When Obedience Makes Life Harder
Companion Bible Study · Leader's Guide
A People for His Presence · Exodus 5:1–6:13 · Study 8

Purpose

Help participants follow the passage's single argument: Moses obeys, Pharaoh intensifies oppression, Moses questions God's apparent delay, and the LORD answers by reaffirming his identity and covenant promises. The goal is not a formula for solving adversity. Participants should leave better able to distinguish God's revealed promises from their own expectations, lament before him, and locate lasting hope in Christ's accomplished redemption.

Preparation

Read Exodus 5:1–6:13, Exodus 3:19–20, Exodus 4:22–23,31, Genesis 15:13–14, Titus 2:14, Acts 2:23–24, and 1 Peter 1:3–5. Review the accompanying participant guide and, if available, the sermon. This study stands alone: watching the sermon is not required. Have Bibles available so the group can confirm conclusions from the text. Guide rather than lecture; ask people to point to the words supporting their answers.

Suggested 55-Minute Flow

8 minutes — Welcome, orient to the central question, read Exodus 5:1–6:13 aloud (or divide readings among participants).
10 minutes — Section 1, questions 1–3: Yahweh's claim and Pharaoh's response. Prioritize questions 2–3.
10 minutes — Section 2, questions 4–6: The foremen's distress and Moses' complaint. Prioritize question 6.
12 minutes — Section 3, questions 7–9: God's identity, covenant, and seven promises. Prioritize question 9.
10 minutes — Section 4, questions 10–13: Crushed spirits, Moses' weakness, and Christ's greater redemption. Prioritize questions 10, 12–13.
5 minutes — Section 5 and prayer, questions 14–15. Invite a brief reflection on what changes when our hope rests in Christ; question 15 can be taken home.

Interpretive Notes

Exodus 5:1–9 — A conflict of authority, not a guarantee of easy obedience.

“Thus says the LORD” announces divine authority; “my people” reiterates Yahweh's claim upon Israel (4:22–23). Release is for worship and belonging, not mere self-direction. Pharaoh's “Who is the LORD?” challenges the divine command. God had already foretold resistance in 3:19–20. Do not assert that Pharaoh's oppression was divine punishment because Moses supposedly misquoted the request; the narrator does not say that.

Exodus 5:10–23 — Genuine oppression, limited perspective, and lament.

The workers suffer a deliberately impossible burden: find straw without reduced quotas. The

foremen blame Moses and Aaron (5:21); their pain is real, even when their understanding is incomplete. Moses observes that oppression increased and complains God has not delivered his people. The question “Why have you done evil?” is Moses' anguished speech, not the narrator's teaching that Yahweh committed Pharaoh's moral evil. The text says Moses turned to the LORD. Encourage honest prayer while distinguishing observable facts from premature judgments about God's faithfulness.

Exodus 6:1–8 — The center of the study.
The LORD's answer begins with his own action (“Now you shall see”) and identity (“I am the LORD”). Covenant remembrance in 6:5 means faithful commitment, not earlier forgetfulness. God promised Abraham's descendants a historical rescue and a particular land; compare Genesis 15:13–14. Exodus 6:3 is debated. Some interpret it as fuller revelation through fulfilled promises, while an alternative reading understands the Hebrew rhetorically. The patriarchs truly knew Yahweh; avoid suggesting they had never heard his name or overloading the group with grammar. In 5:23 Moses complains that God has not delivered; in 6:6 God explicitly promises deliverance. The seven first-person declarations concern rescue (bring out, deliver, redeem), relationship (take as my people, be your God), and inheritance of the promised land (bring to, give). Verse 6:7 expresses the purpose of redemption: covenant belonging and worship. Do not transfer Israel's land promise into a blanket guarantee of the believer's financial or physical prosperity.

Exodus 6:9–13 — Weariness is not a simple measure of faith.
The narrator connects Israel's inability to listen with a broken or shortened spirit and harsh slavery. Do not label the crushed as necessarily rebellious. Moses' “uncircumcised lips” describes perceived inadequacy; it is not a medical diagnosis. The LORD reiterates the commission despite their weakness. Invite compassion for people who find encouragement difficult to receive.

Titus 2:14; Acts 2:23–24; 1 Peter 1:3–5 — Christ, not merely a model of persistence.
The Exodus establishes redemption for belonging to God. Christ gives himself to redeem sinners from lawlessness and purify a people for his possession. His cross is an atoning sacrifice, not simply a negative event that becomes positive; the resurrection establishes living hope. Peter distinguishes God's determined plan from the culpability of those who crucified Jesus. Christ's mission is unique, so do not promise that every hardship will be reversed in the believer's earthly lifetime. The promised imperishable inheritance is distinct from Israel's historical land promise.

Application and 'So What?' are distinct.
Application asks what faithful response Scripture calls for (prayer, truthful obedience, receiving support, compassion for others). 'So What?' asks what difference believing and living these truths makes: difficulty no longer proves God's abandonment; uncertainty need not destroy trust; obedience need not become a transaction for favorable outcomes; hope rests in Christ instead of an improved tomorrow. Don't turn this into a prosperity formula or a demand to suppress grief.

Helpful Follow-up Questions

“What in the verse leads you to that conclusion?” “Does the narrator say that, or are we inferring it?” “Whose action is described here—Pharaoh's, Moses', or God's?” “Which promise was made specifically to Israel?” “What has Christ actually accomplished?” “What difference would this make if the difficulty lasted?”

Pastoral Care and Group Safety

Never require a participant to disclose health, financial, family, or traumatic circumstances. Do not suggest sufferers must remain in abuse, neglect safety, or abandon wise medical or financial help in order to show faith. Do not speculate about whether a difficulty is a divine punishment, a tailored lesson, or an attack of Satan. People exhausted by real suffering may need listening, practical support, and appropriate professional assistance, not quick rebuke. The group may pray without demanding instant relief or a display of strong feelings.

How to Recognize a Fruitful Discussion

Participants can trace the narrative from Pharaoh's refusal to God's “I will” promises, describe the relational goal of redemption (6:7), distinguish lament from rebellious refusal, explain why Christ secures greater redemption, and articulate the difference this truth can make without promising immediate changed circumstances. They can support their conclusions with the text.

Leader's closing prayer prompt

Thank God for his covenant faithfulness and the saving work of Christ. Pray for weary believers, the grace to distinguish promises from expectations, obedience even without immediate reward, and a congregation that helps carry one another's burdens.

Related teaching: “When Obedience Makes Life Harder,” Exodus 5:1–6:13 · Watch the sermon: https://youtu.be/XDJf_mzzm9I · Teaching library: https://tlw.church/teaching/