

The Book of Exodus

Lesson 2: The Burning Bush and the Name of God -- Exodus 3:1-4:17

It was just another day. Moses was eighty years old and tending someone else's sheep on the far side of the wilderness, a place so empty it is called the back side of the desert. Forty years had passed since he fled Egypt as a wanted man, and whatever dreams of greatness he once carried had long since cooled into the slow routine of a shepherd's life. He was not looking for God. He was looking for grass for the flock. And that is exactly where God meets most of us, not in the cathedral but in the commute, not on the mountaintop but in the middle of the ordinary, on a Tuesday when nothing was supposed to happen.

Then Moses sees it. A bush is burning, but it is not burning up. The flame keeps blazing and the branches are not consumed, and Moses says to himself, I will turn aside to see this great sight. That little decision to turn aside changes everything. God waits to speak until Moses turns. And when he does, a voice calls his name out of the fire, Moses, Moses, and tells him to take off his sandals because the ground he has stood on a hundred times before is suddenly holy ground. Holiness was not in the dirt. It was in the presence of God, and the same is true of every place where God meets you.

What happens next is the most important conversation Moses will ever have, and at its center is a question that still echoes through the whole Bible. Moses asks God His name, and God answers, I AM WHO I AM. Tell them I AM has sent you. It is staggering. Every other so-called god of Egypt had a story, a beginning, a need. This God simply is. He did not come into being; He has always been. He depends on nothing and no one. He is the self-existent, eternal, covenant-keeping Lord, and He has just told a runaway shepherd His name. Centuries later Jesus would stand in the temple and say, before Abraham was, I AM, and the people picked up stones, because they understood exactly what He was claiming.

But look closely, because this is not only a lesson about who God is. It is also a lesson about a reluctant man. Moses spends most of this passage saying no. Who am I? Who are You? What if they do not believe me? I am not a good speaker. Please send someone else. And God answers every excuse, not by telling Moses he is more capable than he thinks, but by promising, I will be with you. That is the whole secret. God does not call the equipped; He equips the called, and the only credential that finally matters is His presence. If you have ever felt too small, too unqualified, or too used up to be of any use to God, this is your passage. The God who burns and is not consumed is still calling, still patient, and still saying, I will be with you.

Group Discussion: God revealed Himself to Moses as I AM, the eternal, self-existent Lord, before He ever asked anything of him. Why does it matter that the call to serve flows out of who God is, rather than out of who we are or what we can do?

Personal Reflection: Moses offered God one excuse after another for why he could not be used. Which of his excuses sounds most like the one you keep telling God about yourself, and what would change if you truly believed God's answer, I will be with you?

Read Exodus 3:1-4:17

Study Questions

1. Read 3:1-6. God called the ground around the bush holy and told Moses to remove his sandals, and Moses hid his face, afraid to look at God. What do the fire that did not consume the bush and the command about holy ground reveal about the holiness of God and how we ought to approach Him?
2. Moses was simply tending sheep when God broke into an ordinary day, yet he had to turn aside to truly see. Where might God be present in the routine corners of your life that you are too busy or distracted to notice, and what would turning aside look like for you?
3. Read 3:7-10. God said He had seen the affliction, heard the cry, and known the sorrows of His people, and so He had come down to deliver them. What does this tell us about the heart of God toward those who suffer, and about how His compassion moves Him to act?
4. God told Moses, I have seen, I have heard, I know. Think of a burden you have carried quietly, assuming no one noticed. How does it change you to know that the God of the burning bush sees, hears, and knows your sorrows too?
5. Read 3:11-12. When Moses asked, Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, God did not answer the question he asked but promised instead, I will be with you. Why does God so

often answer our fear about our own inadequacy not by boosting our confidence in ourselves but by pointing us to His presence?

6. Moses' first excuse was, Who am I? Where in your own life has a sense of being unqualified or insignificant kept you from stepping into something God may be calling you to do?
7. Read 3:13–15. God revealed His name as I AM WHO I AM, the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, His name forever. What does the name I AM teach us about God's eternal, self-existent nature and His unchanging faithfulness to His covenant, and how does Jesus' claim in John 8:58 connect to it?
8. The God who met Moses is the eternal I AM, who does not change and never fails. Where do you most need to rest in the truth that God simply is, steady and unchanging, when so much around you and within you keeps shifting?
9. Read 4:1–9 and 4:10–17. Moses raised objection after objection, that they would not believe him, that he was slow of speech, and finally, please send someone else, until the anger of the LORD was kindled. How does God's patient answering of each excuse, and yet His displeasure at Moses' final refusal, teach us the difference between honest weakness brought to God and stubborn unbelief that resists His clear call?
10. Look back across this whole encounter, from the burning bush to a hesitant man finally going at God's word. Name one specific excuse or fear you have been hiding behind, and

one concrete way you will trust the I AM who promises His presence, so that this passage shapes you into the kind of person Jesus can use.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Genesis 15:13–14, where God foretold to Abraham both the bondage in Egypt and the deliverance now arriving; Acts 7:30–34, where Stephen recounts the burning bush and the voice of the Lord; John 8:58, where Jesus declares before Abraham was, I AM; Isaiah 6:1–7, where another servant is undone before the holiness of God and then sent; 2 Corinthians 12:9–10, where God’s strength is made perfect in our weakness

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