



About five months ago, my son joined the Army. Let me tell you, his mom and I weren't exactly thrilled about that decision. But we love our son, and we wanted to support him and give him all the love and encouragement we could.

When he arrived at boot camp, they took away his phone. For about ten weeks, we had almost no contact with him. Then, one day, we finally got a phone call, but it lasted only about two minutes. Those two minutes felt pretty precious to us!

After he graduated from boot camp, we finally had the opportunity to sit down and hear about his experience. He told us about his drill sergeant, the things they were required to do, the intense training, and the importance of following the rules. He also told us about the times when other recruits didn't obey. Someone would get caught with something they weren't supposed to have, or someone would break a rule, and the entire platoon would be disciplined because of it.

My son is a rule follower. He liked his drill sergeant, followed the rules, did what he was told, and performed extremely well physically. He was even near the top of his class in things like running. So you might think that because he was doing everything right, he would receive some special privileges.

But he didn't.

In fact, the entire platoon was told that if they could stay out of trouble, they would be given a few minutes with their phones to call their family and friends. My son and the other recruits did what they were supposed to do. They followed the rules. They stayed out of trouble. But they never got that phone call.

Now, from my son's perspective, that probably didn't seem fair. He had done what was expected of him, yet he didn't get the outcome he thought his obedience deserved.

But here's the thing: the Army was in charge. The Army was in authority. My son wasn't in control of the outcome. His responsibility was simply to obey the orders he had been given. What happened after that was ultimately out of his hands.

And I think sometimes we can approach our relationship with God in much the same way.

We obey God. We do what His Word commands. We try to live faithfully. And sometimes, perhaps without even realizing it, we begin to think that God owes us something in return. *"God, I did what You told me to do, so why didn't things work out the way I expected?"* We can begin to think that our obedience should guarantee a certain outcome.

But that's not how our relationship with God works. Obedience does not put God in our debt. God is sovereign. He is in control. He sees what we cannot see, knows what we cannot know, and is working according to a plan far greater than our own.

And that's exactly what we see happening in Exodus 5.

Moses and Aaron obey God. They go to Pharaoh just as God commanded them. But instead of things getting better, things get worse. Pharaoh increases Israel's workload, their suffering intensifies, and Moses himself begins to question God.

Moses obeyed, but he didn't get the outcome he expected.

And that's where Exodus 5 teaches us an important lesson: **Obedience is ours. Outcomes are God's.**

Our responsibility is to faithfully obey what God has told us to do. God's responsibility is to determine what happens next. Sometimes obedience brings immediate blessing. Sometimes it brings opposition. Sometimes it makes things harder before they get better.

But regardless of the outcome, God remains sovereign, God remains faithful, and God remains in control.¹⁰

ICEBREAKER

Have you ever done what you believed was the right thing, only to have things get harder instead of easier? What happened!

READ IT

Read Exodus 5:1-23

EXPLORE IT

1. **What do Moses and Aaron do in verses 1–3? Why do they go to Pharaoh?**
2. **How does Pharaoh respond to Moses and Aaron in verses 4–9? What does he do to make Israel's situation worse?**
3. **How does Israel respond to the increased workload and suffering in verses 10–21?**

¹⁰ Author's Note.

4. Who do the Israelite foremen blame for their increased suffering in verse 21? Why?

5. How does Moses respond to God in verses 22–23? What questions does Moses ask?

APPLY IT

Many Christians think that if they're serving the Lord in some way, the Lord will bless them and life will be sweet. After all, they're seeking first God's kingdom. They're doing His work. Won't the Lord bless those who do His work?

That depends on how you define blessing. If you define blessing as hardship, sleepless nights, daily pressure, weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions, and other difficulties, yes, you'll be blessed. Those are just some of the things that Paul endured as he served the Lord (2 Cor. 11:23–28; 12:10). But if you define blessing as everyone loving what you're doing, no one ever criticizing you, and everything always going well in your life and ministry, I'd ask, "Have you ever read the Bible or church history?" There would be no such thing as persecution or martyrdom if God protected all of His servants from difficult trials.

