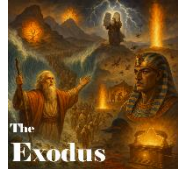




When Calling Meets Resistance:  
God's Response to Our Doubts  
Exodus 4:1-31  
(Lesson #4)



*4:1 Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'"*

To put this back in context, this follows the **seven things** that **Yahweh said would happen**. The **seven prophetic words** that Yahweh gave to Moses, **namely**:

- **FIRST**, they, the nation of Israel will heed your voice, they will listen to your voice.
- **SECOND**, you and the elders of Israel shall go the king of Egypt, to the ruling Pharaoh.
- **THIRD**, you shall say to the Pharaoh...
- **FOURTH**, but know in advance, that the king of Egypt will not let you go until compelled by a mighty hand.
- **FIFTH**, therefore, for that reason, because Pharaoh will not let the nation go, I (Yahweh) will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with multiple wonders and then Pharaoh will let you go!
- **SIXTH**, I (Yahweh) will give this people favor in the sight of their Egyptian masters, and when you finally leave Egypt, you will not go away empty handed.
- **SEVENTH**, thus, in doing this, you shall **plunder Egypt**.

Now there at Mt Sinai, there at Mt Horeb, there at the Mountain of God, Moses had a real encounter with God. God had provided great clarity, a clear commission and mission.

Moses had a real and amazing experience with the living God! Then Moses says to God, OK, *but what if they do not believe me? What???*

God said the people will believe. Moses responded to God, but what if they do not?

**PAUSE:** Moses' saying **"they will not believe"** is really Moses saying to God, **I do not believe!**

Now, here Moses, in-spite of meeting God at a burning bush, in-spite of standing in the middle of an impossible to imagine miraculous event, shows a **shocking lack of faith**.

**Now, have you ever doubted God's promises, have you ever sort of said God, I hear what you are saying, but, what if it does not happen that way?**

*Vs 2-3 The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff." 3 And he said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it.*

To answer Moses question: Yahweh asks him: *"What is that in your hand?"*

Moses replies: *"A staff."* The Hebrew word, **מִטֵּה (matteh)**, means a branch or a rod. It is likely a shepherds staff. Moses **replies a staff**.

Then Yahweh tells him to throw his staff on the ground.

Moses does so and it became a serpent, it became a snake, and Moses ran from it. Can you picture this in your mind, God turns Moses' shepherd staff into a snake and **Moses runs away from it!**

**I imagine God laughed.**

**But do not miss this, the man who once had a scepter of Egypt in his hand now only has a wooden staff, but this is what God can and will use.**

- This staff would be used to split the Red Sea.
- This staff would be used to strike the rock and get water out of the rock.
- This staff would be raised in battle and the Israelites would be victorious.

**APPLICATION:** What has God put in your hand to fulfill the call he has for you.

*Vs 4-5 But the LORD said to Moses, "Put out your hand and catch it by the tail" — so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand — 5 "that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."*

Then the Lord tells Moses to put out his hand and catch it by the tail.

Moses had tended Reul's flocks for 40 years and he likely knows that it is not a good idea to grab snakes by the tail, because they can turn around and bite you. It is much safer to grab snakes by the head or around their head.

But here, Moses does as God commands. By the way the verb translated "catch" is an **imperative. It is a command.**

**Yahweh is teaching Moses obedience, little by little, and God is teaching Moses that God can be trusted, even when it does not make human sense.**

Now in the middle of the quotation of what God told Moses to do, what God commanded Moses to do, is the narrative of what happened when Moses did it.

This miracle is being provided, because of Moses' question: *What if they do not believe?*

Moses reaches out his hand, takes the serpent by the tail and it once again becomes a staff.

Now I do not know about you but that is an **amazingly cool transformation!** Throw the stick on the ground and it becomes a serpent, pick the snake up by the tail and it becomes a rod again.

This is an amazing miracle and God provides it so that Moses can show the Israelites visibly that God is with him.

*Vs 6 Again, the LORD said to him, "Put your hand inside your cloak." And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow.*

Then it seems like, before Moses can even say a word, Yahweh directs him to put his hand inside his cloak.

So Moses follows God's directions and places his hand in his cloak. Then Moses pulled his hand out of his cloak and it was covered in leprosy. This would have been a **very scary transformation.**

Can you imagine, you put your hand in your cloak as directed by God and when you pull it out it is **covered in leprosy!**

*Vs 7 Then God said, "Put your hand back inside your cloak." So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh.*

As Moses is standing there, with one of his hands covered in leprosy, God then directs him to put his hand back in his cloak. He follows God direction, pulls it out and his flesh has returned back to normal.

