

Journey to Freedom.

PART III

Introduction

A few weeks ago we introduced our new series that we'll be exploring here on Sunday mornings and evenings and in our Life Groups during the week.

We've called this series "Journey to Freedom" and we're going to be making our way through the book of Exodus in the Old Testament.

This morning we're going to continue together with Part III in our *Journey to Freedom*:

We're going to be looking at the birth and early years of Moses. There are so many angles we could take from his early life, but this morning I'd like to go off the beaten path and explore a remarkable insight that this account reveals to us about the nature and function of God's gifts to us and our response to them...

The Bible reveals that God loves to give us things; He gives us our personality, our talents, our passions, our strengths, our desires, our dreams and visions; all of these things are for the fulfilment of His purposes on this earth. They make us who we are. They make us different to everyone else. They give us significance and make every single one of us absolutely vital to the fulfilment of God's plans right here as a part of this church in this town of Waiuku.

But there are a few things we need to know about and do in relation to the things God gives us...

Turn with me, in your Bibles, please, to Exodus 2:

Scripture – Exodus 2:1-10

^{NIV} **Exodus 2:1** Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, ² 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. ³ 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.

⁴ His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. ⁵ Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. ⁶ 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.

⁷ Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" ⁸ "Yes, go," she answered. And the girl went and got the baby's mother. ⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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."

Overview

Moses had a pretty eventful life even before he was a few months old!

We know from the first two legs of this journey that Pharaoh had become paranoid about the explosive growth of the Israelite population in Egypt and had decreed that all male babies born be thrown into the Nile.

Moses was born, and his parents' recognised there was something special about him and risked everything to hide him from Pharaoh. As he grew this became harder and they were forced to make a tough decision. Trusting God with their baby boy, his mother placed him floating in a basket among the reeds on the edge of the Nile where he was discovered by the Pharaoh's daughter.

His sister, who had been watching, was quickly on-hand and was able to offer help. As it turned out, Moses' own mother was able to nurture him and raise him until he was a bit older. From here he was returned to Pharaoh's daughter and raised as a prince of Egypt.

We could look at this same passage every week for months and draw so many things from it; but this morning I'd like to look at the remarkable revelation of how we and God interact with the things He gives us.

1. RECEIVE

I've broken this passage into what I see as a pattern revealing a five-step process of interacting with God because of, in response to, and for the sake of what He gives us.

For the rest of this message I'm going to be referring to our talents, our gifts, our visions and dreams and our passions when I talk about the 'things God gives us'.

The first step we see is that we RECEIVE from God.

^{NIV} **Exodus 2:1** Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, ^{2a} and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son.

Moses' parents received a literal, physical, gift from God – a baby. For our application we're going to take this metaphorically in that what we have we RECEIVE from God.

When things don't seem to be working out or when we feel like we're hitting a brick wall; when we wonder why we're frustrated or begin to question whether we're doing what God's created us to do – remember that the gifts you have are from God. The passions you have are from God – the one's in-line with His character anyway!

We may, at times, look at the things which make us 'us', and ask how can they be significant in the plans of God – especially if we begin to compare them with other obviously 'spiritual' gifts – but we must remember that what we have we received from God.

2. RECOGNISE

We have all RECEIVED a gift or gifts from God; we don't get a say in the matter. These are put in us when God created us; I love the imagery in Jeremiah of God "knitting us together" in the womb.

Receiving is one thing; the first step in actually beginning to use our gifts for the purposes God gave them is to RECOGNISE the gift.

^{NIV} **Exodus 2:2b** When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months.

Moses' mother recognised that he was a "fine child". This language doesn't mean much to us, so we need to look a bit further.

^{NLT} **Exodus 2:2** The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She saw that he was a special baby and kept him hidden for three months.

We get a stronger sense of what Moses' parents saw when we look to the New Testament and the way in which the Jewish writers understood the language:

^{NIV} **Acts 7:20** "At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for in his father's house.

^{NIV} **Hebrews 11:23** By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

It's one thing to have a gift; it's another to consciously identify it and to accept that it is from God and, most of all, to cherish it and recognise that what we have been given is "no ordinary thing."

Your gift from God is no ordinary thing. The passion God has planted in your heart is no everyday whim – it's something special from God. That dream or vision you have is no pipe-dream but is something given to you by God for the glory of His Kingdom. That talent you can't see much use for is no ordinary thing and is intended for the fulfilment of God's purposes on this planet and we, as members of God's body with you in this church, cannot do without you using your talents and gifts.

