

# Slavery to Ability and Inability

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Good morning, Watermark. As Eric said, we began a series in Exodus last week, which Chris Thornton introduced to us.

And what you don't know, and what Chris is too modest to tell you, is that he actually wasn't supposed to preach. Alfie, who was, got concussed in a rugby match the day before.

So at 2 p.m. on a Saturday afternoon, Chris gets a call, please will you preach? And by the way, the topic is, God is in control. Now, if there ever was a practical outworking of the sermon, this was it.

But if you missed it, you can still get it. It's on the church website. If you go to resources and under sermons, it's there. It really, it was a message that totally blessed me, and I encourage you to go back and give it a listen.

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Graeme, and I'm one of the elders here. And if you're an Australian or a Kiwi, you might be thinking to yourself, what is that heavenly language he is speaking?

[ 1 : 0 4 ]     And actually, it's just my South African accent. And I owe a lot to my accent. Actually, I think my accent got me married. Because my wife confessed to me about two years into marriage, she said to me, you know, when I first met you, I thought, wow, he's just too hairy for me.

But I do like his accent. So I have a lot to be grateful for. So that was a few years ago. Now we have two kids. I have a son, Elijah, who's five, and a daughter, Daniela, who's two.

Now, if you don't have kids, you think to yourself, oh, that's cute. If you have kids, you think, that house is crazy. And that's exactly what our house is.

Especially between about 7 and 8.30 at night, our house is nuts. Okay, that is, it's dinner time, play time, fighting time, wrestling time, story time, Bible time, bedtime, crazy time.

And usually by about half past 8, my wife and I, we are done. We kind of feel like we've been in a boxing match for an hour and a half, and we're kind of done. Okay, those parents who have kids know what I'm talking about.

[ 2 : 1 7 ]     And, you know, by half past 8, we still have some work to do, and we're totally dead. But occasionally, very once in a blue moon, the kids go down easy, and we actually have some time to ourselves.

So one thing that we do very occasionally is we watch a movie other than SpongeBob, right? So, but the problem is my wife really doesn't like watching a movie with me at that time because I fall asleep.

You know, by 10 o'clock, the lights go out, and I'm out. And she wants to finish the movie, and I'm fast asleep. But a few years ago, there was a movie that we watched together which had me totally, totally enthralled.

It was really, it's a fantastic movie. And I would rate it as probably the best movie I've ever seen. It was called The Shawshank Redemption. Has anyone seen The Shawshank Redemption? Okay. It's about 20 years old, right?

So we're showing our age here. But the basic idea of this story is that there's a man called Andy Dufault who gets wrongly accused of murdering his wife.

[ 3 : 21 ] And he gets sent to this prison, Shawshank, which is a maximum security prison. It's totally inescapable. No one has ever escaped from this prison. And anyway, the basic plot of the movie is what happens to him in prison.

But at the end, Andy Dufault manages to escape from Shawshank. And it's this incredible story, right? Because the movie actually goes back and shows you how he managed to pull off this escape, right?

And it took years of preparation for the moment comes when he actually managed to escape, right? The story of a man who was in prison but won his freedom, right?

This fantastic escape story. But it really is nothing in comparison to the escape story of Exodus. Exodus literally means the going out.

And it is the greatest escape story of all time. In fact, Joey, who's age nine, after Sunday school, his mother asked him what he had learned in Sunday school.

[ 4 : 26 ] And she knew they were looking at Exodus. And he said, Well, Mom, we learned that God sent Moses behind enemy lines on the secret rescue mission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

And when he got to the Red Sea, he had his engineers build a pontoon bridge over the sea. And the Israelites walked across. Then he used his radio and he called in the bombers.

And the bombers came and they bombed the bridge before the Egyptians could get on. And all the Israelites were saved. And Joey's mother looks at him and says, Now, Joey, is that really what your teacher taught you?

And he goes, Well, no. But if I told you what the teacher told me, you would never believe it. And really, Exodus is like that.

It is an unbelievable story. It is the story of about two million people plus thousands of animals who were slaves in one of the most fortified nations at the time.