OK, the stick to snake and snake to stick transformation, miracle, trick is cool. The no leprosy to leprosy to no leprosy hand transformation is a little scary, a little spooky.

**Then God says what we are thinking...**

*Vs 8-9 "If they will not believe you," God said, "or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. 9 If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."*

If they do not believe you or the first miracle is not convincing, then give the second sign a try, they “may” believe that. I must be honest, that is not as reassuring as I had hoped.

It seems that God is acknowledging some **may not believe**. If they do not, do the snake miracle, if that does not work, do the hand miracle.

If they do not believe those two transformative miracles then take some water from the Nile, pour it on dry ground and the water will become blood.

Now this third miracle, this third sign is not one of transformation. For there is not a step that turns the blood back to water only this step of turning water to blood.

But, in response to Moses’ concern that the people of Israel may not believe that Yahweh has sent him he provides: The transformative staff sign, the transformative hand sign, and the water to blood sign.

**APPLICATION:** Maybe at this point you are thinking, but we do not have an amazing miracle to validate our ministry. I would disagree, you have the amazing miracle of the transformation of your life and you have the amazing miracle of the empty tomb!

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Now at this point, one would imagine that Moses is now ready, he is now good to go. Yahweh has answered his concerns in reference to what he is to do if the Israelites do not believe him and Yahweh has provided Moses with three very amazing signs. Then we read:

*Vs 10 But Moses said to the LORD, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue."*

Moses says Ohhh Lord, I am not eloquent, the Hebrew word is **דבר (dabar)**, it is normally translated “word” what Moses is saying is listen God, I am not good with words, I am not good at public speaking. Neither in the past nor even since you have started talking to me.

Then Moses says: I am slow of speech and of tongue. The Hebrew word used here is: **כבד (kabad)**, it is normally translated heavy or grievous.

There has been a great deal of speculation here of what Moses means. Some believe Moses had some speech impediment, others that Moses was not good at public speaking, others that Moses had not spoken Egyptian for 40 years and thus forgotten the language, others that Moses had not led people for 40 years, while others believe this is false humility or finally maybe it was simply an excuse.

We may never know for sure.

Remember what Stephen preached and Luke recorded about Moses in Acts:

*“And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.” (Ac 7:22 ESV)*

Also, remember Josephus in his writing described Moses as a mighty Egyptian general.

We cannot be positive, but it is possible that Moses is overstating and even **exaggerating his limitations!**

**APPLICATION:** “**I Am**” is all that we need regardless of the situation of circumstances we find ourselves in. It is foolish to argue “**I am not**” when the great “**I Am**” is on our side.

While it is true that we are to be **humble** (consider I Pet 5:5b-6 or Pr 29:23). I do not believe this is humility, I agree with **Warren Wiersbe**: “**Humility isn’t thinking poorly of ourselves; it’s simply not thinking of ourselves at all but making God everything.**”

This is not humility, but simply unbelief, possibly masquerading as humility.

**Tony Merida** wrote this: “**Moses’ problem was that he was thinking too much about himself.**”

Let’s be honest it is not about us; it is about **HIM!**

***Vs 11 Then the LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?”***

Then Yahweh responds to Moses with the exact same response He responds to us with when we say something like this.

Can I paraphrase. I made you Moses, I know everything about you.

Also, do not forget what God had just a moment ago told Moses (we read it last week) (Ex 3:11-12).

Bottom line, Yahweh is telling Moses, I know everything about you, I created you the way you are, I have called and commissioned you, and I will be with you.

**You need nothing else to be successful, but to obey!**

Here is the point, Moses may have felt like his abilities were lacking. **But we must remember that when God calls, God enables.**

***Vs 12 Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.”***

Now therefore, based on all that I just said **GO! This of course is a command**, but it is so much more than that. Look what Yahweh says to Moses.

**Go and... Go and I will be your tongue**, I will **teach you** exactly what you need to say. If the concern is **your vocabulary**, I will give you the **words**, I will give you the **thoughts**.

**I will be your mouth. I am with you**, and I will be **active** in the mission I am sending you on.

I will not be a silent partner, where you believe you are lacking, I will make up the difference. I will cover the shortfalls!

