

“The Art of Letting Go” (Exodus 2:1–10)

I have a confession. I absolutely hate dumb, pious Christian bumper stickers. Let me cite a few examples. “God is my co-pilot.” What an embarrassing bumper sticker for most Christian drivers. We are some of the worst drivers anywhere in the world. To place any blame on God is inexcusable. Moreover, God is no one’s co-pilot. He is *the* pilot, *the* captain, and *the* King of the Universe. Another common bumper sticker is: “My boss is a Jewish carpenter.” This bumper sticker sounds clever; the only problem is Jesus is not a Jewish carpenter. He worked as a carpenter while He was growing up, but at age thirty He became an itinerant preacher. More importantly, Jesus is the Son of God, not a Jewish carpenter. This bumper sticker unintentionally marginalizes Jesus. Or what about this classic: “Christians aren’t perfect, just forgiven.” While I understand the sentiment behind this cliché, it is really an apology or an excuse for those who do not live like Christians. The thought is: Don’t look at me, look at Jesus. Yet, Jesus said that His disciples are to be “salt” and “light” to the world (Matt 5:13–16). The apostle Paul went so far as to say, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). However, one of the dumbest Christian bumper stickers of all time is “Let go, let God!” This cliché gives the impression that God is responsible to do all the work. Our part is simply to step back and let go. Despite the ridiculous notion of this bumper sticker this cliché literally and physically applies in the story we will study today.

In Exodus 2:1–10, we will be introduced to Jochebed (*Yokebed*)—the mother of Moses. Jochebed, whose name means “the Lord is glory,” learns firsthand the important lesson: *Let go, let God*. Is this a lesson you need to learn today? If you’re like most moms (and dads), probably so. Is it easy to drop your child off at kindergarten for the first time? Is it easy to send your child off to college miles away? Is it easy to send your child into the military? Is it easy to give your child away in marriage? When it comes to our children, to *let God and let God* is one of the most difficult things in the world. However, it is also one of the most necessary and beneficial acts of love and faith that we could ever perform. God wants you and me to trust Him with our children so He says, “*Let go, let God.*”

Before diving into this story, we must set the context. In Exodus 1, we learn that after Joseph’s death,¹ God blesses the nation of Israel with many offspring. Consequently, the Pharaoh grows concerned that the Hebrew people will eventually overpower the Egyptians. So this Pharaoh turns them into slaves to break their wills. In 1:22, Pharaoh issues a decree that every Israelite family must throw every baby boy into the river.² Thus, our story begins on an ominous note. In 2:1–2a we read: “**Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and bore a son.**” These are simple and straight forward verses. Man marries woman and woman conceives a child.³ The parents are not named in this passage; however, in 6:20 we learn that their names are Jochebed and Amram⁴. There is an obvious emphasis upon the term “Levi.”⁵ Not *Levi Strauss*©, but rather the tribe of Levi. God chose a man from the tribe of Levi because that was going to be the priestly tribe. Aaron, the brother of Moses, would be the High Priest; but Moses would be like God to him (7:1), setting up the priesthood, building the sanctuary, and walking Aaron through the routine and even going into the Holy of Holies with him.⁶ Moses, the author of Exodus wants his readers to know that his parents did not intermarry and he and his brother came from the right line to function as priests.

Verse 2 concludes with a strange statement: “**...and when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months.**” The translation “beautiful” is problematic. What mother isn’t going to think her child is “beautiful?”⁷ If Moses was an ugly baby, would his mom have thrown him into the Nile? Of course not! There must be another explanation. Interestingly, this same phrase⁸ is recorded in Genesis 1: “And God saw that it was good.”⁹ Jochebed looked upon her child with a joy similar to that of God upon His creation. She realizes that Moses is a creation of God that it was good, and she knows that God expects her to do everything in her power to save this creation of God. This Hebrew idiom means “to care about,” “to be fond of,” or “to want (to have or to keep).” Thus, the meaning is “longing to have/keep him.”¹⁰

