

“Getting Unstuck in My Faith”
By Rom A. Pegram (9/8/19)

Several years ago, I was a part of a mission group who took about 100 teenagers to Ocoee (southeastern), Tennessee. Our day off activity was to take the kids rafting on the Ocoee River. I didn’t raft that day, but myself and another leader were drafted to be positioned along some of the Class IV rapids on the river to film the group as they were coming through. It was shooting the rapids that always caused difficulty for the rafters. What we witnessed that day was spectacular!

In each of the rafts was an experienced guide who would give the group direction, as needed, going down the river. As a dad, the most heart-pounding experience that day was watching/filming my son, Josh, and a good friend of his—along for the first time. Positioned on the worst of the Class IV rapids, I witnessed both my son ... and his friend, Jason, flying out of the raft when it momentarily got stuck on some rocks. So, watching my son and his friend ejecting out of that raft into the fast-moving waters of the Ocoee made me just a bit nervous. All kinds of things were going through mind—as a parent, thinking of Josh’s friend Jason’s parents, and what they’d think if I didn’t bring their son home safely. As a pastor, I’m picturing having to do funerals after this ‘fun day,’ because the mighty Ocoee ate some of our kids...

Here’s something interesting I learned: The guides, to get the kids successfully through this rafting adventure, did this: When they came through the rapids and got *stuck* on the rocks, if they’d tried to paddle and push through, they probably would have lost the raft and we might’ve lost some kids. But what the guides always had them do, when they got stuck on the rocks, was to ... *paddle backwards*. That and things like always lean your weight toward the smaller of the rocks you stuck on. There’s technique to this, but the main thing was to ... *paddle backwards*. It wasn’t really a natural thing for anyone to paddle backwards, but when you’re stuck on the rocks, that’s the first thing you do! So, they’d get stuck, paddle backwards, then take another route around the rocks. Long story short, everyone made it out OK...

I remember a time when I was a younger man (20s) ... when I got *stuck in my faith*. For several weeks, I quit going to church with my family—Jane and the kids. I experienced a crisis of faith and really got stuck spiritually...

Later in life, I also experienced getting stuck financially—never enough to make ends meet. And what I’d been taught all my life (Christian practice of *tithing*) just wouldn’t work for me. Yet, when stuck financially ... I got so desperate at one point that I decided to do things God’s way, and lo and behold ... I got UNSTUCK. And on and on...

Folks, have you been there? At times in your life, have you ever got stuck in some area of your life—or life in general?

Maybe, for some of you, this is the first time you’ve been to church in a long, long time (which may be a safe bet coming off of a beautiful Wisconsin summer). Some of you may have seen advertisement for this series and said, “You know what, I’m stuck, and I’m going to be there today.” The GOOD NEWS for all of us willing today to say that we’re stuck is ... *God loves to get us UNSTUCK!* In fact (and I know this is traditionally the wrong time of year), *that’s what EASTER is all about!* Easter says, the same power

that raised Christ from the dead—the same power that got Jesus UNSTUCK, is available to you and me to get us UNSTUCK too!

Here's what those opposing Jesus tried to do 2,000 years ago. They tried to 'stick' Jesus in that tomb. In fact, they put a very large stone in front of it to make sure he'd stay *stuck*. But you know what happened. Three days later, Jesus became UNSTUCK. And you and I can rest assured that when we feel stuck in life, Jesus will move us from stuck ... to UNSTUCK. And the Bible is full of stories of people who became UNSTUCK with God's help...

Let's go back 2,000 years ago to that first Good Friday and the cross. It's Friday night; they've crucified Jesus—their friend, their Lord, and their Savior. Here's this group of leaders who've committed themselves to following Jesus and now Jesus, *their* leader, is dead on a cross. It's Friday night and all the disciples feel *stuck*—especially one...

Do you remember Peter? Peter's one of my favorite disciples, because I can relate to Peter. He's sometimes a bit brash ... and he often sticks his foot in his mouth! Peter, however, was a fisherman by trade—a professional. He was a fisherman before he became a follower of Jesus. But one day, he made a brash decision to leave his fishing nets and follow Jesus. ... In John 13, Jesus tells his disciples that one of them is going to betray him. Peter's attitude? 'Well, it may be one of these other losers, but it's not going to be me! I'll never deny you, Jesus!' And at that moment, as you'll recall, Jesus gave Peter his nickname. You know his name wasn't Peter, don't you? His name was actually 'Simon.' But Jesus called him Peter—*Petros, the rock*. Peter became 'the rock' or 'Rocky,' as we might call him today. And it was based on Peter's profession that Jesus was the Messiah—the Son of God, and Jesus was going to build his Church on him. Then, Peter finds himself on the night of Jesus' arrest, denying his Lord 3 times. Peter, who said he'd never deny Jesus, now turns to mush ... and denies Jesus 3 times! And we don't really know where he was when Jesus was on the cross—probably in hiding somewhere...