[ 5 : 33 ] And they managed to walk out of, from their captives' eyes, they managed to walk out of this country through the desert, which is even more amazing because Israel, I mean Israel, Egypt was so powerful, they had agreement with everyone around them that if they caught anyone, they sent them straight back to Egypt.

And here they managed to pull it off. In fact, a military expert has sort of sat down and analyzed what the Israelites would have needed to survive in the desert.

And this is what he came up with. He said, Just to survive, that amount of people would have needed 900 tons of food a day. They would have needed 7.5 million liters of water.

And if they had walked five in a row in a column and just kind of walked out of Egypt, the line would have lasted 370 kilometers. It would have taken you 10 days just to walk past them.

And all this, they were led by one man. So how did they do it? Humanly speaking, this story should have never happened.

[ 6 : 44 ] But it did. Because it is a divine story. God is behind the whole thing. And the story of Exodus really reveals to us something of God's character.

Because ultimately, God is a redeemer. He loves to get you out of the mess you're in and bring you into his promises.

If you trust in his ability, you trust in his power and put everything in his hands. So who was this human leader of the whole thing, right?

It's a guy called Moses. Moses. And at 80 years of age, Moses gets this call to go and be the human leader of this great escape.

80 years of old, 80 years of age tells me two things straight away. It tells me something about old people and tells me something about young people. So young people, I don't know, can I call myself young, right?

[ 7 : 44 ] But anyway, young people, I think their greatest strength is they have zeal and enthusiasm and they want to get stuff done. The problem is we're in a hurry, but God often isn't.

And his time frame is very different to a young person's idea of a time frame. And he might take a lot longer to prepare you for what he wants to do with your life.

Now, for old people, it tells me that you're never too old. It's never too late for God to use you. I don't know if you've ever felt this way.

I have. But sometimes you think, oh, well, let's just leave it to the younger generation, right? They've got more time. They're more enthusiastic. They get stuff done.

Let's just leave it to them. God does not let you off that easy. So here's this man, Moses. And if you rewind 80 years, he's an adopted son in Egypt.

[ 8 : 48 ] And he was raised with the best of everything. He had the best clothes, the best education, the best food, the best accommodation. He probably had the best view in Egypt.

This guy is living the Hong Kong dream. He's Pharaoh's adopted son. He's a prince in Egypt. And humanly speaking, he is at his height of power and ability at the age of 40.

And if you are going to use someone, this should be it, right? This should be the time in his life. But God doesn't work that way. And, you know, we might think we need to be in a position of power and influence to be used of God.

And by all means, God can use people in positions of power and influence. He's done it again and again. But God can use anybody, regardless of age, regardless of status, and regardless of position.

You see, it was the Lord who had made Moses mighty in the palace in Egypt. But what he really needed to do was make Moses meek. And he was going to use the desert to achieve that.

[ 10 : 07 ] So Moses, at age 40, he's got all this power, all this ability. But he finally sees something. He sees his Hebrew brothers and sisters oppressed.

He sees the injustice of it all. And he wants to do something about it. And he trusts in his ability, his power to get the job done. And the first thing he sees is an Israelite getting beaten up by an Egyptian.

He doesn't ask God what he should do. He just runs in there and sorts the Egyptian out, kills him, buries him in the sand. So he acts at the wrong time and certainly uses the wrong method.

But it's as if Moses is saying, God, I'm going to do this for you rather than with you. And Moses is in for even more of a shock because the very people he's trying to help, they don't even accept his leadership.

You know, they're like, who made you leader? Are you going to kill me too? And Moses' whole world comes crushing down. So he does the only thing he can and he runs away to the desert.