**APPLICATION:** I want to speak to all of us. Some of us are delaying obedience, waiting for God to provide something more. God is telling us, I created you, I have put this mission before you, and I will be with you. Now **GO!**

***Vs 13 But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.”***

OK if you are like me this is getting annoying!

What is Moses' problem? God has promised He will be with him. God has walked him through the seven major things that will happen. God has given him signs to perform if people do not believe that Yahweh has sent him. God has explained how He will cover Moses' supposed limitations.

Then Moses, in what is a shocking verse and one that was written by Moses himself says: *"Oh, my Lord, please send someone else."*

Here we finally get to the root of the problem. You see it was not his **abilities**; it was Moses' **availability**, that was his **real issue**.

**APPLICATION:** Are we available for God to use?

*Vs 14-17 Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, "Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. Vs 15 You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. Vs 16 He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. Vs 17 And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs."*

Then the אפ ('aph), the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Moses.

Moses lack of faith and obedience to God has caused anger to well up in God against Moses.

Now to go back to a **prior lesson** for a moment. As you see what is happening here, you have been hearing the **revealed will of God**.

Moses, you go, I will be with you, I will be your mouthpiece, I will make up for what you lack. Go, I will be with you! Moses, makes excuse, after excuse, after excuse and finally puts out his "off duty" placard.

Yahweh responds to Moses with a **sixfold** response that we will walk through together but let's first deal with the larger point.

**Revealed will, Moses you go. Finally, after a whole lot of push back from Moses, we see God's permissive will. OK, I will give you Aaron.**

By the way this is the first time that Moses' brother Aaron is mentioned in the book of Exodus.

Using Aaron in this capacity was not God's revealed will. God permitted it because of Moses' unbelief.

But it will come with future consequences. In (Ex 32) we read.

Also, in Numbers 12 Aaron would team up with Miriam and speak against Moses. This was when Yahweh temporarily struck Miriam with leprosy.

Moses asked many questions and even made excuses, but God was not angered. Who am I, what if the Hebrews say God did not send you? I have never been elegant, oh my tongue and my mouth.

Here is what angered God, it was when Moses said, **I am not available**.

**APPLICATION:** One of the sternest acts of discipline that the Lord can use on us is to sometimes give us what He knows is not best for us (at least at that time), but which we are demanding.

OK, but let's unpack what God tells Moses, after Moses: *"Oh, my Lord, please send someone else."*

**Vs 14 - First**, OK, consider Aaron, he can speak well.

**Vs 14 - Second**, he is coming out to meet you, it appears that Yahweh spoke to him to go to Midian to see Moses. There is obviously some back story here and it is possible that Moses stayed in contact with his Hebrew family while in Midian. He is going to be super glad to see you.

**Vs 15 - Third**, you will speak to him and he will speak for you.

**Vs 15 - Fourth**, I will be your mouth, I will be his mouth, and I will teach both of you what to say and even what to do.

**Vs 16 - Fifth**, you will not need to talk to the people, you will talk to your older brother Aaron, and he will speak for you, he shall be your mouth.

**Vs 16b – Sixthly, and you shall be as God to him.** I Yahweh will talk to you, you shall talk to Aaron.

Tuck this away, for you will see Moses will do a great deal of the speaking. He really did not need Aaron.

Vs 17 - The command reiterated: ***And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs.***

Grab the staff, you will need it to do signs and go. Now Moses could never, at this time, imagine how God would use this simple tool to show forth his power!

A simple tool, but if it is the tool the Lord will use, it will prove to be an amazing tool!

**APPLICATION:** What is our staff. What is that simple thing, gift, or ability whereby we are to serve the Lord?

**APPLICATION:** The will of God will never lead us where the power of God can't enable us! Therefore, let us walk by faith.

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***Vs 18 ¶ Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Please let me go back to my brothers in Egypt to see whether they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."***

Moses, leaves this interaction on Mt Horeb (Mt Sinia), and he goes back to Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. He asks Reuel's permission to go back to his brothers in Egypt to see how they are doing, to see if they are still alive.

**It is interesting**, it does not appear, that Moses says anything to Reuel about what just happened on Mt Sinai, or about the **real reason he desires to go back to Egypt**.

We can only **speculate** why this is so...

But Moses asks Jethro for his permission and Reuel tells Moses to "go in peace." Jethro provides his blessing to proceed to Moses.

***Vs 19 And the LORD said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead."***

Then, in all of this Yahweh tells Moses plainly and unequivocally, go back to Egypt, for "all the men" including the Pharaoh "who were seeking your life are dead."