Jochebed hides her child for three months because she wants to preserve Moses' life and honor God. Keeping baby Moses quiet for three months must have been agonizing. For nearly one hundred days they hide Moses and guard his crib. They nurse him regularly to avoid the hunger pangs that would cause him to cry out and reveal his hiding place, bringing sudden death. What faith and courage!¹¹ We learn in Heb 11:23 that they acted in faith. This brave couple feared God more than they feared any man.¹²

In 2:3 the story gets even more interesting: **“But when she [Jochebed] could hide him [Moses] no longer, she got him a wicker basket and covered it over with tar and pitch. Then she put the child into it and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile.”** At the three month mark baby Moses becomes too restless and his identity is going to be exposed. So Jochebed takes action and prepares him for the river. After all, the Nile River is the one place that soldiers would never look for Hebrew babies. Although Moses' mom has to send him out into the world before she is ready, there is little doubt that she somehow hopes to save him by taking every precaution.¹³ The tar¹⁴ and pitch waterproof the basket. She even places Moses among the reeds by the bank of the Nile so that he won't float down the longest river in the world. In one sense Jochebed obeys Pharaoh's decree. If Pharaoh decreed that all baby boys must be thrown into the river, then into the river he would go.¹⁵ After all, Pharaoh did not say one could not use a basket!¹⁶ Having received her son as a gift from the Lord, Jochebed turns him back over to the Lord in faith.¹⁷ Interestingly, the same Hebrew word translated “wicker basket” (*tehvah*) reads “ark” in English translations of Genesis 6:14. Noah's ark in the flood saved the creation; Moses' ark in the Nile saved Israel.¹⁸ The point of this verse is that God is using Moses' mom to deliver her son.

In 2:4 we come upon another informative verse. “[Moses' sister, most likely Miriam] **stood at a distance to find out what would happen to him.**” Jochebed has faith that God will somehow deliver her son so she posts Miriam to keep watch and see what will happen to him. Clearly, Jochebed is not just feeding Moses to the crocodiles. Rather she gives Miriam strict instructions to not let Moses out of her sight. Her intent, as I see it, is probably to bring him there during the day, and then at night time, bring him back home.¹⁹ And Miriam (about 5 years old) is to “babysit” Moses during the day and make sure nothing happens to him.

Our story takes what appears to be a turn for the worst in 2:5–6: **“The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the Nile, with her maidens walking alongside the Nile; and she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid, and she brought it to her. When she opened it, she saw²⁰ the child, and behold, the boy was crying. And she had pity on him and said, ‘This is one of the Hebrews' children.’”** The very last person that Miriam wants to see is Pharaoh's daughter. What chance did this baby have of staying alive when Pharaoh's own daughter picks him out of the river? Poor Miriam experiences a babysitter's worst nightmare. Yes, that's right, the baby is kidnapped!²¹ I'm sure Miriam feel absolute fright and panic. This would mean instant death for her baby brother. Imagine the emotions that shot through her mind and heart. What a helpless feeling! She just has to watch the event unfold. Upon unwrapping the infant's clothing, Pharaoh's daughter recognizes that Moses has been circumcised and is thus a Hebrew baby. A Hebrew baby would have been circumcised on the eighth day. Although circumcision was practiced in Egypt, it was not done to infants. Surprisingly, she has “pity”²² on the child.

In 2:7–8, Miriam thinks quickly and says to Pharaoh's daughter, **“‘Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women that she may nurse the child for you?’ Pharaoh's daughter said to her, ‘Go ahead.’ So the girl went and called the child's mother.”** Miriam is courageous and smart. Yet, she is also probably well-trained by her mom. It is standard procedure for a wealthy woman to hire a wet nurse to feed a child until he is weaned, and the wet nurse would be the legal guardian during those first years. So, at just the right time, Miriam moves in and makes an offer to help fulfill that custom. What suspense! Pharaoh's daughter disobeys her father's command! I guess that isn't so ironic in our day and age. Many daughters disobey Dad...and even Mom. (Sorry mom, even though it's Mother's Day, I still have to tell the truth.)