- [ 11 : 20 ] I'm done. I'm finished. I've lost everything. I've lost my power. I've lost my ability. And it can happen to us. What would it take for your world to come crashing down?
- The truth is not very much. It could be a financial collapse.
- It could be a sickness, a death, a bad relationship, a rumor that destroys your reputation. But through all this, God is not worried.
- Moses has lost his power, his ability, his influence. But God has not lost his. If our world were to collapse, the same would be true today.
- We might lose all our security, all our power, all those things that we think hold us up. And when they fall and we've lost them, God has lost his power or ability.
- [ 12 : 31 ] Because here's the truth. God can do more with one man alone in the desert than he can do with one man with all the power and luxury in a palace in Egypt.
- See, God had been preparing Moses in Egypt for 40 years. And now he was preparing him for another 40 years in the desert.
- If you want a summary of the life story of Moses, he lived to be 120. It would go something like this. For the first 40 years, Moses grew up thinking he was a somebody.
- He spent the next 40 years learning that he was a nobody. And he spent the last 40 years of his life learning what God could do with a nobody.
- So here's Moses. He's 80. And he's a shepherd in Egypt. And he's kind of scratching out a living. And he's in the desert.
- [ 13 : 31 ] And there is a bush on fire. Now, it would have been an acacia bush. There is nothing special about an acacia bush. It's just an ordinary bush. There are a whole lot of them.
- But this one is different. This one is on fire. And that gets Moses' curiosity up. And he goes and he has a look. And if Moses had actually realized in hindsight, he was being shown a picture of his life's work.
- Just an ordinary acacia bush, but ablaze with God. Because this wasn't a fire that burnt and consumed the bush, but it filled it up.
- And our lives can be like that too. Just an ordinary acacia bush, but ablaze with God. And God calls Moses.
- He says, Moses, Moses. Do you know that God knows your name? The Bible says God knows the number of hairs on your head.
- [ 14 : 37 ] Now, I'm making that job a little bit easier for God because I'm actually losing my hair. So, I'm helping him out there a little bit. But God knows you personally.
- So, here's Moses. He must have thought he's been totally forgotten, right? Forty years he's been scratching a living in the desert. He must have given up all hope of ever being able to help his fellow people.
- And God calls him. Moses, Moses, I know who you are. I want you to go back to the very place you failed.
- Because you see, at 40, you were big, tough, and strong. And you were going to do it in your strength, your way, using your ability. He said, now that you're 80, now we can do it together.
- Now you're going to use my power, my ability. Now you would have thought, at this point, Moses would have been quite happy to hear that. But five times, he tries to get out of the whole thing.
- [ 15 : 43 ] You see, it seems like at 40, he's just way too eager. And at 80, he's just very reluctant. I don't know if you've ever walked into a class on the first day of school, right?

P1 or grade 1. And the teacher asks a question. It's the kids. You just see 30 hands go, pick me, pick me, pick me. They are like the donkey in Shrek, right? They're jumping up and down to be chosen.

You fast forward to the last year of school, form 6. Teacher asks a question, and it's just eyes down. Don't look at me.

Don't look at me. Don't make eye contact. And that's exactly a picture of Moses, right? He's just like, please don't pick me. So Moses comes up with his first excuse.

He says, who am I? You know, just in case you haven't noticed, God, I'm pretty insignificant now. I'm a shepherd, and we all know shepherds are pretty much looked down on.

[ 16 : 41 ] So Moses is this healthy modesty that Moses is displaying here. Now, this excessive self-depreciation.

It's good to feel inadequate if it drives you to God. It's bad if it drives you away from God's work.

It's good to feel inadequate if it drives you to God. It's bad if it drives you away from God's work.

You see, because this false modesty is really, it's kind of like a pride in reverse. There is the kind of pride that scrambles for the front seat, right?

But there is another kind of pride that kind of scrambles for the back seat. So all of you sitting in the middle today, you're fine. Okay, that's a joke. But he says to Moses, he says to Moses, Moses, I didn't say you would do it.

[ 17 : 47 ] I said, I'll be there. But I need you to be there too. So to this excuse, God answers Moses. Moses says, God, I'm insignificant.

God looks at him and says, you know what? I'm not. I'm not insignificant. And it's kind of like when God looks at you and he uses your life, he's not looking for the most qualified person.

You know, we've been looking around and we've decided that you are perfect for this call. It's God looking at your life and saying, I'm going to use you by my mercy and grace.