It is **interesting** that this **important piece of information** was not shared by God until Moses took that **first step of obedience**. I suspect there are some **good lessons** for us in this simple point.

Maybe this was what Moses was worried about. But God did not inform Moses of Pharaoh's death until Moses took the first step of obedience.

*Vs 20 So Moses took his wife and his sons and had them ride on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the staff of God in his hand.*

So Moses took his wife, and **both of his sons** (Gershom and Eliezer) and he put them on donkeys, by **way of implication** it seems he may have **walked**, and he went back to the land of Egypt. Now Moses is a little ahead of his skis for he actually has not left Midian yet. But he will.

Notice also that Moses took the **"staff of God"** in his hand.

OK, I do not believe at this time Moses saw it as the staff of God, at this point in the narrative it was his shepherd's staff, but after all that God will do through this simple tool, as Moses writes all of this down, he refers to his simple shepherd's staff as the "staff of God."

**APPLICATION:** All that we have belongs to God. More significantly the things we have that we use to execute God's commission and God's mission in our life are God's items.

As I reflected on this verse, I had my ESV study bible open (I mean God's ESV study Bible) open, and I was typing on my computer, but maybe I mean God's computer, for these are my tools of service.

*Vs 21 And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.*

Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and provided a **two-fold directive**:

- 1) When you get to Egypt, it will not be the first thing you do, but when you go before the Pharaoh, do the miracles, that I have put in your power:
  - a. Snake miracle
  - b. Hand miracle
  - c. Water to blood miracle
- 2) But I will harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will not let the people go.

Three big points here:

**First**, we will see this play out, but you should not picture this is as the nice Pharaoh, being hardened by the mean God. You should picture this as Pharaoh's hardens his heart against God and guess what God does in response? Yes, God hardens Pharaoh's heart.

Remember what we read in Romans (Ro 1:18-24).

Before we leave this first point let me show you something about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart that will play out in Exodus.

Here God says: ***But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.*** We read something very similar in (Ex 7:3).

The first time we read about the actual hardening of Pharaoh's heart here is what we read in (Ex 7:13). But, the first time Moses credits the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, here is what we read this in (Ex 8:15).

More about this as we continue our journey in Exodus.

**Second**, we will talk a lot more about this as we journey through Exodus, for the moment, recognize that part of the reason God will harden Pharaoh's heart is so that God can fully showcase His power and His person to the nation of Egypt. To show that He is the One true God!

Two examples (Ex 11:7; Ex 12:12).

**Third**, I hope you see that God is with Moses, God is telling Moses what to do, God is telling Moses what to expect. He is not a silent partner. God is very engaged in leading the people out of Egypt!

**Vs 22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son,**

When you go before Pharaoh, and you have done the miracles in his sight, then you shall say to him, thus says Yahweh: **Israel is my firstborn son,**

Now this is interesting, **Yahweh does not say Israel is my son. He says, Israel is my firstborn son.**

**Vs 23 and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son."**

And I, Moses say to you, on the behalf of Yahweh, the one true and living God: **"Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son."**

From the jump Moses is to be clear with the Pharaoh, he is to tell him where disobedience leads. It leads to the **death of your firstborn son.**

You Pharaoh are holding God's firstborn son prisoner. If you do not let him (the nation) go, God will punish you, by killing your firstborn son!

**Before Moses ever left Midian**, Yahweh was clear **that a battle was brewing in Egypt** and Pharaoh would not give up his nation of slaves easily.

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**PAUSE:** OK, we now come to some of the strangest verses in the Old Testament, but I think we can make sense out of what happens here.

A little backstory, in Genesis 17:9-12.

We should suspect that the Jews had been circumcising their male children on the eighth day.

**Vs 24 ¶ At a lodging place on the way the LORD met him and sought to put him to death.**

So Moses, Zipporah, Gershom and Eliazer are in the area of Mt Sinia, you will see that in a moment, they are likely getting ready to begin the trip to Egypt (300-350 miles as a crow flies).

At some lodging place, which they likely had many, but at some lodging place, likely still in Midian, prior to entering Egypt, Yahweh, met Moses and sought to kill him!

**This will need some explanation!** But for the moment, simply accept something big is happening here, that we will unpack as Moses reveals why God would seek to kill the deliverer He is sending to Egypt.



Obviously, this is anthropomorphic language, for if God was really trying to kill him, Moses would be dead, but God wants Moses' attention. This is like when Jacob wrestled with the Lord in (Gen 32).