And then, on Saturday night, Peter's having what we might call 'a dark night of the soul.' Have you ever been there? And he feels *stuck*! The One he'd left everything to follow, just died on the cross 24 hours ago. So, Peter gets up on Sunday morning and does what? Pray? Gather the others who've been following Jesus to console them? No. He goes back to his old ways. He decides to do something very familiar, very comforting; he goes fishing...

And we'll pick up there in John 21 in just a moment... But, Peter—on Saturday night—was asking himself questions like: How could this happen to me? Why has God forsaken me? Is there any hope? ... Have you ever asked similar questions of God? Have you ever come to a point in your life where you feel *stuck*? The power of the resurrection says that Christ was raised from the dead so that you and I can get UNSTUCK! That same power that raised Jesus is available to you & me today! So, let's talk about that and let's begin with Romans 6:4b (NLT)—out loud together, with great enthusiasm, okay?

...And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

Good job! Now, if you'd turn to your notes, I want to give you *3 lessons from the life of Peter, the Rock*... And let me encourage you to take notes—at least a minimum of notes—during this series. If you've come here for some time and never taken advantage of the note sheet or the message time, give it a try during this series. Why am I saying that? Because if you're *not* stuck right now, in some area of your life, *you will be* someday ... and I (and God) want you to be ready! So, here we go: Lesson 1 is:

I have to admit that I'm STUCK. 'Sounds simple, right? But this admittance, that we cannot get through life on our own, requires something very powerful—HUMILITY. For those of you with me over the summer, that's the 3rd Beatitude—Matthew 5:5a – “God blesses those who are humble....”

You may have heard the old saying: “If you find yourself in a hole, the first rule is to stop digging!” Maybe you've heard that. Let me give it to you in a different way today: “If you find yourself stuck, the first rule is to admit you're stuck!” You have to admit it ... and this is really hard for guys!

It's like having to stop to ask for directions; we hate that. We hate to admit that we need help with anything, but especially when we're driving ... and people are counting on us to get to the correct destination. It's a guy thing!

Your first step though, if you ever feel stuck in life though, is to *admit it!* It's hard to admit to your spouse or kids (those closest to you). It's hard to admit to your friends—that you may need help. But I'll tell you who it's especially hard to admit to—GOD. Here we're at a place where we have to say, “God, I'm stuck!” And *for all those who may be stuck right now, and for all you others who will be stuck someday, let's say this together right now: “God, I'm stuck!”* That's hard to say—*very hard to say...*

So, Peter finds himself in this position where he was stuck after Jesus' crucifixion, and he didn't want to admit it. He didn't want to say, “God, I'm stuck”, so Peter did what any red-blooded male would do: *Peter went fishing!* And what Peter was really telling himself was, “I'm going to get *myself* unstuck!” Just remember, fishing was a natural thing for Peter; it was comfortable. He'd been a fisherman long before he'd been a follower of Jesus; it was a family business, and he'd been a professional. So, here we are... It's Sunday morning—early, and here's what happens (John 21:1-3, NLT): “Later, Jesus appeared again to the disciples beside the Sea of Galilee. This is how it happened. ² Several of the disciples were there—Simon Peter, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples. ³ Simon Peter said, ‘I'm going fishing.’ ‘We'll come, too,’ they all said. So they went out in the boat, but they caught nothing all night.”

Now, they don't know it's Jesus, OK? They'd been out fishing all night ... and they hadn't heard about the resurrection. So, this happens beside the Sea of Galilee as they had come in off the water early in the morning. Peter was there. Several of the other disillusioned disciples were there. Peter said, “I'm going fishing” and several followed him; they were all a bit *stuck*...

Have you ever been there? 'Ever had your fishing pole in the back, Sinatra blaring “I did it my way” on the radio, and you're headed anywhere but *toward* God?

Peter, here, was having what we might call ‘a dark night of the soul.’ And maybe some of you’ve been there, ignoring the brutal fact that you’re *stuck*, instead of humbling yourself before God, admitting you need God’s help getting UNSTUCK...

