**Series Road Map**

**Series Overview:** In this series, Supporting Cast, we are looking at the lesser known yet vitally important characters in the Bible. We believe that every single person has a specific role to play in the story of God and it is only when we all follow God’s call that He can accomplish His work in the world.

**Week Overview:** This week focuses on the story of Pharaoh. Though he is the adversary or the “enemy” in this story, God still has an intentional plan and purpose for Him.

***Outline:***

**Grab the Room (Intro):**

* Moment of honesty: How are you actually doing?

**Tension (what’s the struggle):**

* Sometimes we have an automated answer to the question of “how are you?” yet there is something in our life holding us captive that we need to face.

**Text:** Exodus 6:1-9, 7:3

**THP**: He is Lord. I am not.

**Supporting Points:**

* He uses Pharaoh not to tortue the Israelites but to call them back to His promises and the reminder that when He says “I am the Lord” He means it.

**Application (call to action)**:

Whatever struggle you find yourself in. God has a promise to see you through your struggle.

Activity: Students pairing their struggle with a promise of God. Writing it on a notecard.

\*\*\*Vision: End worship on a more mellow song. Lean into having their full attention and start with a more serious, honest tone. Don’t let up into the light-hearted right away.

When was the last time you asked yourself, how am I really doing? I think it’s pretty common that we text our friend, pass a teacher in the hallway, chat with our life group leader, or talk to our parents after school and they ask, “how are you?” If you’re like me, you have your set response to that question. No matter the day, this seems to be your natural response. Maybe it’s:

* “Good”
* “Fine”
* “I’m doing alright”
* “Could be worse”
* “Stressed but blessed!”

I think it has become a norm for us to ask that question in conversation because it helps to fill the space. It’s not that we don’t actually want to know how people are but sometimes we ask that question without *really* asking it. So, I want to create some space today to actually ask you that question, “how are you” and for you to come up with a really honest response. Not an automated response but something that is true, even if it seems a little ugly or hard. Life is not all sunshine and rainbows and that is okay. So…”How are you?”

I want to dive into Scripture as we sit in this moment of reflection and honesty. For the past few weeks we have been in this series titled, Supporting Cast where we are taking a look at some of the lesser known but vitally important characters in the Bible. We believe that every single person has a specific role to play in the story of God and we want to unpack what that looks like in the lives of some of these biblical characters and what it means for our lives.

Today we are entering into the story of the Israelites in Egypt. The Israelites are God’s chosen people. The ones that we are reading about throughout the entire old testament. However, they aren’t known for their dedication to God as much as they are known for forgetting or rejecting God, only to have Him call them back time and time again. In today’s story, that is no different. In fact, we are diving into a really dark time in Israel’s past.

In the book of Exodus, God’s people are enslaved in Egypt. For over 400 years they have been living in harsh conditions with zero freedom. They had no leader or voice which meant they had no sign of freedom on the horizon. That is all thanks to Pharaoh, the Egyptian ruler. He is the one holding them captive and refusing to let them free no matter the circumstances. It is a pretty bleak situation.

If you were to ask Israel, “how are you?” I don’t think the answer would be very optimistic. Honestly, I think that’s okay. Maybe as you sit here and reflect you are thinking to yourself, my answer isn’t very optimistic. I’m not happy with my situation or with my circumstances right now. Life isn’t sunshine and rainbows, it’s hard. School is hard, my family is a mess, I am fighting with my friends, I am anxious, I am depressed, I am just confused. Maybe you feel like you are stuck in Egypt. With no hope for future freedom. If that’s you, today I just want to assure you that we see you, we hear you, and today we have a message of hope for you.

If maybe you are sitting here today and you are thinking, man life is pretty good. It’s not perfect but it’s not bad. I still want to encourage you to lean in because this message applies to every single person in the room today.

If you have your Bibles turn to Exodus chapter 6. We just walked through Israel’s current experience, the enslaved and sad circumstance that they find themselves in. Now, I want to read to you, God’s response. I want us to walk through how God responds to His people in times of crisis.

Exodus 6:1-8

Then the Lord told Moses, “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh. When he feels the force of my strong hand, he will let the people go. In fact, he will force them to leave his land!”

**2** And God said to Moses, “I am Yahweh—‘the Lord.’[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus+6&version=NLT#fen-NLT-1658a)] **3** I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El-Shaddai—‘God Almighty’[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus+6&version=NLT#fen-NLT-1659b)]—but I did not reveal my name, Yahweh, to them. **4** And I reaffirmed my covenant with them. Under its terms, I promised to give them the land of Canaan, where they were living as foreigners. **5** You can be sure that I have heard the groans of the people of Israel, who are now slaves to the Egyptians. And I am well aware of my covenant with them.