Our story concludes in 2:9–10 in astonishing fashion: “**Then Pharaoh’s daughter said to her [Miriam], ‘Take this child away and nurse him for me and I will give you your wages.’ So the woman took the child and nursed him. The child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. And she named him Moses, and said, ‘Because I drew him out of the water.’**” What irony! Can you imagine getting paid to raise your own son? You may be saying, “I should have been paid for raising my son. In fact, I’m still waiting for my wages!” Thanks to God, for the first two to four years of his life, Moses has the opportunity to bond with his mother and to receive basic spiritual instruction from her. Although she has only a few years to teach him the most important lessons in life, God blesses. This is an amazing example of God’s sovereignty. God uses Moses’ own biological mother to prepare him to be Israel’s deliverer. This is also a great reminder of the importance of these formative years. Moms maximize these years when your children are young. Pour your lives into them. Your time, energy, and sacrifice will pay rich dividends. Pray fervently that your child will learn to love God’s people, hear His voice, and respond to His call.²³ And remember it’s not so much what you *teach* your child, it is what you *are*—your actions, your attitude, even your tone of voice!²⁴ As a mom you can play an integral role in your child’s eternal destiny and impact human history.

Surprisingly, the issue that commentators spend the most time discussing is whether the name “Moses” has Egyptian or Hebrew origins.²⁵ Yet, the significance of Moses’ name is given in the text itself. There is clear irony here. Pharaoh’s decree was to “throw out” Hebrew baby boys and his daughter’s declares Moses’ name “draw out.” What a glaring example of God’s sovereignty! Not only did God deliver Moses, but through his deliverance it appears that the Pharaoh’s policy of genocide is set aside. Pharaoh’s own daughter defied his order, thereby making it virtually impossible for the Pharaoh to enforce his own decree. Think about it for a moment. Pharaoh’s daughter refused to abide by her father’s orders by taking Moses out of the water, and then she takes a Hebrew child home with her as her son. Now, in the palace of the Pharaoh whose orders were, “Throw them in the water!” there is a Hebrew boy whose name means “Taken from the water.” It is very unlikely that Pharaoh could have enforced his decree when his own daughter disobeyed it when living testimony of this disobedience lived in the palace of Pharaoh, under his protection. Once again, Pharaoh’s efforts to destroy the people of God are turned inside-out, resulting in the fulfillment of His promises concerning the blessing of His people, Israel. Once again, God has providentially preserved and prospered His people. Moses has been spared, and so have the other Israelite boy babies; now there is a Hebrew living in the palace, part of the royal family.²⁶

This story is designed to give us hope. A pagan culture, no matter how degenerate, need not destroy our children. But to combat our culture we need the same strengths in our lives that Moses’ parents had.

- ***We must have faith in God.***²⁷ Each of the women in this story exercises faith: Jochebed, Miriam, and Pharaoh’s daughter. They are amazing examples of what God can do through people like you and me. Did you notice that God is never mentioned once in this passage? Still, we know He’s at work. There are things mothers can do, but ultimately they have to leave it in God’s hands. That’s the hardest thing, isn’t it? Letting go? A mother’s love never changes, but parenthood is a constant process of letting go: letting your child make mistakes; letting your teenager learn some things the hard way; letting your adult child follow God’s call, even if it means he or she will live 1,000 miles away. Mothers, take heart! He’ll use your courageous, sensible faith to accomplish his purposes. He’s working behind the scenes to accomplish His purpose in your children’s lives. He *will* use you, but it’s not all up to you. This is where faith comes in. God expects parents to completely rely upon Him. It is a daily dying to self. It is living a life that says, “*Let go, let God.*” This adventure is only possible through a faith relationship with Jesus Christ. In order to be the mom that God wants you to be, you must *first* place your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior. If you haven’t exercised faith in Christ alone, please do so today. He offers you eternal life and an abundant life here on earth.

- ***We must have courage.*** Parenting is not for sissies! It requires immense courage. We must have boldness to stand against the waves of materialism, secularism, and sensualism that are bombarding our children everyday. We must be willing to go against the grain, even at times being mocked by coworkers, neighbors, and even church families. Honestly, if you raise your children in the Lord, other parents will be threatened. They will say, “You are overprotective. You are extreme. You are paranoid.” We may be misunderstood or misaligned. Yes, we may suffer mildly, but in the end, we will be glad we stood strong. The tragedy is there is a dearth of courageous children because there are very few courageous American parents. We must pray that God will grant us courage.