BUT, there’s an alternative. There’s a better way to live. James 4:10 (NLT) says, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.” Have you ever wondered why God allows us to get *stuck* in the first place? I mean, why isn’t every day like EASTER? Why do we have to go through the ‘crucifixion Fridays’ ... and the dark Saturdays, time after time after time? *Could it be God allows the ‘stuck days’ in our lives so that, once again, we’ll affirm our dependence on him?* Maybe getting *stuck* is the only way some of us will ever humble ourselves so we can hear from God and get back to him. This is ... SO IMPORTANT; the first step in getting UNSTUCK is to admit you’re *stuck* in the first place... Secondly:

Be open to God’s voice. There’re two keys here, when it comes to being open to God’s voice—this 2nd step to getting UNSTUCK in our lives. *We have to be open*—to open ourselves up to hearing from God... And we have to be open ... *to the right voice!* I’m amazed at how easy it is to listen to the *wrong* voices when we get *stuck*—closing ourselves off to the very ones who can help us...

Many years ago, I was counseling a couple whose marriage was on its last leg; they’d waited until it was ready to blow to ask for help. As Jane will tell you, I invested a ton of time in this couple—way over and above the call of duty. This was unusual, but it was the man in this relationship who was very open to listening and changing his ways; it was the woman who was the hard case—not willing to grow or change at all. And it wasn’t just my experience...

At one point, I’d referred her to a Christian counselor in a larger city, as she seemed like she was going to need extra help getting through this very difficult time. But she wasn’t listening to the counsel I gave her. She wasn’t listening to this Christian counselor either. She was willing to listen to things like her horoscope, her sister (who had a similar personality), or her friends. But she wasn’t willing to listen to her husband, her pastor, her counselor, or those closest to her in her family. As a matter of fact, she is the only person I’ve ever referred to outside counsel who was fired by her counselor. She was asked not to come back ... and eventually the marriage fell apart.

Long story short? She was stuck, but not willing to listen to God’s voice (or those who stood with God). She was wanting to ‘fix everything herself’ ... and it cost her her marriage. Folks, it’s human nature to listen to the wrong voice. Good Friday reminds us how sinful our human nature is. There’s a natural side that pulls us away from God; there’s a spiritual side that draws us to God. It’s like paddling backward; it’s not natural, but it’s what will get us UNSTUCK. Are we listening to the voice of God within us? Or are we listening to other voices? We have to be open to God’s voice—the 2nd step in getting UNSTUCK in our lives.

Let’s look at Peter one more time. Peter’s first response to being stuck was to default to his former life—what was familiar to him. He’d been a fisherman before Jesus, so he went fishing. But then something great happened. John 21:4-6 (NLT) says, “At dawn Jesus was standing on the beach, but the disciples couldn’t see who he was.”

Remember, they'd been out fishing all night and they couldn't make out who this was. "He called out, 'Fellows, have you caught any fish?' 'No,' they replied." And fishermen are never proud to admit that. "Then he said, 'Throw out your net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you'll get some!'" Now, I don't know if this has hit you or not, but whoever this was probably didn't know they were dealing with professional fisherman here. This'd be like telling Gary Jesse how to fish! And I wouldn't do that, but the story goes on. "So, they did, and they couldn't haul in the net because there were so many fish in it." From empty nets to a full catch. From stuck to UNSTUCK. From a hopeless night to a hopeful morning. For this first time in several days, Peter (the Rock) is given hope and knows ... this situation won't last forever. There was hope on the horizon, because there were fish in the nets! But you know—don't you, he could've chosen to ignore the voice from the shore; it would've been easy to do...

Proverbs 14:12 (NLT) says, "There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death." Listening to those rafting guides going down the Ocoee seemed like the right thing for folks to do; they did, and they got UNSTUCK. Listening to the voice from the shore seemed like the right thing to Peter; he did, and he got UNSTUCK. Are you listening to *God's voice* today? And finally (#3)...

Commit to God's plan. You admit, you listen, and then you commit (obedience)! All of these have to go together...

Back to John 21... The nets have come up; they are full of fish. And then what happens? Verse 7: "Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It's the Lord!' When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his tunic (for he had stripped for work), jumped into the water, and headed to shore." Don't you just love how spontaneous Peter is? Everybody else stayed in the boat ... but not Peter; he was going to commit (once he knew it was the Lord Jesus)! Peter didn't wait; he swam to shore. Peter doesn't do anything half-hearted, does he? And then they had breakfast together...

His Lord was crucified, but now resurrected. He was stuck, but now UNSTUCK—obviously. They'd gone from empty nets, to full stomachs—from helpless to hopeful, from being separated from God, to having breakfast with God (Jesus) on the shore (shore lunch!). That's the process of becoming UNSTUCK. That's the power of resurrection that's available to us, too. Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT) says, "For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." God so wants all of us to be ... UNSTUCK...

And here's our definition: Moving forward in my life because I am willing to give God **complete control** (Romans 12:1-2). We'll pick up here next week...