**6** “Therefore, say to the people of Israel: ‘I am the Lord. I will free you from your oppression and will rescue you from your slavery in Egypt. I will redeem you with a powerful arm and great acts of judgment. **7** I will claim you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God who has freed you from your oppression in Egypt. **8** I will bring you into the land I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will give it to you as your very own possession. I am the Lord!’”

I love this passage because it is such a strong reflection of God’s character. If you want to know who our God is, this is a great place to start or return to. He opens with a statement of power. He says, “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh.” He is making a promise to His people through their leader, Moses, that He will rescue them from Egypt by putting the pressure on Pharaoh. He is saying to them, I have heard you, I see you, I have not forgotten you. I am coming to your rescue, I am coming to make it clear to the world that you are loved and favored by me!

Then he ends with this incredible declaration of who He is and what He is going to do. He starts with, “I am the Lord.” Pause here. Can I suggest something? I think this is where we all need to start. Is Jesus the Lord of your life, or are you? Who is in control? I think so often we try to take that position of control away from God. We look at the mountains in our life and we think, there is no way that is going to move. I cannot move that mountain. You’re right. You weren’t meant to. If this is all that you get from the message tonight, here this. He is Lord, you are not, and that’s exactly how it is supposed to be. You can find rest in that because this is what he promises as Lord in this passage…

* I will free you
* I will redeem you
* I will claim you
* I will bring you into all that I have promised
* I will give you a life filled with more love and hope than you could have ever dreamed

BUT, in order to access allll of that, it has to start with believing that declaration. I am the Lord.

So, how do the people respond?

**9** So Moses told the people of Israel what the Lord had said, but they refused to listen anymore. They had become too discouraged by the brutality of their slavery.

How many of you would consider yourself to be stubborn? Okay, if you think you are stubborn I can bet the Israelites have got you beat. Look at how they respond! God has just given this magnificent declaration of who He is and all that He has planned to do and give them and their response? They refused to listen. They were too discouraged by their circumstances to even listen to God. Have you been there?

This is where Pharaoh becomes a vitally important, yet lesser known character in this story. I think he may feel like a supporting cast member to us because when we look at Pharaoh we see the bad guy. The evil man that wouldn’t let the Israelites go. However, though his role may seem small and horribly unhelpful to the entire story, I would argue he is actually a key piece to the entirety of God’s plan.

\*\*\*Insert personal story or joke to lighten the mood

Now, if you can imagine, I was A+ student in Sunday school. I was the first to answer questions, the first to read out loud, I wanted to know anything and everything about Jesus. Unfortunately, I didn’t always have the best motives. While I did love Jesus, deep down I knew that if I had a good day in Sunday school and could tell my mom what I learned, she would buy me ice cream with my lunch after church.

This story of Pharaoh and God going head to head is one that I remember from Sunday school and it goes like this…

\*\*\*Summarize the story of the plagues in your own way, or even how you heard it in Sunday School.

 It is the story of the ten plagues. Imagine a Pharaoh so stubborn, so wicked that even the nastiest of plagues wouldn’t convince him to let the Israelites go.

So, God sends these horrible plagues to the land of Egypt to try to convince Pharaoh to let His people go. Every time God sends one of these plagues He starts with, “Let my people go, so they can worship me. If you refuse to let them go I will…” Some of the plagues are especially nasty including everything from frogs, to rivers of blood, to locusts and festering boils. Yet each and every time God would send one of these plagues upon Egypt, Pharaoh still refused to let the Israelites go.

Can you imagine what it must feel like to be in the Israelites’ position right now? Just as a reminder, they are not following and abiding in the Lord right now, they refused to listen to Him! It’s not likely that they even realize what God is trying to do here or that He has a plan to free them. So, day after day the Israelite people are enduring all of these awful things alongside the Egyptian people. They are experiencing plagues of gnats, flies, hail, and literal darkness.

Maybe you’re in the same position. You have so much going on around you, so much chaos that you are struggling to find God in the midst of it. Maybe you are sitting here praying that whatever situation you are struggling through right now will just end. But no matter what you do, whatever struggle you are in, you feel like it is not letting up. You are in Egypt and this struggle is holding you captive. You have a Pharaoh in your life that will not set you free.

However, there is a reason for Pharaoh. There is a reason for whatever situation in your life that has you feeling like you are out in the middle of Egypt.

Here’s what the Lord says in Exodus 7:3

“But I will make Pharaoh’s heart stubborn so I can multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in the land of Egypt.”

I think we all know that if God wanted to, He could snap His fingers and the Israelites could be free. No human, no Pharaoh could stop the power and will of God in setting His people free. When He says, “I am the Lord” he means. **He is Lord, you are not.** That is intentional! Pharaoh is just a man in this story. A man whose heart has been hardened. But why? Why would the Lord not just let His people go? Why is the Lord not releasing you from this struggle that you are in?