And we're going to do this together. There's a lovely little quote I found, right? I don't know who said it, but it goes something like this. It says, God does not give us the jobs we are fit for.

He fits us for the jobs he gives us. And if we are afraid of some ability or inability that we do not have, that's actually a good starting point.

[ 18 : 51 ] Because we go to the one who is significant, who does have it all, and we can draw on him. The second excuse Moses gives is, well, I'm ignorant.

You know, what should I say? Who sent me? And God gives him the name Yahweh, which is Hebrew for I am.

And if we just stop for a minute and think what a wonderful name that is. It tells at least three things about God. It tells me that God is personal.

I am, right? No one says I am without being personal. It also tells me that God is eternal. He's not the God I was or I will be.

He is I am. The beginning and the end. The alpha and the omega. And it also tells me he's unique. There's no one quite like him.

[ 19 : 52 ] You can't really just limit the description of God. I mean, for one thing, he's three and one, right? And I'm not. And if you just compare this to the gods of Egypt at the time, you really understand this contrast, right?

Because some of the gods in Egypt, one was called Ammon, which means concealed or hidden. I mean, could you imagine praying, dear hidden?

Okay. As opposed to I am there. The other god was called Ra, which means swift or fast.

And I'm assuming because he was so swift and fast, they used to refer to Ra as an it. Nothing personal, just a force somewhere out there that moves pretty quickly. As opposed to I am.

But you know the most wonderful thing about the name? Is it's incomplete. Complete. I am blank. And it's almost like you put anything you need after that name.

[ 21 : 03 ] It's a little poem that goes like this. It says, It's as if I need love.

I am love. I need strength. I am strength. I need provision. I am your provider. It's kind of like if we get it, it's we've been given this blank check of everything we would ever need.

The question is, how often are we cashing in that blank check to be used? What is it that you need this morning?

Have you asked the great I am for it? Do you need comfort? I am your comforter. Do you need forgiveness? I am your righteousness.

And it's as if he is saying to Moses, Moses, I am your provider. I am the redeemer. I am sent you.

[ 22 : 18 ] Moses just goes, but God, excuse number three, they are not going to believe me. God is incredibly patient, don't you think?

At this point, he is still listening to Moses. And he says, Moses, they will believe you because of what I will do. You see, you are thinking about your own inability again.

You're thinking about yourself and you're thinking you're in this alone. People will believe the words of God when they see the works of God.

When they see his power, his beauty, his ability, and not yours, that is when people will believe. We are merely vessels through which we allow God to work.

Let him use us. And he gives Moses three miracles, right? He says, okay, Moses, this, this, I'll prove it to you. He goes, you see that little staff you're holding, that little shepherd staff?

[ 23 : 24 ] Throw it on the ground. Moses throws it on the ground and God creates a snake. Now, Moses does the only sensible thing he's done since this conversation started. He runs away. It's a snake, right?

And I mean, it's quite funny. God must have actually had to call him back. Moses, just pick that thing up. And I actually have to really credit Moses with a little bit of faith here because he picked the snake up.

I don't think I would have picked the snake up. But anyway, he grabs it by the tail. It turns back into a staff. And he says, now, Moses, stick your hand in your coat. Pull it out. Heal. Leprous.

Disease. White. Okay, put it back in your pocket. Healed. Okay. Moses, if they don't believe that, you're just going to take a cup out of the Nile, pour it on the ground, and I'm going to turn that water to blood.

And I don't know if you notice this, but those are miracles of threat. They're miracles of destruction, right?

[ 24 : 24 ] A snake kind of signifies death to me. Leprosy, disease. And finally, the Nile.

This was the source of life for Egypt was the Nile. That very thing that's meant to give you life can be turned to death. This, we worship a God who creates and gives life, but he is also a God who can destroy.

He is a God to be feared. And Moses just hears this, and he just says, excuse number four, I've got a speech problem.

At this point, you're like, Moses, come on. But we're getting closer to the real reason here. I think of a plumber from Bradford in England.

He was born in 1859, and he went by the name Smith Wigglesworth. A great name, that, Smith. And anyway, Smith couldn't read or write, and he had a genuine speech problem.

