



TIME OF GRACE®

Am I Strong Enough? I Feel Stuck

Study Notes

Summary

At times in life, you feel stuck. There is nowhere to turn. No simple solution. In those moments, you need the Almighty God, the Father who does wonders, the Savior who parts the seas for his people.

- God's goal = _____.
- **Exodus 14:1-4:** ¹ Then the LORD said to Moses, ² "Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. ³ Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.' ⁴ And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD." So the Israelites did this.
- **Exodus 14:10-18:** ¹⁰ As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" ¹³ Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." ¹⁵ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. ¹⁶ Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷ I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. ¹⁸ The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen."

- Exodus 14:21-23,26-28:** ²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, ²² and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. ²³ The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. ²⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen."
²⁷ Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the LORD swept them into the sea. ²⁸ The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.
- Exodus 15:1,2,11:** ¹ Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: "I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea. ² The LORD is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. ¹¹ Who among the gods is like you, LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?"
- God gets glory when he _____

Points to Ponder

- Challenge: Read the entire story of the Red Sea in Exodus 13:17–15:21.
- If a kindergartener asked you what the word *glory* meant, what would you say?
- How much glory (0-100) did you give God during the introduction of this message? Did your number change by the end of the message? What two or three things might increase that number in the week ahead?

Homework for Next Week

Read Mark 11:27-33.

Time of Grace Ministry
Am I Strong Enough? I Feel Stuck
Exodus 14:1-28; Exodus 15:1,2,11
October 24, 2021

Pastor Mike Novotny

Some of you were raised to think that Christianity was about doing your best, and God would meet you halfway. It is not. It is about the kind of God who saves us when we have nothing to offer, and it is why we worship him. My hope is in Christ alone. Not I, but Christ through me.

Quick show of hands. How many of you have ever heard of the phrase hashtag goals? Ever heard that before? Now if you are an Instagram user, that should sound pretty familiar. Or, couple goals, or relationship goals. If you are about my age — you know, maybe you have heard some of the younger folks say it. And if you do not know what a hashtag is, you should probably just leave church right now because it is going to be awkward for you in the minutes to come. Yeah.

So hashtag goals is just a modern, trendy way of saying I like that, I want that, and I would love to become that. Like if you jumped on an airplane after church, you flew over to England, and somehow got into an English premier league soccer game, and you, you know, snapped a selfie from the front row — in the background are my soccer idols — if I saw that picture on social media, I might post. Hashtag goals. Or if your sister got married and finally uploaded her wedding pictures, and she looked perfect, and her hair looked beautiful, and she looked so happy, and the photographer was great, and there is that — you know, that one picture with the sun setting, and she is holding your new brother-in-law's hands, you would post, "Goals." Or if you are at the gym, and your buddy took a video of you just like throwing up 225 on the bench, and a guy like me saw that. Or if you were putting up like 125 on the bench, you know—I would put, "goals." Because, man, I would love to do that. I would love to be that. That is kind of what the phrase means.

So here is my big question for you today. What do you think would make God post that? Like what would he have to see in your life, or my life, or on earth—that if God was an Instagram user, he would post goals. The answer is actually really clear in the Bible. What God wants more than anything—what he craves, what he hopes for, if God would pray to himself, this is what he would pray for — is you worshipping him. If you like collapsed at his feet, if you held onto him, and you started bowing down, lifting up hands, forgetting totally about yourself and fixing your thoughts totally on him, God might pull out his phone, snap a picture of you at his feet, and post goals. In fact, I want to show you this big idea that you find throughout the Bible. I have read the Bible cover to cover a couple of times, and God's biggest goal is this — his own glory. Now that might feel kind of odd to you, especially if you are new to church. I mean, if you did that — if that was your goal for yourself, that all of us should bow down to you — that would be a bit much.

