

Exodus: What We Mean When We Say God Part Three – Reckoning with the Holy Other

By Pastor David Fields

Exodus 4

I. Learning to Trust

Yahweh doesn't scold or belittle Moses here. When Moses expresses his doubts that the elders of Israel will believe Yahweh sent him (see 3:18), God doesn't begin with: "Don't contradict me. Do you know who I am?" He works *with* Moses', even granting that Moses could, in fact, be justified in believing they won't listen.

God takes Moses seriously. This is a real conversation.

A. Yahweh is relational. Moses is learning to trust the Lord *who is deeply personal*.

The Holy One doesn't override or force Moses. He doesn't override or force you either.

What's In Your Hand?

When Yahweh tells Moses to throw his staff to the ground, and turns it into a reptile, this is a dramatic sign of God's ability to intervene in the order of nature – which will become significant in the Plagues that are to come. There is no space – zoological or meteorological – that is outside of God's reign.

The snake was a symbol of Pharaoh's royal authority. So, when Moses is told by Yahweh to "grab the snake", this is a symbol God granting Moses delegated authority to overthrow Pharaoh.

Moses is learning to trust God's strength, to find his confidence in Yahweh alone.

When God's people are caught between the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army, they begin to freak out. So, they say to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert die?" (Ex 14:11a).

And Moses is able to say: "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." (Ex 14:13).

B. Moses has to *act* in trust, in order to *build his trust*.

Moses has to reach out his hand and grab the snake. And when he does, he finds God to be worthy of his trust.

The same is true for us. How do we grow in faith? We listen to the word of God, as it is now recorded in Scripture, and we trust what he says, and then act out of that place.

What is the thing that has your knees knocking, or a lump in your chest? Is it a fear that if you follow his ways, it won't be for your ultimate good?

- Maybe for you it shows up in worry about money, so you lack generosity in our finances – worried that God won't take care of you if we step into the practice of sacrificial giving; to support missionaries, mercy ministries, or giving to the local church.
- Maybe it's about relationships. We are saying, "God, you can have these other areas of my life, but I'll keep this part of my life under *my control*. I'll do this in my way."

II. How God Works *With Our Weakness*

Even after God gives him three signs, Moses is still in this space of wrestling with his own sense of inadequacy, and he says:

"Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." – Exodus 4:10

But God **does challenge Moses' logic**. "Who gave human beings their mouths?" Like, "honestly, I can enable you to do what I ask you to do." But even after God's very logic reply, Moses says, flatly: "Please send someone else."

This is the first time God is described as "burning with anger" in the Biblical story, and it's against his own chosen guy. Moses is learning to reckon with God as God is. And God has limits. God does get angry. But notice too: God does not discard Moses, either. He even accommodates to Moses, saying that his brother Aaron will be his mouthpiece. This is a real *relationship*. A *true give and take*.

What's the implication for us?

God tends to find people who will not think their gifts, their smarts, or their charm can carry them.

The measure of faith isn't about how easily you said "yes", but the perseverance and trust in God when everything goes wrong...and you stay.

If Moses had entered the task without all the wrestling, it would be far too easy to exit. It is this robust engagement, honesty, and directness with God, forged in this call experience, that's what will sustain Moses through the rest of his leadership.

Paul, who Jesus called as a missionary to the Gentiles – he says that God gave him a "thorn in the flesh," some kind of challenge – I think probably an eye disease – and after pleading with God three times to remove it, God says to him: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." – 2 Cor 12:9

Basically, God says, "No – I want you to struggle with this, Paul. That's the place that fuels your dependence on me." So, Paul basically says, God might even send difficulties to humble us; to get the pride out of us. Paul concludes: "For when I am weak, then I am strong" – 2 Cor 12:10b

Paul says to that church in Corinth – a group of people who were really attracted to the attractive, the strong, the gifted, the eloquent – he tells them to look at their own resume:

“Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth; but God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.” – 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

- Perhaps like Moses, you believe that God would do better to use someone else for his purposes. But: No one else is you. No one else has the unique combinations of gifts, life experience, heartbreak, and connections that you have. No one else has your friendship with God. And God wants to work with...you.