Perhaps you’re not a parent. You too must exercise courage. Are you in a dating relationship that may or may not be right? If so, are you willing to let this person go? Do you have a desire for an advanced degree that may or may not be God’s will for you? Are you willing to part with this degree? Are you seeking a promotion that has your name written all over it? Are you willing to relinquish this to the Lord? God knows what is best for you. But you must let it go. If He chooses to give it back to you, praise His name. But this doesn’t always happen. In the end, you must simply *let go, let God*.

- ***We must have a strategy.*** Faith and courage are but the foundations upon which we must build. We’ll never rescue our children from Satan’s plot to destroy them by merely trusting God. We must act on our faith! This doesn’t mean we have all the answers, but we must be willing to seek God’s will for our children. Do you know what your child wants to do vocationally? Do you know what your child wants to accomplish for the Lord? Help your child accomplish his or her dreams. Make sacrifices so that your child can far surpass you. It was eighty years after his birth that Moses ended up trusting God and being used by him. His parents did not get to see what he eventually became. But they planted seeds into his young life that one day came to full harvest. Jochebed and Amram learned to *let go, let God*. As a result, Moses did not grow up as a slave but as a son, safe and secure in Pharaoh’s court. There he “was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22). This was the finest training world had to offer—a near Ivy League education. Moses was trained in linguistics, mathematics, astronomy, architecture, music, medicine, law, and the fine arts of diplomacy. In other words, Moses is trained for Pharaoh’s overthrow right under Pharaoh’s nose!²⁸ The great irony of these verses is: Pharaoh had determined to kill all baby boys (1:22), but this baby boy will end up killing Pharaoh and his army. What a wonderful example of God’s sovereignty.²⁹ Indeed, God works all things according to His sovereign purposes (Rom 8:28).

Perhaps you are a single mom who is feeling at the end of yourself. You are so drained and depleted that you have nothing left in your spiritual tank. God wants you to know that you’ve been doing the work of two—both father and mother. He is pleased with you, but He yearns for you to *let go, let God*. You may be a military wife who is feeling the weight of loneliness while your husband is deployed. It’s difficult to raise your children alone during twelve month deployments. God wants you to rest on Him during these difficult seasons. He will be your strength. Maybe you are a spiritually single mom who has an unbelieving husband. You are trying to raise your children in the Lord, but you are growing weary and losing heart. It’s difficult to get the children ready for church on your own. It’s hard to be their spiritual leader. Yet, God is saying, “Let me be your husband, let me be your children’s father. I care more about you and them than you ever could. I will shepherd all of you.” Perhaps you are an empty nester with grown children who now have their own children. You may be discouraged because you were not the mom you wanted to be when your children were growing up. Now you may feel like you have no credibility. Don’t talk yourself down. God still wants to use you. Let Him worry about softening your children. If you have a beating heart and red blood flowing through your veins, God is not through with you. Just *let go, let God*.

Scripture References

Exodus 2:1–10

Exodus 1:15–22

Hebrews 11:23–28

Acts 7:19–22

Mark 3:31–35

Proverbs 22:6

2 Timothy 2:5

Study Questions

1. How has God orchestrated various details in my life to bring about His sovereign purposes? Are there specific details, experiences, or divine occurrences that vividly stand out to me? What have I learned about God by observing His tapestry in my life? In light of what the Lord has done, why do I still doubt His power and care? How can I change my faulty thinking? Who can help me in this process?
2. Why is it so difficult to release my children to God? What do I hope to accomplish by holding on to them? Do I believe that God is less concerned about my child's well-being than I am? What step can I take today to relinquish my grasp on my child and give him or her to the Lord? What parents have I seen do this particularly well? Will I contact this couple today and seek to learn from them?
3. When I have given someone or something up to God how have I seen Him return to me what I have given to Him? Why does He often do this? What is His primary desire for me? Read Exodus 20:3; Luke 14:26. How can I learn this lesson more quickly in every area of my life? How have I prioritized my children over my relationship with the Lord? What has this looked like in my life? How can I correct this sinful behavior?
4. As a mom (or dad), how have I exercised *faith* in my relationship with my children? How did this step build my children and me up in the Lord? How have I exhibited *courage* with my kids? What recent decision have I made that goes against the grain of my society and friendships? Do I have a *strategy* for raising my children in the Lord? If so, how would I explain this to others? What has God shown me about how to raise my children in the last six months?
5. Read Exodus 1:15–2:10. How does God use women in this narrative? What can I learn from the various scenes? How does this persuade me that God wants to use me to accomplish His will in the world today? Why has God always enjoyed using women for His sovereign glory and purposes? What practical ramifications does this have on my daily life as a wife, mom, and woman of God?