[ 25 : 38 ] And he felt the call to go and preach. And he didn't want to do it. You can understand why. He's got a speech problem. He doesn't want to do it.

And he actually tried to find someone else to do his job for him. In fact, he even said, I'll pay you. I'll finance you. But can you preach? And he couldn't find anyone.

So eventually, Smith begins to preach. And God healed him of his speech problem. And the people who listened to him were amazed.

Because this is the same plumber from Bradford that we heard mumble and stumble his way through things. Because he was so fluent. He was so articulate with God's work that people were amazed.

But you see, Smith Wigglesworth had the same problem as Moses. He was so focused on his own inability rather than looking at God's ability.

[ 26 : 40 ] You know, I think the saddest thing about all this is Moses could have actually done the job. He really could have done the job, right? But God, in his patience and his mercy, says, all right, listen, you have your younger brother to come and help with this little thing.

I think it's just a beautiful little touch of God's grace and mercy and patience with Moses. But then Moses just finally blurts it out. Send someone else.

That's the truth of it, right? He didn't want to go. It's as if Moses is saying, here I am. Send him. You know, we can come up with five excuses or 500 excuses.

Or we can hide behind our own ability or our own inability. But the truth is sometimes we just don't want to do it.

And that's true of me too. But when we do that, we're really doubting two things about God. We're doubting God's ability.

[ 27 : 46 ] We don't think that he is really good. We don't think that he really is powerful. And we don't think he will do what he says he will do.

The other thing that we're doubting is God's authority. It's like, who are you to tell me what to do? I find it amazing.

One of the first things we're called to do as Christians is we call Jesus Lord and Savior. Now, Lord means the ruler, the boss, the king of your life.

I'm handing you control. And if we call him Lord, but then we do not surrender to his authority, is he really Lord to us?

I heard someone once say this. They said, if he is not Lord of all, he's not Lord at all. Because it's a contradiction to the very name Lord.

[ 28 : 51 ] Are we doubting his authority and his goodness and his ability? Have any of you heard of a man named Phil Fisher?

Okay, that's encouraging. Have any of you heard of VeggieTales? Okay, good. Phil Fisher was the creator of VeggieTales.

And Phil Fisher, from a very young age, was an incredibly talented animator. He spent his childhood in the basement animating and making movies.

And he was really, really good at what he did. And he loved Jesus. And he thought, I'm going to do something for God. And I'm going to use my animation for God. So he goes to seminary.

He doesn't really think seminary is for him. He drops out. And he starts this company called Big Idea Productions. And in 1993, VeggieTales is born.

[ 29 : 49 ] And it's amazing. Because quickly, this thing just explodes. Right? I mean, who would have thought a talking cucumber and a talking tomato blows the world away? But it does.

Right? Everyone becomes fascinated with VeggieTales. It sells millions of copies worldwide. And pretty soon, people are asking, my goodness, you know, Phil, are you the next Walt Disney?

Because it became one of the largest animation studios in America. They went from a staff of three in 1993. Seven years later, they had 200 people working from them.

And there were just people crowding around him and said, listen, you know, this thing is good. We want to invest. We need to merchandise. We need to open theme parks. And Phil's just lapping this up.

And then at the height of his professional success, everything went wrong. His staff members started arguing amongst each other.

[ 30 : 51 ] Video sales, for some reason they couldn't explain, just suddenly stopped. He had to fire half his staff because he couldn't afford to keep them. And then the cherry on the top, one of the distributors for VeggieTales ends up suing the company.

The court finds in favor of the distributor. And Phil Fisher is left bankrupt. He has to sell VeggieTales Big Idea Productions. And he's bankrupt.

I am done. His whole world comes crashing down. I'm a failure. And he writes. He writes this in a book. You can get it. I'm busy reading it at the moment.

It's called Me, Myself, and Bob. So, and then he says, kind of my whole world just came crashing down. And the hardest part was all because I thought, God, I'm doing this for you.

I'm doing this for you. And why did you allow this to happen? But five years later, Phil Fisher gets the call to go back to the very place he failed and to animate again.