But it is different with God, and here is why. It is not just because he is God, and he is in a category of his own, and he deserves it. Did you know that the more glory that God gets, the better life gets for you? The more you are stunned by God — his presence and his love, the more he takes your breath away, the more he is literally awesome, like there is some awe when you think of him — the more peace and joy and satisfaction you get in this life. In fact, I would propose to you that Christianity offers you very, very little unless God is very, very great. Because what I can guarantee you, week after week, message after message, whether you come here to church or you are sitting there at home, is not an easy life, or a comfortable life, or a rich life, or a healthy life, or a wealthy life. I cannot guarantee our kids are going to potty train really quickly. That they are going to sleep through the night right away. That you are going to meet the one or things are going to turn around at work. Or you are going to get pregnant again. Like I cannot promise you that.

But I can offer you this: God. I actually thought of this yesterday afternoon. A 19-year-old girl flies home to her parents about 10 days ago. And last Sunday, as she sits right about there in church, she starts to not feel right. And in days, everything falls apart. Her body turns on itself. Starts attacking her own nerves and organs. And when I walk in, I see this beautiful young woman—19 years old—in the ICU, intubated. Hoping, praying that she is going to make it and recover. You know, as a Christian, what can I say to her? When I leave the hospital, and there is her mom at the picnic table outside, what do I say to her? Well, I have something to say to them. And it is beautiful, and it is hopeful, and it is joyful, and it is powerful. But it is not—it is going to be fine. I am sure Jesus will fix it. I pray for that. I desire that. But the rock that I can offer that family is nothing besides the presence of a crazy—good and glorious God. And today, if all these people were not here, I might say the same thing to you. Like I cannot promise I can fix your relationship. We are not one of those ministries where you like send in a dollar and we promise God will give you a hundred. But I can offer you today a rock for your life. A hope and a joy so that you will not be shaken, no matter what comes your way. And that rock is God.

So I want to show you a picture behind me, and then I want to ask you a really important question. On a scale of zero to 100, how glorious is your God? I know it is a personal question, so here is what I am going to have you do. Everyone put up your index finger for me. Yeah. Good. I will wait for you. Good. I want you to take that finger, and on your leg, I want you to write your answer. You do not have to tell anyone. No peeking at each other. Because here is my goal for today: to increase that number. For God to gain glory. You are not going to leave church today healthier, wealthier, richer. But I hope you leave happier as that number goes up and you realize that God who goes with you is not some small God. He is awesome in glory.

Now to make that happen, to get you closer to the number that Jesus lived in, I want to tell you one of the most glorious stories of the entire Old Testament. In those thousand or so pages, there is one story that got repeated again, and again, and again when people wanted to remember how great and awesome God was. And it is the story of his people, the Israelites, crossing the Red Sea. I wish I had an hour to explain all the background. There is about one to two million people. God had just rescued them from slavery in Egypt. They were on the run. And we are about to see this moment where God rescues his people, and they turn and give him all the glory. So if you have a Bible with you or you just want to follow along on the screen, we are going to jump into

Exodus 14, and here is how it starts. “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. Now Pharaoh will think the Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert. And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain,’ there it is, “glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.’ So the Israelites did this.”

You see the point, huh? That is a setup. Whatever God is about to do, the purpose is so that he gains glory. So that the Israelites, the Egyptians, the whole world—when they hear this story, they will stop thinking of a 17, or a 31, or an 82. They will give God maximum glory.

But before I keep reading, can I take a really quick tangent? Sorry. I just do not want to lose some of you. Any of you confused by that little phrase where God said, “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart”? And we think God is a God who loves people. Who wants to save people. Why would he like make Pharaoh’s heart rock solid so he rebelled against God? And I wish I had a whole sermon to explain that. I do not, so let me give you the quick answer. Because Pharaoh started it. Now Pharaoh had been so stubborn in enslaving God’s people. He had lied, betrayed, manipulated. He was a king of injustice, and God knew he was not going to change. And so God decided to use this very evil, stubborn man for his purposes. And to do so, God had to harden his heart. He had to make it so proud that Pharaoh would not just accept his losses. He would tear off after the Israelites to enslave them all over again. And God knew if he did that—if he brought the whole army—every chariot, every soldier to crush the Israelites—God would have a chance to gain maximum glory. And that is exactly what happened.