Notes

¹ Cf. Gen 50:22–26.

² When Jesus was born, He was also the object of Herod’s hatred (Matt 2:1–23).

³ At the time of Pharaoh’s order they already had two children, Miriam (Exod 15:20) and Aaron.

⁴ Amram means “exalted nation.”

⁵ Stuart observes, “Names provide the inclusio that sets this section off as a unit. Verse 1 names the house (tribe) of Levi as the genealogical locus for the story, and v. 10 ends with the naming of Moses and an explanation of his name’s meaning.” See Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*. The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 84.

⁶ See Lev 9.

⁷ See also HCSB and NKJV. Other English versions render this phrase “healthy” (NET), “fine” (ESV, NRSV, NIV), and “special” (NLT).

⁸ Heb. *ki tob*.

⁹ See Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25 (see also 3:18; 6:2; 40:16).

¹⁰ Stuart, *Exodus*, 88.

¹¹ Gene A. Getz, *When You Feel Like You Haven’t Got It* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1976), 16.

¹² Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus*. Preaching the Word commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 46.

¹³ Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*. Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 18.

¹⁴ The “tar” (*chemar*) with which the ark was coated is the same as that mentioned in Gen 11:3.

¹⁵ The Nile was more than a river; it was one of Egypt’s top gods.

¹⁶ Michael Eaton, *Exodus 1–20*. Preaching Through the Bible (Tonbridge, England: Sovereign World, 2002), 16.

¹⁷ Ryken, *Exodus*, 46–47.

¹⁸ Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 352.

¹⁹ This insight came from interaction with my friend, Verlyn D. Verbrugge.

²⁰ One of the interesting things about this passage is the prominent role women with motherly instincts play in the story. Jochebed “saw” that Moses was beautiful. Pharaoh’s daughter “saw” the basket, “saw” the child crying, and had pity on him. Moses’ sister stood in the wings to “know” or “notice” what would happen and when to act. All of this foreshadows what God would soon do for his people. Later in chapter 2, it’s God who looks upon his people who are suffering. We’re told in verse 25 that “God saw”—same word—“the sons of Israel, and God took notice”—same word—“of them.” So you could say it’s the motherly instinct of God which caused him to move forward to save his people. And it was God’s motherly instincts to “see” us as worthy of delivering from our utterly helpless state through the death, burial, and resurrection of his own Son.

²¹ Ryken, *Exodus*, 52.

²² Ryken, *Exodus*, 52 writes, “The pity of this Egyptian woman is a reminder that the Exodus was not just for the Jews; ultimately, it was for the salvation of the whole world, including the Egyptians. When the Israelites finally made their exodus from Egypt “many other people went up with them” (Exod 12:38). Very likely, at least some of these people were Egyptians. This is not surprising, because God has always planned to save people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.”

²³ Ryken, *Exodus*, 53 writes, “Undoubtedly, Jochebed fervently prayed for her son and Moses learned to love God’s people, hear His voice, and respond to His call.”

²⁴ Getz, *When You Feel Like You Haven’t Got It*, 18.

²⁵ The name “Moses” seems to come from an Egyptian word that means “son” or “is born” though the sound Moses was a pun on the Hebrew verb “to draw out.” Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*. Translated by Israel Abrahams. Reprinted, English ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983), 20–21.

²⁶ Bob Deffinbaugh, “The Preservation and Preparation of Israel’s Deliverer” (Exodus 2): http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=135.

²⁷ These three actions steps come from Getz, *When You Feel Like You Haven’t Got It*, 18.

²⁸ Ryken, *Exodus*, 53.

²⁹ See Gen 50:20: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”