What do all these word pictures have in common: "you sure have painted yourself into a corner," "being caught between a rock and a hard place," "being up against the wall," "in a pickle"? (R) They all describe tough times. They all describe predicaments or hard situations. One person defined a predicament as a "lawyer who specializes in suing doctors for medical malpractice finding himself in need of major surgery."

We have all faced difficult times. They come in various sizes tailor made just for us. What might be difficult for you might be a piece of cake for someone else. Have you ever observed that? It's just like in school, some people had no problems giving speeches in class; other people sweated and dreaded that day. But in some form we all face difficult times. Let's list on this board some of the issues that create difficult times. (R)

Well, let's add another thought about difficult times. Red Sea Rule #1 according to Robert Morgan is "Realize that God means for you to be where you are." In other words, God places you in difficult positions. The reason you are there - facing those difficult issues - is that God placed you there. He put you between the rock and the hard place. He put you in that situation in which you feel like you are being squeezed like a vice. When you face difficult times, realize that God means for you to be where you are. Sometimes this is easier to see than others.

Let's take a look at this situation here with Moses and the Israelites. I wish I could show us on this map exactly what happened, but we don't know where the Red Sea crossing took place. For example, we don't know where Succoth or Etham are that are mentioned in verse 20 or Pi Hahiroth or Baal Zephon are in verse 2. But essentially, here's the story. The Israelites had just left Egypt. Finally, after the tenth plague in which all the firstborn Egyptians and their animals were killed, Pharaoh let them go. So, they headed back to the Promised Land of Abraham. They didn't go the way of the Philistines, because if they had to face war, the Israelites might have changed their minds and turned around. So he takes them on this journey and they get to Etham at the edge of the desert.

How did they know where to go? There was a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way during the daytime. At night, it was a pillar of fire. The Lord dwelt in that pillar. All they needed to do was follow that pillar. Well, at the edge of the desert, the Lord spoke out of the pillar and told them to turn back and camp near Pi Hahiroth. If all the Israelites had to do was to follow the pillar of cloud, why did God speak? Probably to confirm what he wanted them to do. He wanted them to turn. Up to now, they were making an apparent straight shot to the Promised Land. There was no obstacle in their way except crossing the desert. But now he wants them to turn. Some have guessed Pi Hahiroth is a mountain and others guess that it is a garrisoned Egyptian city. The same guess is with Baal Zephon. Either way, they are called to encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, directly Baal Zephon. In other words,
they are to turn from having the Promised Land before them without any obstacles in front of them except the desert as they are fleeing Egypt. (Map)

Let me make three observations about God's directions: 1) they were not logical; 2) they were not the quickest or the shortest or the easiest route to go; and 3) God was putting them in a hard or difficult position. The Lord does tell them why he wants them to do it; he wants the Egyptians to chase them and pursue them. This way the Egyptians will think the Israelites are confused, the Egyptians will change their mind, and thus the Egyptians will pursue them. More about that next week.

Realize that God means for you to be where you are. He places us in difficult times. In care group on Wednesdays, we have been looking at a similar story. It was read earlier. Jesus had been teaching from a boat to the people who were on the shore. When he was finished teaching, he told the disciples to go to the other side of the lake- the Sea of Galilee. Well, as they were sailing across the sea, Jesus fell asleep in the stern, the rear of the boat. A great squall or wind came down from the mountains around the lake and the waves grew rough. In fact, the waves were breaking over the side of the boat, and the boat was nearly full of water. Where is Jesus? He is still sleeping. The disciples go to him and wake him up. "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

Jesus got up, rebuked the wind and spoke to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" The wind and the waves obey. The wind ceases and the waves immediately become completely calm. Jesus then says, if not rebukes his disciples. "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" The disciples are now terrified of him. "Who is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him."

As you think of that story, do you think it was just coincidence or by accident that that storm came upon the water? If Jesus had the ability to calm the wind and the waves, was he not the one who brought or allowed the wind and the waves? Was he not the one who put or allowed the disciples to be in those difficult times?

Realize that God means for you to be where you are.

Why would God do this? Robert Morgan writes these important words: "when you are in a difficult place, realize that the Lord either placed you there or allowed you to be there, for reasons perhaps known for now only to himself." He tells Moses and the Israelites why he put them in a difficult position. Yet, he doesn't tell the disciples. Job had a lot of things happen to him, all his wealth was taken from him, his ten sons and daughters were killed, and then he had physical pain. He wanted to know why. Yes, at the end God did speak to him and reveal himself to Job, but he never tells Job why. Sometimes we can see why we are in a difficult place, other times not.

Realize that God means for you to be where you are. He put you in that situation.

You might wonder, what if I sinned? What if the difficult times are the consequences of my choices? First of all, remember, God is sovereign. He uses our free will and our consequences of our free will within his purposes. J. I. Packer, a writer and theologian, wrote, "Our God is a God who not merely restores, but takes up our mistakes and follies into His plan for us and brings good out of them." Mindboggling but true. Our sins and rebelliousness and
stupidness are all wrapped up by God in accomplishing his plan. But secondly, we need to repent and seek forgiveness from God. When he shows us our folly of our sin, we need to turn from the sin and turn to God—repent. Ask forgiveness and follow God again. In fact, he may have brought you those tough consequences so that you would repent. He will take us from where we are in those difficult times because of our sin to where he wants us to be. Remember, that is where we want to be, where God is.

So, what are your circumstances? What are some of the difficult times you have been going through? Think of them. Maybe write a couple down right now.

Now apply this thought beside it: God means for you to be where you are. God has led or allowed you to be in this situation. Ponder that. God is sovereign, remember that. God is love. He didn't put you in that situation because he stopped loving you, but because he loves you. You aren't there by accident. Yes, many of our situations we have created. We often shoot ourselves in our feet. But through Jesus we may be forgiven and through him we can face those consequences of our sin. God means for you to be where you are, whether you understand that or not.

Thus, we need to trust God. Remember, the God who brings these challenging times also delivers from challenging times. The God who wounds also heals. The same God who led you in will lead you out. Realize that God means for you to be where you are.