***Vs 25 Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it and said, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!"***

OK, now we need to read between the lines a bit. Here is what scholars believe.

Moses had two sons. But here son is singular. So here Zipporah has to act to circumcise only **one of her sons**. Scholars believe it was likely the younger son (Eliezer). Although Albry Mohler believes it is the older son.

It appears that in anger due to his disobedience, God strikes Moses, and he is ill or in some other way incapacitated and God is going to kill him because he had not circumcised his younger son.

It appears that Zipporah knew what needed to be done, for she went and circumcised the younger son.

Again, it seems that either Moses never got around to circumcising Eliezer (disobedience) or when he circumcised Gershom, it created so much strife in the home with Zipporah that he delayed circumcising the second son (still disobedience). We will never know for sure, but that is what scholars believe is going on here.

So for reasons that are not fully clear, Zipporah responds and takes a flint knife and cuts off her son's (**likely Eliezer's**) foreskin.

She then takes the foreskin and throws it at the feet of Moses and says: ***"Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!"***

It seems that Moses had not circumcised his youngest son, but clearly Zipporah knew about it and knew what to do. They were in disobedience to God. This action on Zipporah's part appeases the anger of God.

This is a weird verse and a weird episode. But it reminds us of a great truth, without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.

***Vs 26 So he let him alone. It was then that she said, "A bridegroom of blood," because of the circumcision.***

He (presumably God) let him (presumably Moses) alone. Reading between the lines it seems that Moses was engaged or in some way incapacitated. It appears that God relented once the right of circumcision had been performed, likely on the younger son.

**Now why would God be angry and why would He move to kill Moses?**

God had called Moses to lead His people and Moses was not keeping the mark of the covenant that Yahweh gave to the nation of Israel. Imagine the deliverer of Israel had not circumcised one of his children.

***Vs 27 The LORD said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him.***

Then Yahweh spoke to Aaron and said: ***"Go into the wilderness to meet Moses."***

So, within this Hebrew community in Egypt, it appears that many were worshipping and praying to Yahweh, even if they did not know His name, and here we are told that the one true God appears to Aaron and directs him to proceed to Midian. So Aaron went to the mountain of God, and Aaron kissed his younger brother.

***Vs 28 And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which he had sent him to speak, and all the signs that he had commanded him to do.***

Then Moses told Aaron everything that Yahweh had said to him. Moses told him all the words of the Lord and about all three signs that he had commended Moses to do: The miracle staff, the miracle hand, and the water to blood

***Vs 29 Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel.***

Moses and Aaron went to Egypt, this would have taken time, but they went to Egypt, they gathered together all the elders of Israel as they had been directed to do by Yahweh.

***Vs 30 Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people.***

Moses shared with the elders all that God had spoken. We can imagine that he shared how God had seen what they were enduring, God had heard their cries and further, God was coming down to rescue them. It is also likely that Moses shared God's seven points that will occur:

- **FIRST**, they, the nation of Israel will listen to your voice.
- **SECOND**, you and the elders of Israel shall go the king of Egypt, to the ruling Pharaoh.
- **THIRD**, you shall say to the Pharaoh...
- **FOURTH**, but know in advance, that the king of Egypt will not let you go until compelled by a mighty hand.
- **FIFTH**, therefore, for that reason, because Pharaoh will not let the nation go. I (Yahweh) will stretch out my hand and strike (smite or strike) Egypt with multiple wonders and then Pharaoh will let you go!
- **SIXTH**, I (Yahweh) will give this people favor in the sight of their Egyptian masters, and when you finally leave Egypt, you will not go away empty handed.
- **SEVENTH**, thus, in doing this... You shall **plunder Egypt**.

Now the Israelites, like Moses know exactly what to expect.

***Rarely, does God give this kind of clarity up front. RARELY!***

***Vs 31 And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped."***

When the people heard that Yahweh had visited his people, that he has seen their affliction they believed.

Then the people believed... That is number 1 of the seven things that Yahweh told Moses would happen.

If you are checking things off, please check this one off as a promise fulfilled.

God has said the people will believe and indeed they have. Not only did the people believe.

Hearing that God had heard them, hearing that God had seen their affliction, hearing that God was coming to deliver them, they bowed their heads and they worshipped Yahweh, the covenant keeping God!

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We will end with the words for **Warren Wiersbe**: "This was the lull before the storm. God was about to declare war on Egypt and Pharaoh, and life for the Jews would become more difficult before it would get better."