinary? Apparently, I heard, there was about five thousand different Greek words that make up the New Testament. And, in the mid-1800s, scholars estimated that about 500 of those words were completely unique to this book.

In other words, in ancient history, in legal documents, in personal letters, you wouldn't find any of these words, there were just like, fancy religious Bible words. What? 10% of the New Testament. That's what they used to think. But then, in the late-1800s, two archeologists were digging in an ancient trash heap in a place called Oxyrhynchus. In that stack of ancient papyrus, they noticed one of those special words from the New Testament, and then another, and then a third, and a fourth, and a fifth, and a sixth, and a hundredth, and a two-hundredth, until almost all 500 of these unique Bible words, they found out, weren't unique at all.

And the way people started to view this book changed. That although it does extraordinary things in the human heart, it was never written in extraordinary language, but in the language of people.

And I've got to tell you, I love that fact. That God, from the days of Moses, up until our day today, he insists on using people in situations like this, and like us.

Write these down, number one: God uses the ordinary to change your life. I have a big hunch that a whole bunch of you would like to make some changes in your life. Alright, and some of those might be pretty big extraordinary changes. Some of you might want to get sober, for the first time in a long time, or stay sober. Some of you are maybe stuck in a relationship that doesn't have affection and forgiveness and commitments and humility, and you just want things to be different tomorrow than they were yesterday. But you know how God makes changes like that? Through the most ordinary stuff. If you've ever been part of a recovery program, you know they have this beautiful powerful saying, "One day at a time." It's not a decade of sobriety. It's just one ordinary day. Say yes to this, and no to that.

I've been the pastor here at the Core for almost six years now. Like, next week is my six-year anniversary. Which means, I've preached between two and three hundred sermons at this church. And as I look out at some of you, some of you have had your lives changed in the last six years. Question, do you remember all two hundred sermons? One hundred sermons? Ten? Today? I forgot half of it already! Oh my goodness! And that's okay. Right? Because it's not some epic church service that changes your life, it's just spiritually feeding your soul, Sunday after Sunday, day after day, and one day, you wake up, and you're not the person you were five years ago.

Some of the strongest athletes you've ever seen, ask them about the workout that changed them. They'll look at you funny. Because through ordinary habits, like prayer, dating each other, coming to church, God turns that dimmer switch into, one day, what once was darkness, becomes light. That's point number one.

Here's point number two: God also uses the ordinary to change their lives. I think it's safe to say that all of us here, and all of you watching at home, we all want the next generation to be better than ours. That true? Right? We want the next generation to love God more than we do. We want them to love each other better than we did. We would love to see God raise up the next Moses, the next Martin Luther, the next Martin Luther King Jr. But do you know who are going to raise amazing men and women like that? Ordinary people. People who'll one day look back and say, "I have no idea how that happened with my kid." I was at this virtual conference a couple of weeks ago, and one of the speakers were talking about her studies of young men and women who had grown up to do great things. She said, one of the key factors outside of the home environment itself, that led a kid in this direction instead of that direction was... one committed adult. And these kids say, you know, it wasn't every relative that I had, I had that one uncle, that one aunt, that one grandparent, who always called, and always checked in, and they didn't get too busy.

It doesn't take a thousand extraordinary people to change the next generation, it takes one. You don't have to call every day. Just stay connected. One conversation, a few texts, what's that going to do pastor? That. That. My last point is by far the most important. So if I lost you, come on back and don't miss this. Number three: God uses the ordinary to change your eternal life. We think of Jesus being special, you know there were a bunch of Jesuses? One of the Apostles was nicknamed Jesus, Barabus, the guy who was released at Jesus' trial, his first name was Jesus.



One of the future Apostles in the book of Acts was named Jesus, there's Jesus Justice. Why do they have to call him Jesus of Nazareth? Because there was a whole bunch of Jesuses! But this ordinary family, from this ordinary place, and this kid with this ordinary name, grew up to do what? The extraordinary! And where did Jesus die? On a cross. We Christians sometimes make the mistake and call it "The Cross," like there's only one. There were three crosses on that one hill on the Friday that Jesus died. The Romans put up hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands, but God used an ordinary death, to do the most extraordinary thing.

So, at the end of every day, you could fall asleep knowing that, "I am forgiven, and I am loved, and I messed up a whole bunch of stuff, but his mercy is more!" As he was dying on the cross, he couldn't use his fingers to write in blood, so he used his words, and he spoke one Greek word "Tetelestai". Ever heard it? If you would dig in that ancient trash heap, you would find the bottom of a receipt with all of these charges, all the things that you owe, one word, "Tetelestai." And it meant, "Paid in full." All the debts gone, erased, and Jesus spoke it. And people understood it.

Brothers and sisters, we have an extraordinary God. And he offers extraordinary blessings and he still has great plans to do extraordinary things through me, through you and through us. But, please, please, please, do not forget this one thing. In the days of Moses and the days of Jesus and our day today, ordinary is how God ordinarily works.

Let's pray.

Oh, Father in heaven, I'm thinking of that passage where you say that you choose the lowly, and the despised, and the people who aren't all that special to be part of your Kingdom and your family. You love to choose those of us who bottomed out, who walked away, sheep who've strayed, those of us who have been so lost in our sin so that we just get that it wasn't us, it was all you. And that's why we love you, it's why we worship you, it's why we sacrifice for you, it's why we obey you.

Thank-you God, for the good news of your love, and I pray, if I could be so bold, that you would do extraordinary things through us this week. Lord, there are people who just don't have a connection to a spiritual family but it could be an ordinary conversation that turns into something more. There are children who are one step away from going down a bad path and running with a bad crowd, but you could use one person to mentor one thing to make the whole ending of the story different.

And so we pray God that you continue your long history of doing extraordinary things just like that. Today, Heavenly Father, we also pray and we continue to pray for truth and justice, for order and love in our country. It feels like the stories keep coming, Heavenly Father, and it's almost hard to believe. Our people are so broken, and we need Jesus for justice and truth to reign. For people to be humble enough to love each other, no matter what our differences and backgrounds.



And so, I pray God, this problem seems so much bigger than me, and us, but if it's true then we can have a part. That ordinary people with extraordinary conviction can make incredible changes in a community, so use us God. In conversations, face to face, and online, use us. May it never happen again, and may we be part of the solution to this incredible problem. God, we call upon you today, like the people of Israel, knowing that without your help, we can't fix it, and we can't change it. But with you, all things are possible. Miracles are possible. And so we pray to you with boldness and with confidence. Amen.