We RECEIVE from God; and we need to RECOGNISE that it's no ordinary thing – that whatever our gift or talent or passion or dream – it's something special and needs to be treasured.

3. RELEASE

One of the interesting things with gifts is that they don't do us any good just hanging around with us. In fact, they're never going to be able to fulfil the purposes God gave them to us for if we don't do something with them.

Imagine if the apostle Paul never wrote a letter. Imagine if John Wesley never wrote a song. Imagine if Luther never thought outside the box. I'm going to get a bit closer to home now; imagine if Guy or Carmen never painted. Imagine if Tony never played drums. Imagine if the kitchen team never offered to serve. Imagine if the Children's teams never made a stand. There are far too many examples to go on listing them all – but you get the idea.

A gift doesn't achieve anything until we RELEASE it.

We RECEIVE from God, we RECOGNISE the importance of it, then we must RELEASE it.

^{NIV} **Exodus 2:3** 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. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. ⁵ Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. ⁶ 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.

I'd like to draw a couple of analogies from this passage.

The first is that there came a point where Moses' mother couldn't hold onto the gift any longer. She couldn't hide it any longer. She couldn't keep it in another moment.

When we've been given something from God it needs to have an outlet, we need to release it. Jeremiah expresses this beautifully when he describes the gift of prophecy God gave him:

^{NIV} **Jeremiah 20:9** But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.

We need to release what we've been given.

The second aspect I'd like to bring is that there was effort involved; there was a degree of preparation required in order to release the gift. Moses' mother had to go and find tar and pitch and a basket and coat the basket, making sure it would be waterproof.

There's no real way of knowing, but I cannot imagine that – as an oppressed slave – tar and pitch would be easy materials to acquire. Yet Moses' mother made the effort and got what she needed to release what God had given her.

Remembering the context here and the environment in which these people were living. There were a whole heap of factors at play here – knowing that Pharaoh, or his soldiers or guards would kill the baby boy – his mother needed to ensure her timing was perfect for releasing him.

She also needed to place Moses somewhere that he would be found. There was obviously a degree of strategy involved in where she placed him. We cannot expect that a daughter of the Pharaoh would just bathe anywhere along the Nile. Whether Moses' mother strategically placed him where Pharaoh's daughter would be we cannot know – but we can be assured that Pharaoh's daughter would not be bathing anywhere near where the slaves would normally be, or even where common Egyptians would be.

Releasing our gifts has to be done with a certain amount of strategy and deliberateness. You see, as a preacher I could stand on a street corner and yell out all day long and achieve, most likely, nothing. The apostle Paul could have gone to any random town or city and preached but would not have seen the potential God placed within him realised.

In Luke 4 from verse 20; Jesus speaks about not being accepted in His hometown and He recounts the story of Elijah. Elijah was sent to a specific widow in the region of Sidon to release His gift there. Of course there were needy widows all around Elijah,

but God's plan for his gift required deliberateness and strategy and he had to released it where God had opened a door for him.

We can serve anywhere and doing anything – and on one hand this is absolutely essential for us to function as a body – there are always things which need to be done that may not be our passion or within our gifting, however, when we've identified our gift and allowed God to show us how and where to use it – releasing it in that ministry or area is where we discover the true potential God has created us for.

The main facet of releasing our gift is that of actually beginning to use it for God's glory. To serve in areas we have ability. To lead in areas we have skill. To operate in areas we have talent.

The final thing I want to mention about releasing our gift is that of giving it to God. In a more literal sense this is what Moses' mother did; she committed or entrusted her precious son to the Lord's care.

Sometimes we cannot see how we can use our gift for God. Sometimes we cannot seem to find an outlet for a passion burning within us. Sometimes we may have used a gift for the wrong purposes and felt a need to lay it aside for a while. All of these situations are also times when we need to release our gift to God.

I started dj'ing when I was 14 and over a few short years got myself into all sorts of mess through the lifestyle associated with it at that age. When I woke up to the fact that God was still waiting for me to come back to Him and was more interested in where He could take me rather than where I happened to be at that present time and when I chose to follow Him again I had a tough decision to make. I'm actually not too bad at dj'ing and it was good money and I had a lot of friends associated with the scene – I believe that it's a gift God has given me, however, I'd misused it. So that was something I had to release to Him and give up for a time, trusting that if it was in God's will for me He would open the doors for me to use it again – for His glory.

Whether it's beginning to use our gifts for the first time; or whether it's entrusting back to God something we've tried to use or are longing to use or have misused – we need to RELEASE what He's given us back to Him.

It may be by serving in an area, it may be a simple prayer asking God to use what He's given us. We need to RELEASE the gifts He's placed within us.