III. Reckoning with The Holy Other

This text starts with Moses' experiences Yahweh's "immanence", his closeness, his "approachability". But there's more, much more, that Moses needs to learn of the Living God.

In Ex 4:22-23 God has just promised that he will finally free God's people – but only after the firstborn sons of Pharaoh, and of Egypt, will die. For, as God says, Israel is *his* firstborn son. And the Egyptians, who threw baby Hebrew boys into the Nile to die, will now experience a reckoning.

Moses has failed to circumcise his own son, and so, as Alistair Roberts and Andrew Wilson put it: "Moses has neglected God's commandment and now stands outside the mark of sonship, under the same judgment as Pharaoh. So, not for the first time, a woman comes to Moses' rescue." – Alistair Roberts and Andrew Wilson

Moses needed to know that the God he meets in the burning bush is no tame deity. He needs to reckon, for himself, with the reality that Pharaoh will face; that the Living God means business. Yahweh is not to be trifled with.

And so, this micro-exodus points ahead to the provision God has made for us to be saved as well. As Zipporah covers Moses with the blood, and as the Passover Lamb will cover the doorposts of the Israelite homes, so the greatest exodus comes as Jesus' blood, on the beams of a cross, will cover the sins of anyone who receives him. God himself would be the sacrifice that frees and forgives us. That assures us of God's deep love.

This God – the one who confronts Moses here – is the same God who invites us, to come boldly before him, know him, walk with him.

Just listen to how the writer of Hebrews puts it:

"Therefore, brothers and sisters, since *we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the*

blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his [Jesus'] body, and since we have a great priest [also Jesus] over the house of God, **let us draw near to God** with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful."

– Hebrews 10:19-23

Life Group Discussion

Open Up

Think of a time when you had a task or calling that seemed much too large. How did you feel about? How did you respond/what did you do to manage?

Dig In

1. **Read Exodus 4:1-17.**

- a. Does the willingness of Yahweh to engage with Moses by addressing his fears and even accommodating to Moses' concerns surprise you? Why or why not?
 - b. Are there ways you can relate to Moses in this scene? (Fear; inadequacy; hesitation; unwillingness to try?)
 - c. What does this text tell us about God and how we can relate to God?
2. We saw in the message that Moses has to act in trust when God says to pick up the staff-turned-snake by the tail. Moses has to reach out his hand and grab the snake, and only when he does act in faith, he finds God to be worthy of his trust. The same is true for us. We grow in faith as we listen to the word of God, as recorded in Scripture, we trust what he says, and then act out of that place.

If you are comfortable sharing, what is the thing that has your knees knocking, or a lump in your chest? What would it look like for you to trust God with it?

3. Yahweh describes himself as "slow to anger" in Exodus 34. But there is a line, a point at which God does "burn with anger" toward Moses. Even still, God works with Moses.

How does this part of the story, and of God's character, challenge or encourage you? (Just in case you might think this doesn't show up in Jesus, we find that he also has moments of anger or frustration/disappointment with his followers, and yet he works with them even still. For just a few examples see Matt 17:14-18; Matt 21:12-13; Matt 26:34; Matt 26:52-54).

4. The nighttime scene in **Ex 4:24-26** is a puzzling text. In the context of the whole narrative, however, it is a sort of “mini-exodus”, which reminds Moses that Yahweh is not to be trifled with – and living in covenant faithfulness is a holy, dangerous business. This scene does, however, point us to consider how God makes provision for our forgiveness and new life in Jesus. That Jesus’ blood will cover and save us. This is the means by which we draw near to God.
 - a. How do you think this incident challenged and changed Moses?
 - b. How might this scene encourage you toward a holy-awe, and deeper sense of appreciation for what Jesus has done on the cross for you?

Prayer: Take some time to share any specific needs of your group and to respond to what you were seeing of God in this text. Take time to give thanks for Jesus’ blood that covers us and enables us to come with boldness before God (See Heb 4:16; 10:19-23).