This verse says, “so I can multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in the land of Egypt.” I know it feels like a cop out answer to say that there is a reason for whatever circumstance you are in. To tell you that everything will work out for good. The reality is, it’s true. God has a reason for the season. That is a Christmas saying usually but when God says, “I am the Lord,” he means it.

Today I want to challenge you to view your circumstance from a different perspective. You see, the Israelites could have seen this season and this struggle as lost. It was hopeless. The Pharaoh was horrible and evil and vile and life would never move on. They could have sulked in a corner and blamed God for putting them in this situation and not saving them. That could be your perspective too.

Yet, there is a deeper truth here. That is, **He is Lord and you are not.** When we look at that first Scripture that we read, the incredible declaration and promise of God to His people, where He says I will free you, claim you, redeem you, and all of that. He promises ALL of that *before* the plagues and Pharaoh’s stubbornness happens. God’s promise to them precedes the struggle.

God’s promise is good in both times of fruitfulness and times of struggle.

When struggles arise, when we feel like we are in Egpyt, when we feel we have a Pharaoh in our life that is stubborn, unrelenting, and holding us captive. The answer is to go back to the promise. To see God in the midst of it. To lean heavy on God, crying out to Him for deliverance. Jesus didn’t come to earth to make life easy but to give us hope in the midst of struggles. In the midst of Egypt.

So, how are you? What is your Egypt? What is your Pharaoh? What is holding you captive? What situation or circumstance are you seeking freedom from?

Then...are you seeking the promise of God in the midst of it? When He says, “I am the Lord” He means it. **He is Lord, you are not.**

\*\*\*Response activity

* Put a list of key promises of God on the screen
* Pass out notecards
* Have students write their answer to “How are you?”
* Instruct them to pair their situation, struggle, or circumstance with a promise of God that will sustain them through it.

**Micah - Ortberg has this famous line, “there is a God and it is not you.” I like how the THP is connected to that. I wonder if changing Lord to God would make it catchier… just a thought. Maybe not. Honestly, this script is strong. I’m all game for it. The only thing is it doesn’t feel like there’s a practice or takeaway from the script. He is Lord, I am not--yes, but what are we to do with that? What if we challenged our students to fast? We all fast on Thursday that week as a practice to remind ourselves He is Lord--he sustains us.**

**Kent: Kylee… seriously… good! I like the THP but I think it should be GOD instead of Lord… super minor just my two cents.**

**Could you write out your funny story to lighten the mood?? Just for direction sake for the rest of the team?**

**I love the end with the promises idea… I also like the idea of challenging students to more! I am up for Micah’s idea above to challenge students to fast and to meditate on God being God and the fact that we are not!**

**Scott: I love the question about stubbornness. I’d like to spend just another moment there and ask if there’s ever been a time that a word of encouragement or scripture ever made them not feel a single bit better or maybe even feel worse. It’s a very real feeling that we don’t like to own up to.**

**Saying that He is Lord and I’m not is a struggle. Not just once but every day. We have to not only let go of pride, but also believe so much in God that we’re willing to submit to His plan. How can we help students move toward that decision? Is there an action we can help them with? Help identify the tension in their own life?**

**The Israelites were ne we really on board with her plan. They just kinda went with it because it was happening to them. They remind me a bit of Jonah. Maybe inside that story is a reminder to be on board. To find joy and rest and hope in Gods plan. We can either choose faith and enjoy the journey or be a stubborn kid dragging our feet the whole time and never engage in God's plan. Create a bit of fomo around being fully used by Fox and living a powerful story.**

**I love your point on pharaoh being a cast member. What if we asked the question “what if he hadn’t? What if he’d just let them go?” Maybe no celebration, no miracles, no Passover, no precursor to Jesus…**

**Aaron: Not to go against Kent… But I like your use of “Lord” in the THP, but I would suggest adding about 2-3 mor sentences when you are reflecting on the first passage and talking about the statement “I am the Lord.” I think this is a chance where you could clearly define the word “Lord” it’s a word many of our students have heard, and even said. They know that “Jesus is Lord” and “God is Lord”, but what does it actually mean to call someone the Lord of your life. Ultimately, it means they are in control, not you. I think if you spend just a little more time here and provide a little more clarity it will give the THP more weight. Fantastic script, Kylee. Very excited for this one!**

**Harrison: Really loved this script. The flow was good and the application was great. Adding in a little something for someone who is not going through junk would be helpful, and adding something fro someone who doesn't believe. There are always multiple groups that we need our messages to apply to. The application is great but there needs to be something for everyone in the audience. Not much to say because it was written so well!**