4. RENEWAL

This leads us to our next step which is RENEWAL.

^{NIV} **Exodus 2:7** Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" ⁸ "Yes, go," she answered. And the girl went and got the baby's mother. ⁹ 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.

What we see here is a most amazing aspect of our interaction with God. Moses' mother could no longer hold him to herself, she could no longer keep him hidden, she could do no more for him alone, she could not protect him or her family and was brought to the point where she had to release her precious gift to God and trust that He will care for it.

Moses gets found by the Pharaoh's daughter – the one person in the whole land most able to care for him and prepare him for the plans God had for his life. Not only that, but Moses' own mother is able to raise him in safety for a time.

We see that when we release our gift God brings RENEWAL to it and us. Had Moses' mother not released Moses, chances are that he would have been discovered and killed and the family punished, if not executed for disobeying the Pharaoh.

By trusting God and releasing her gift, Moses' mother experienced a renewal that only God can bring. She was given more time with her son and knew that He would be raised in an environment where he would be able to realise his potential far greater than had he grown up as a slave.

Not only was her gift restored to her, but God renewed it with interest. Get this; in verse 9 we read that Pharaoh's daughter *paid* Moses' own mother to raise him!

We receive from God, we recognise it's value, we come to a point where we release it back to Him and God brings renewal returning the gift with even more than we started with. We see this same pattern echoed in the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25. It's also the same principal as the Law of Sowing and Reaping.

This is God's nature confirmed to us over and over where it seems completely illogical that giving something away or releasing it or serving in some way actually increases what we have been given. Giving to God results in multiplication in any area.

I mentioned that I felt I needed to release my dj'ing to God. A couple of years later God renewed this for me and I've been able to do some really cool things through it – and get paid a lot more now too!

Releasing our gifts to God, whether it's trusting Him to use them, or whether it's beginning to use them and serve does not mean we lose them; it's an opportunity for growth and renewal that will not otherwise happen.

5. RESULTS

Our final step here reveals the ongoing and perpetual nature of our interaction with God – our life with God is an ongoing journey...

^{NIV} **Exodus 2:10** 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."

We could easily see this as déjà vu where Moses' mother has to release her gift *again*. But really what we get from this is the realisation that our journey with God and the fulfilment of His purposes in us require an ongoing, almost ping-pong process of releasing and renewal, release and renewal.

In our lives, as we grow as Christians, walking with God, the gifts He placed within us before we were born are intended to be used and to grow.

It's only by continued release and renewal that we experience the RESULTS God has created us to fulfil.

It must have been so tempting for Moses' mother to try and run and hide with her son. Having released him once I can't imagine how difficult it must have been to give him away again. But unless she had and unless Moses had grown up in Pharaoh's house he would never have been prepared and skilled and able to fulfil the greater purposes God had for him.

The results God created Moses for, the results that God had given Moses' parents their precious gift to achieve would never have come to be unless the gift had been released, renewed and released again.

The full potential of God's gift to Moses' parents would never have been realised had this pattern not been followed. God gives us gifts for results which see the increase of His Kingdom on this earth and in this community we are so blessed to be called to.

Conclusion

RECEIVE, RECOGNISE, RELEASE, RENEWAL, RESULTS.

The Bible reveals that God loves to give us things; He gives us our personality, our talents, our passions, our strengths, our desires, our dreams and visions; all of these things are for the fulfilment of His purposes on this earth. They make us who we are. They make us different to everyone else. They give us significance and make every single one of us absolutely vital to the fulfilment of God's plans right here as a part of this church in this town of Waiuku.

These gifts need to be valued – this happens when we recognise they're from God. They need to be released – either by finding areas to use them in or by trusting God that He will open doors to fulfil the passion in our hearts. There is a process of releasing and renewal which is how our gifts are built and become more effective – it's only by committing to this ongoing process that we will see the results God has placed these gifts in us to accomplish.

Prayer

Every single one of you has been given a gift by God.

If you want to release it today then we'd love to stand with you and pray.

If you feel you've misused a gift and want God to renew it then we'll stand together and pray.

If you have this passion or dream burning inside but cannot find a way to fulfil it then we'll stand together and release it, trusting God to open doors and bring what He's placed in you to completion.

If you feel your gift is in need of growing and strengthening and you know there's more for you but just can't seem to move past the level you're at; then let's pray together.

If you have no idea what gifts God has given you then we'll pray that God will highlight them to you. In most cases it's as simple as looking at the things you're passionate about, the things you love doing, and the things that excite you.

Let's stand together and pray...