The fact is, when you begin to serve the Lord, you've joined the infantry. The prince of darkness begins gunning for you. Often things don't become easier or go more smoothly in your life. Things get more difficult.¹¹

6. Why are we often tempted to think that if we are obeying God, our circumstances should immediately improve?

¹¹Steven J. Cole, "The Plan Isn't Working (Exodus 5:1–6:30)," *Bible.org*, March 11, 2018, <https://bible.org/seriespage/6-plan-isn-t-working-exodus-51-630>.

7. Have you ever been discouraged because doing what you believed God wanted you to do didn't produce the outcome you expected? What happened?

8. What can happen to our faith when we judge God's faithfulness by our circumstances?

Actually, sometimes obedience can make life more difficult! In the movie *The Christmas Story*, after Ralphie's friend Flick gets his tongue frozen to a pole, their teacher says:

Miss Shields: Now, I know that some of you put Flick up to this. But, he has refused to say who. But those who did it know their blame. And I'm sure the guilt you feel... is far worse than any punishment you might receive. Now, don't you feel terrible? Don't you feel remorse for what you have done? That's all I'm going to say about poor Flick.

Adult Ralphie: Adults love to say things like that. But kids know better. We knew darn well it was always better not to get caught.¹²

Ralphie knew that if he obeyed the teacher and told on his classmates things could actually get worse!

9. In Exodus 5, Moses and Aaron obey God's clear command, yet the immediate result is that life becomes significantly harder for God's people. Why do you think God sometimes allows obedience to make our circumstances worse before they get better - and how does that challenge the way we usually measure whether God is "with us"?

¹² [https://achristmasstory.fandom.com/wiki/A_Christmas_Story_\(Transcript\)](https://achristmasstory.fandom.com/wiki/A_Christmas_Story_(Transcript))

10. Sometimes when we take a step of obedience the enemy immediately targets you. Where have you seen this pattern in your own life or in the lives of other believers - where stepping out in obedience seemed to invite greater pressure, criticism, or difficulty rather than relief?

11. If we define “blessing” the way Paul does in 2 Corinthians 11–12 (hardship, weakness, persecution, etc.), how does that reshape the way we pray, the expectations we bring into ministry or obedience, and the way we encourage one another when following Jesus makes life more complicated rather than simpler?

Exodus 5:22 — “Then Moses turned again to the LORD and said, ‘O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me?’”

Moses was frustrated. He was confused. He didn't understand what God was doing. And while some of Moses' questions revealed a lack of faith, there was something he did right: **he turned to God.**¹³

12. What do you learn from the way Moses brings his frustration and questions to God?

¹³ Author's Note.

13. What is the difference between honestly wrestling with God and turning away from God?

14. When you are discouraged or confused by your circumstances, where do you tend to take your questions?

Some of you may not yet know Christ as your Savior and Redeemer. You can't serve (obey) Him until you know Him. Jesus promised ([John 5:24](#)), "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." That promise is for you!

Others of you may know Christ but you're not serving Him. Maybe you tried and got burned. Maybe you've drifted into living for yourself and collecting this world's stuff. You've lost your focus. Paul told Timothy ([2 Tim. 2:3-4](#)): "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier." Serving as a soldier can be dangerous. Soldiers suffer casualties at times. But that's our calling: faithfully to serve our faithful, covenant-keeping Lord even in the face of opposition and setbacks. He enlisted you; now make it your aim to please Him.¹⁴

15. What are some areas where you are tempted to demand immediate results from God?

¹⁴ Cole, "The Plan Isn't Working."

16. What would it look like for you to faithfully obey God without knowing what the outcome will be?

17. Is there an area of your life right now where God may be calling you to trust Him and keep obeying even though the circumstances haven't changed?