

THE FAMILY YOU LEAVE



Introduction

Weddings and funerals often bring families together in ways other events don't. While they may seem like opposite ends of a spectrum, they actually mark the same simultaneous milestones: a beginning and an ending.

At weddings, couples end their separate lives and start a new one together. At funerals, we end our earthly relationship with the loved one who passed and start a new segment of life without that loved one physically present.

That's why the Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory used by healthcare and mental health professionals ranks funerals as the #1 most stressful event in a person's life and weddings at #7. They are two of the most stressful occasions people endure.

✚ **What's been your experience with weddings and funerals? How stressful did they appear to you?**

Session Context

After fleeing Egypt because Pharaoh wanted to kill him, Moses moved to Midian, met his wife Zipporah, and became a shepherd for his father-in-law. He lived there for about 40 years.

One day, while shepherding the flock, he saw a bush with flames all over it that didn't burn up; so, he got closer to see why. That's when God spoke to Moses and declared he would lead the Israelites out of Egyptian captivity. Moses tried to get out of the assignment by raising concerns, but God addressed every one of them. God also gave Moses a relative to share the great leadership burden ahead – his brother, Aaron. (Read Exodus 3 & 4.)

Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh at least twelve times to secure the Israelites' release, but Pharaoh refused to let the people go until he experienced the final plague: the death of the firstborn in each household that wasn't covered by the blood of an unblemished lamb. The previous nine plagues brought pain and suffering to the people but did not take their lives. Egyptian death is what finally caused Pharaoh to order the Israelites leave Egypt.

Scripture Exploration

Exodus 14:1-14

¹ The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn back and encamp before Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, before Baal Zephon. You shall encamp opposite it by the sea. ³ Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, 'They are entangled in the land. The wilderness has shut them in.' ⁴ I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will follow after them; and I will get honor over Pharaoh, and over all his armies; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD." They did so.

⁵ The king of Egypt was told that the people had fled; and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, "What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" ⁶ He prepared his chariot, and took his army with him; ⁷ and he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, with captains over all of them. ⁸ The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; for the children of Israel went out with a high hand.* ⁹ The Egyptians pursued them. All the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen, and his army overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth, before Baal Zephon.

¹⁰ When Pharaoh came near, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them; and they were very afraid. The children of Israel cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ They said to Moses, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you treated us this way, to bring us out of Egypt? ¹² Isn't this the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."

¹³ Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today; for you will never again see the Egyptians whom you have seen today. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you, and you shall be still."

VERSES 1-4

God gave orders to have the Israelites turn back toward the very people they were leaving. It likely seemed risky and strange, but God was clear on his reasoning — Pharaoh wasn't fully humbled. When God said, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart," it wasn't God increasing Pharaoh's evil nature. Instead, it was God using the Israelite's departure to expose Pharaoh's true heart posture.

VERSES 5-9

Hearing that his slave labor was gone affected Pharaoh's heart and mind. But he wasn't the only one affected after hearing it. His servants were too. Pharaoh's original decision to let the Israelites go was likely driven by emotion (grief) since he had just lost his firstborn. However, hearing the impact of his decision caused Pharaoh to reconsider it and ultimately decide he had made the wrong one.

VERSES 10-12

Seeing Pharaoh's army intimidated the Israelites. Despite the miraculous power they had seen God perform with the plagues and the way he went before them while in the wilderness (a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night), they were still afraid of the physical power shown by Pharaoh. They viewed Pharaoh's army chasing them as a death sentence and complained.

VERSES 13-14

At this point, we don't read in scripture where God told Moses how he would provide the Israelites victory at the Red Sea. Instead, we see Moses speaking in faith about

what God would do and how the Israelites should behave in light of that truth.

☆ **Scripture Insight**

The words "turn back" in verse 2 don't imply that the Israelites were going back to a place they had been. It was a directional change only. Based on previous scriptures, the place they were going to encamp was not a place they had been before. So while they were going back toward the direction they had been leaving, they were not necessarily going back to a place they had already been.

Life Application

+ God knows our turning points.

Pharaoh's decision to let the Israelites go was not his final decision. It was a momentary one. God knew when Pharaoh realized the impact of his decision, he would chase the Israelites so they could serve him and his Egyptian family. God also knew the Israelites would struggle to leave their Egyptian life behind without additional demonstrations of God's power.

Letting go of family – even when the relationships are unhealthy – can be hard. God knows what we need to make some decisions finalized. At times, it means facing our biggest fears so we can learn to rely on God alone.

+ We may need to reface people and situations we thought we left behind.

God's directive to have the Israelites "turn back" was hard. The Israelites had already journeyed several days away from Egypt and now they had to go back in

the direction they were leaving. However, it was a necessary step because who they were leaving wasn't ready to let them go.

Because relationships involve at least two people, it can be hard to move on when one person isn't ready or willing to let go. That means we may need to reface people or situations we're ready to leave behind (or have left behind) because the other person isn't ready yet. In those moments, we have to discern the voice of God and know when he's calling us back to bring final closure for everyone.

+ Seeing physically can reduce our spiritual clarity.

The Israelites became afraid upon seeing Pharaoh's army approaching them. Even though they had personally witnessed God's miracles, they still became frightened when seeing a powerful human enemy.

We too can lose sight of God's presence and promise when faced with physical battles. That's why we need spiritual leaders like Moses in our lives to remind us who God is and what he can do, especially when we're facing situations that seem like our greatest fears are coming true.

Session Reflection

- What turning points have you faced in your family relationships?
- How has God shown you who he is in those moments?
- What family relationships do you fear losing most?
- Who has God given you as a spiritual leader to strengthen your faith when your situations feel overwhelming?
- Who has God called you to help strengthen their faith when their situations feel overwhelming?

Notes

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