Let us keep reading in Exodus 14. “As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, ‘Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Did not we say to you in Egypt, leave us alone? Let us serve the Egyptians. It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert.’ Moses answered the people, ‘Do not be afraid. Stand firm, and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you. You need only to be still.’ Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army through his chariots and horsemen. The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I gain glory,’” I think God’s making a point, ““through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.””

So God says it three times. It must matter that much. God wants glory, and it is about to happen. But before I read you the best part of the story, notice who does not get the glory in this account? The people who get saved. And if you could reach into the Bible and slap someone, would not it be these people? I cannot imagine being Moses. I wish there was like an Instagram picture of Moses’ face when—“Did not we tell you, Moses, that we liked being slaves?” Like, “No, you never said that.” “Did not we love it when we were living in Egypt?” Moses would have said,

“No. You cried out to God. That is how this whole thing started. You were miserable, you prayed, he heard you, he saved you.” But notice these people. After 10 miracles, after being released from their slavery—the first hard thing that happens to them after being saved, and their faith falls apart. They whine. They complain. They forget God. They throw a pity party. They yell at their spiritual leaders. So whatever God is about to do, it is not because these people are great, and strong, and wonderful, and Christian. It is because he is a good God. A God who deserves to gain glory. And so this is what he does.

Let us look at the climax of the story. “Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. And all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. The Israelites pursued them, and all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen.’ Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing towards it, and the Lord swept them into the sea. The water flowed back and covered the chariots and the horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.”

Wow. Can you even imagine that? This is not just some, you know, Bible story that you see in some cartoon-y kids book. This is history, which means real people experienced this real event. Can you imagine yourself there? Maybe you are holding little ones like this on your hip. And you turn, and there is the army that wants to take your children and enslave them. That wants to steal your wife and do unthinkable things to her. And you are defenseless. Chariots were the tanks of the ancient world, and you did not stand a chance. And then your man Moses raises his staff, and the inexplicable happens. Can you imagine if your toes were on the shore, and you took that first step onto the place where the sea used to be? Can you imagine walking, hurrying through that path with a wall of water on each side of you, just defying gravity? Do you think any of the kids poked their fingers into the sea? Did fish swim by you? Can you imagine? And you get to the other side, and you turn around, but the danger is still there. Chariots racing past you, getting closer and closer, until in one single moment — whoosh. And you are safe. And the threat is gone. And the kids are going to be okay. Can you even imagine what you would think about God in that moment? You would worship him. And that is what they did.

Look how today’s story ends. “Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: ‘I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my defense. He has become my salvation. He is my God. And I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him. Who among the gods is like you, Lord? Who is like you—Majestic in holiness, awesome in glory?’” Goals. God said, “I will gain glory. I will gain glory. I will gain glory.”

And when he single-handedly saved his people from unthinkable danger, he got it. That story reminds me of a great story I just read in a book by author Brent Hansen about a flag football mother. Brent had kind of gotten hustled into coaching his son’s flag football team, and he did not want to because they were terrible. The team was the Rams, and when I say terrible, I mean

really, really, really terrible. The little Rams started the season 0-8, and in their first eight games scored a total of zero points. In fact, as they went into the last game of the season, they were zero wins and 11 losses. And their final opponent, of course, was 11 wins and zero losses. But some days, it turns out, are pretty glorious. The Rams got the opening kickoff. And this little kid named Christian—he caught the ball, and he scooted past one kid from the other team. Then two, then three, then all of them. He scampered all the way to the end zone — 6-0. David over Goliath. But then Goliath got up. And the Rams opponent went on to score 11 straight touchdowns. The game ended Rams 6, other guys 77.

And so you can picture these little kids. Totally defeated. The biggest losers of the entire league. They are dragging their gear off the field, when what pulls up on the street next to them? A white stretched limo, little flags flying out the windows. And guess what logo was on the flags? The Rams. And one of the flag football moms smiled at the kids and revealed the surprise: it is your end-of-season party. And party those little losers did. They partied with pizza, and then they went to the pool, and they told everyone at school about this amazing — who else gets to ride in a stretched limo? It is a great story, isn't it? And who gets all the glory? The one who gave the gift. And that is just like God.

