



SERIES: What's Holding You Back?

Week 1: Shiphrah & Puah – Ordinary Extraordinary Midwives	
<p>Connect</p>  <p>5 – 10 min</p>	<p>You could do Section 1 of the Discover Notes (p.2) for this Connect time.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Tell us where you were born, and if there was anything interesting, unusual or noteworthy to do with your arrival or your early days of life.</p>
<p>Gratitude</p>  <p>10 – 15 min</p>	<p>What is one aspect of <u>your</u> daily work (or routine) that you can give thanks for today? What is one aspect of <u>someone else's</u> daily work that you can give thanks for today? What is one aspect of <u>God's daily work</u> that you can give thanks for today?</p> <p><i>Song suggestions:</i> Holding Nothing Back (Tim Hughes), Lifesong (Casting Crowns), Here for You (Matt Redman)</p>
<p>Discover</p>  <p>and</p> <p>Act</p>  <p>35 mins</p>	<p><u>Series Context</u></p> <p>2 Corinthians 2:15-16, 3:3-6</p> <p><i>¹⁵For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. ¹⁶To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?</i></p> <p><i>³ You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.</i></p> <p><i>⁴ Such confidence we have through Christ before God. ⁵ Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. ⁶ He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”</i></p> <p>You are the aroma of Christ. But are you sometimes hesitant about taking the stopper out of the bottle and releasing that fragrance out into the world?</p> <p>You are a letter from Christ. But can you be a bit shy about publishing that letter and inviting others to read it?</p> <p>What's holding you back? Most of us experience a lack of confidence or competence at different times or in different situations. But 2 Corinthians 3:4-6 remind us that our confidence and our competence to be God's good news bearers comes from Jesus, not from ourselves.</p> <p>So what's holding you back?</p> <p>In this series we look at some less familiar characters from the Old Testament. We'll see how their stories can encourage us to have confidence in God and not hold back on what he wants to do in us and through us.</p> <p>THIS WEEK: Shiphrah & Puah in Exodus 1:6-22 (See attached teaching and discussion guide)</p>

Shiphrah & Puah: Ordinary, Extraordinary Midwives

Exodus 1:6-22

These notes are intended to be read aloud by a leader, pausing for Bible reading, discussion & prayer as you go.

1. To Start

Have a look at the two pictures on the last page of this document. (*Print out or project on tv*).

- If the little houses could speak what do you think they might say?
- If they had emotions, how might they feel?
- Do you ever feel like this in any way?

2. Introduction

The story we will look at today comes from the beginning of Exodus. It is a small story sandwiched in between two big famous ones. Even if you have been reading the Bible or hanging around in Christian circles for many years, you probably won't immediately recognise the names of Shiphrah (*shif-rah*) and Puah (*pu-ah*). But I bet you know at least something about their Bible neighbours on either side, Joseph and Moses.

The last 13 chapters of Genesis tell the story of Joseph and his rise to a position of great power, respect, and favour in Egypt. (*See Gen 41:41-44*). Because of Joseph's position in Egypt, his father's family were able to survive famine in their homeland and flourish over 3 generations. Joseph's father was Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel in Gen 32:28. Joseph's story is the story of the establishment of God's people, the Israelites.

The neighbour on the other side of today's story is the story of Moses. His story runs from Exodus 2 through to the end of the book.

- What is something you know about Moses? (*Encourage everyone to briefly share something if they can.*)

Moses is very significant player in God's plan. But if not for the two virtually unknown women we are about to meet (what were their names again?), Moses and many other Hebrew boys may have not have lived to tell the tale.

In between the two big guns of Joseph and Moses is a little story about two women, Shiphrah and Puah. They were midwives to the Hebrews*. They were ordinary women doing an extraordinary job.

In Ancient Egypt, where this story takes place, women delivered their babies kneeling, or sitting on their heels, or on a delivery seat. At delivery, only female helpers were present, no doctors, no men. Peasant women called two women from their household or neighbours to help, and wealthier classes would have servants and nurses present.

Childbirth can be a dangerous time for mothers and for babies. For most of human history, twenty to fifty percent of babies have not lived through their first year. In Ancient Egypt maternal and infant mortality would have been high. Many women died giving birth. Many babies died. And now, for Hebrew mothers and baby boys, childbirth had just got a whole lot more dangerous. Let's look at the story in Exodus 1: 6-22. Bear in mind that the Pharaoh was considered to be more than just a powerful ruler. He was a representative of the gods. He served as a mediator between the people and the gods. (Interesting to note: Powerful Pharaoh is not named but the two midwives are.)

3. Read

Exodus 1:6-22

4. Think About It

Pharaoh seems afraid.

- Of what?
- How does he handle that fear?

Shiphrah & Puah appear not to be afraid. Or if they are, they handle their fear very differently than Pharaoh does.

- What was that reason that Shiphrah and Puah were bold enough to disobey Pharaoh's direct order and then lie to his face about it? (verse 17)
- Discuss how this fear differs from Pharaoh's fear.
- What do you imagine might have potentially held Shiphrah & Puah back from doing what they did?

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- As midwives, what personal qualities and life experience do you think may have also helped them act as they did?

Shiphrah & Puah were two “ordinary” women who feared God more than the king. In the course of their job they took courageous, risky action. They weren’t able to totally thwart Pharaoh’s murderous plans, but they played an important part by doing what they could do. Babies lived. God’s people increased. The next chapter of God’s plan was ushered in.

5. Take another look at the pictures you saw earlier.

The first picture comes from Seattle. The NY Times caption for the photo was “A hemmed-in house has become Seattle’s shrine to defiance.” The house’s owner, Edith Macefield, anchored herself down as development encroached on her block in 2006. The two-story house is now surrounded on three sides by taller commercial buildings. Ms. Macefield died in the house in 2008 at age 86. She was widely reported to have refused \$1 million to vacate. As the project went up anyway, her name and reputation became legendary. In 2017 the house is still standing (for now), but not in great shape.

The second picture is of an outdoor installation by Korean artist Do Ho Suh, originally commissioned for the Liverpool Biennial in 2010. It has also been exhibited at the Tate Modern art museum. ‘Bridging Home’ touches upon the tension that can arise between neighbours of different cultures in big cities.

- What thoughts or insights are sparked for you as you think about these two houses, the story of Shiphrah and Puah, and your own life experiences?

6. So.... What’s holding you back?

“Such confidence we have through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” (2 Corinthians 3:4-6)

- Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to move for anyone who feels they may be being held back by things such as:
 - Feeling small or ordinary compared to those around you
 - Too much fear of ‘man’
 - Not enough fear of God
- Is anyone in your group is facing a situation in their workplace where they need to make a decision or choice based on their Christian values? Pray into that.

* **Hebrews** = Abraham and his descendants. **Israel/Israelites** = The descendants of Abraham’s grandson Jacob (Israel), the 12 tribes of the Hebrews. (Later, the collective name for the 10 northern tribes under Ephraim, as opposed to the two southern tribes under Judah.) In the context of this story, the terms Hebrews and Israelites mean the same.

Picture 1



Picture 2