[ 31 : 58 ] And this time, he calls his company Jellyfish Labs. And I kind of, kind of funny that he chose Jellyfish.

And he says, a jellyfish cannot choose its own course, but it is dependent on the current to take it where it needs to go.

And he said, you know, I had been trusting in my own talent, my own ability to run a business, to animate. And I was like a big barracuda fighting against the current.

I'm going to do it my way. Then I realized what I really need to be is a jellyfish. And he says this now. I get my form, my purpose, only when I'm suspended in the current of God's will and trusting that God's will and ability will carry me where he wants to go.

And Jellyfish Labs, what they make now, it's still in animation and they use some puppets, is something called What's in the Bible. And we actually use it when your kids are out and they're watching a video.

[ 33 : 11 ] That's what they're using. They're using Phil Fisher's videos. And Phil says, he goes, he literally takes the kids right from Genesis all the way through to Revelation. And he said, it's so much deeper, so much richer what he's doing now than he could have ever imagined with VeggieTales.

But he's learned to trust God, his ability, his promises, rather than his own. Moses, when he sees his Hebrew brothers and sisters in trouble, he believes he can save them.



He alone can get them out of the mess. That they're in. And you know what? Sometimes we do the same thing. We trust in our own ability, our own strength to save ourselves.

And the truth of that is it's as hopeless as a Hebrew slave in Egypt, surrounded by the most fortified nation, looking out. You're going nowhere. No matter how hard you try, you are still a slave in Egypt.

But here's the good news. It is possible if we trust in God's ability and God's power as a redeemer.

[ 34 : 42 ] You know, I said to you that Exodus was the greatest escape story of all time. It's actually, it's number two.

Because get this, right? At the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus takes Peter, John, and James with him. They go up this mountain and it says that they're talking with Moses and Elijah.

And this is what they're discussing. It says they spoke about his exodus, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.

That's Luke 9, by the way. Jesus achieved the greatest rescue story of all time. The people in the land of Egypt, they're like, just rescue us from our slavery, of the things that hold us and just get us out of the suppressor.

But God comes in as a redeemer and says, I don't only want to pull you out of Egypt. I want to put you in Canaan. I don't only want to save you from Pharaoh.

[ 35 : 46 ] I want to save you to God. Jesus comes along. He says, you know what? That's not the rescue you need. You need even a bigger rescue. You need a rescue from sin.

But more than that, you need a rescue to holiness, to righteousness. I don't want to just save you from the mess you're in. I want to bring you into a relationship with God Almighty.

You know, and we kind of, we want to be saved from Egypt. We want to be saved from the mess, the guilt, the secret things we think and do when we think no one's looking. But Jesus doesn't just stop there.

So I don't just want to save you from that stuff. I want to bring you into a relationship with me. And God will do it.

God will keep his promises to do that. But it really comes down to where do we put our trust. And often it's a choice I make and that we can make where we choose to trust in our own ability, our own power, our own sense of security, rather than trusting in his power, his ability.

[ 37 : 06 ] And you know, God doesn't just save us once and then forget us. He continues to save us from everything if we will trust him. The key thing is he wants us to be a jellyfish.

Will we let him? Will we allow ourselves to be jellyfish and moved along by God's current and trust him that he will lead us to the place he knows we need to be?

Let's pray. Can I ask you to stand? Stand. Stand. Stand. Father, we come before the great I am this morning.

We want to say thank you. We want to say amen to all your promises and to trust you as children. I thank you for your mercy and your grace.

And you forgive us your forgiveness when we choose to trust in ourselves, trust in our own ability, rather than looking to our Father in heaven who so generously gives us everything that we would need.

[ 38 : 24 ] Lord, I pray that as we leave this place and we go out into the world, into our places of work, our universities, our schools, Lord God, that we will model something of the fact that God is a redeemer, that we will not rely on our own ability and strength to do it, but that we will point people to your saving grace.

And Lord, more than just your saving grace, what it means to be in a relationship, what it means to know and trust God Almighty. Lord, thank you that you bless your people.

Amen.