In fact, before I end today I want to unpack this one single point. That God gets the most glory when he single-handedly saves you. You do not have to raise your hands for this one, but have any of you ever gotten into an argument with your family in the parking lot outside of church? You ever heard like a great church message about love, and compassion, and forgiving your enemies, and then someone messes with your radio station in the car on the way home? Ever said your prayers at the dinner table and then dinner was not filled with selfless conversation and patience, you know? It is crazy, right? God can do really good things for us. And sometimes like the first temptation we face, we find out that the spirit is willing, but the flesh can be pretty weak.

This actually happened to me on Wednesday. My wife had a commitment, so I took my two daughters to my soccer game. And as we were going, I was telling my girls — you know what the goal of today is? The goal's not to win. The goal is to glorify God. The goal is for Daddy to be the most patient, loving, light—shining Christian man on that soccer field so people say, “Wow, he is a pastor, right? What kind of God does he worship?” That was the goal. Ooh, and then I got fouled. And when I asked for a call, then a guy got up in my face, and he started using my Savior's name with the F-word in front of it, and—I am glad you were not there. I did not say anything back. But in my head, I was thinking, “Give me the ball. I am going to murder this man.” And I got the ball, and I did. Ooh. Scored the winning goal, my third of the night. Hat trick. We win 4-3. And as I am walking back from the goal, guess who is walking towards me? And how — I mean, people, I was this close to like stepping in front of him and just being like, what's up?

So I am driving home with my kids, right? And what do I say to them? It was not like it had been forever since I had prayed. I prayed about that very thing 45 minutes before. And maybe that is happened to you too. I mean, despite all the chapters and verses, you and I—we are not as strong as we want to be, and yet God saves you. The word “saves” in the Bible means rescues from danger. Just when my pride and lack of self-control — just when your sin would put you in

danger of being separate from God, just when you started to feel like maybe I do not belong in church, maybe I should not call myself a follower of Jesus, maybe I should not go back. My life is too messy. No. God saves you, and that is so good. Because when you put those three phrases together, that you can walk out of here today and say Jesus single-handedly saves me. When I was the weakest link and the worst sinner, he saved me, and I have God. Do you know what your heart will do? Wow. And you want to scratch out that number and write a bigger one. Some of you were raised to think that Christianity was about doing your best, and God would meet you halfway. It is not. It is about the kind of God who saves us when we have nothing to offer, and it is why we worship him. My hope is in Christ alone. Not I, but Christ through me.

And that is what that girl knew. I went to see the girl in ICU the other day. And when I left, her mother told me a story. Just as her baby is about to have a tube put inside of her, she is anxious and afraid. This mother looks at her daughter, who had just finished reading a book that I wrote about the glory of God. And she said to her daughter, “Do not forget. Wow. God.” Because that is what we offer. I cannot promise you an easy life, but I can promise you this. Wow. God. So go in peace and know that through Jesus, a God like that is with a person just like you.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we love you. We worship you today. We adore you. We hallow your name. We exalt you. We lift up our hearts and lift up our hands because you are worthy and you are worth it. If we spent the next 24 hours praising you, it still would not be enough because you are so worth it. I am so grateful for your one-way love, Father. I have been following your Son for 40 years, and if it depended on me, I just—I could not sleep tonight. But it does not. So thank you for grace, for love that we do not earn, do not deserve, but we still get. I pray that as we walk out of here today, this kind of love would make us want to serve and sing to you. You did not have to command Moses to sing and worship. He just did when he saw what you did first. And so help us to be those kind of people who do love, and who do try, and who do strive. Because the pressure is off, and we know that we are safe and saved through Jesus. I pray for our church too, Heavenly Father. There is so many people right here in our city who grew up just thinking of you differently. They believe in God, but not a God like this. So God, help us to give them a God like that. A God who does everything so that we can rest in peace. We pray all these things in the name of Jesus, our Savior and your Son. And all God’s people who agreed joined their voices, and they said, Amen.