

Midwives and The Power of No

Series: Exodus

Senior Pastor Andrew Gardener | 23 April 2023

- How easy/difficult do you find yourself saying “no” to others?

Part One | Insecurity

Read Exodus 1:1-10, “Israel did indeed move into Egypt, they settled there, and for a period of close to 380 years flourished, grew, and became a power immigrant group in the land. We see in verse 9 this new Pharaoh does not view Israel as a blessing, and instead he thinks the growing Israelite immigrant group is a threat to his power. Notice what he says in verse 10: he says he **must deal shrewdly** with the Hebrews. The word used here is exactly the same Hebrew word used to describe Satan in Genesis 3, the snake was ‘crafty’ or ‘shrewd’. The writer is immediately casting this new Pharaoh in the character of Satan in the drama that is about to unfold.”

- In what way do you think Pharaoh and the snake in Genesis 3 share similarities?

Read Exodus 1:11-14, “Once again, the language used here in this passage is to place this in the narrative of what we see in Genesis 1 to 3. Just as in Genesis where humanity rebels against God’s blessing by taking the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil and desiring to gain greater power, so here Pharaoh attempts to destroy the source of God’s blessing, the Israelites, so his own people can remain the true power on earth. Pharaoh’s insecurity in his own power and his ability to diplomatically work with a large immigrant group within his land causes him to act in deeply evil ways. **Insecurity is often the primary brokenness that drives the oppression and enslavement of others.** Insecurity will always work to cause you to provide for yourself at the expense of others. And so one of the critical ways we can begin to move in the opposite spirit of slavery and oppression is through dealing with our own personal insecurities. **As we become more secure in Christ and who we are as his children made in his image, we become less a vehicle of slavery and injustice and more a vessel of freedom and grace.**”

- How has the insecurity of yourself or others impacted you?
- What has caused your insecurity that you are aware of?

Part Two | The Power of Choice

Read Exodus 1:15-17, “Midwifery was an incredibly important profession in those days as infant mortality rates were incredibly high and these women were trusted with the skills to do their best to ensure children were delivered strong and healthy. For the Egyptians, the birthing process was what today we might call a liminal space – a space where life and death is held in a tense balance, and where there is great

spiritual significance and need for spiritual blessing. As such, midwifery was seen as more than just a job or a role, it was a spiritual act as the women literally held life or death in their hands.”

- What role(s) are you in? What spiritual significance does your role(s) carry?

*“The depth of evil Pharaoh now steeped to is shocking and explosive. He orders Shiphrah and Puah to commit genocide – ‘**if it’s a boy, kill him**’. Shiphrah and Puah, as Hebrew women themselves, are to be the ones to bring death upon their own people. Note what the enemy is doing here – **women, who are the carriers and givers of life, are called upon to be the destroyers of it.** And Pharaoh, in his arrogance, has no doubt they will do it, for they are his slaves supposedly without choice. But verse 17 lays this out to us – they feared God and through this refused to act in accordance with the command of Pharaoh. Note this: Their fear of God caused them to say no to the fear of Pharaoh. Throughout the bible, ‘fear of the Lord’ describes the reverence, respect, and esteem that one has in acknowledgement of and response to God’s goodness, holiness, and power. Motivated by this kind of fear, Shiphrah and Puah have the courage to seize back the power of choice from the grips of slavery and at the very risk of their own lives, choose the lives of unborn children instead.”*

- How would you act if you were Shiphrah or Puah?

*“The midwives literally held in their hands the choice of life and death, and they chose to say no to death and yes to life. This moment of bravery from Shiphrah and Puah is a critical turning point of the whole narrative itself. It’s as if God is asking them, and us, **whom ultimately will you serve?** Me or Pharaoh? My way or the world’s way? **The very instruments Pharaoh chooses to carry out his plans become the very instruments God uses to subvert those plans.** Shiphrah and Puah could have chosen to obey injustice and death and become instruments of evil. Instead, they chose to fear God, and in this God uses them to stand against evil. They are the first to say ‘enough is enough’, and their bravery places a solid marker in the ground. You always have the power of choice. You can always choose life over death. God can turn you around. And it is this movement from death to life that God speaks of at the end of this passage – **And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.** That’s the power of Exodus. And it is the power available to you too. May you have the courage to stand up against whatever it is that is enslaving you, and may you experience life where death has reigned.”*

- Whom ultimately do you serve? Does that give you the courage to stand up against what is enslaving you?