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Accept the Call



Background

Passage

Exodus 3:1–4:31

Focal Verses

*Exodus 3:1-6, 10-15;
4:10-12*

What This Lesson Is About

This lesson examines the call of Moses at the burning bush and the principle

that God has a calling for each of us.

Why This Lesson Is Important

Most adults believe only pastors and those in vocational ministry will hear a "call from God." In spiritual terms, they might see their own vocation as less significant than that of

a pastor. But *vocation* originally meant a calling. The truth is that God has a call for everyone.

How This Lesson Can Impact Your Life

This lesson can help you discover the unique call God has placed on your life to serve Him.

"Tell us about your call." When an individual is being ordained—formally set aside for ministry—in our Baptist churches, an ordaining council usually is convened to question the candidate about his doctrinal beliefs, philosophy of ministry, commitment to the church, and so forth. Almost always, the one being considered is asked to tell about his call to ministry. These testimonies are always interesting and inspiring.

This week, we will examine the divine call to Moses. God's call to Moses was spectacular, as was Gideon's in Judges 6:11-40 and that of Saul (Paul) in Acts 9:1-19. Yet for most believers God's call is not nearly as dramatic. God does not call most believers to vocational ministry, but He does call every Christian to honor Him in specific avenues of service, often including what many would think of as a secular career. Studying Moses' call will help us to properly appreciate and respond to God's call in our own lives.

Encounter God's Presence

Exodus 3:1-6

¹Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb.

²And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.

³And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

⁴And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.

⁵And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.

⁶Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

Imagine you are reading the Bible for the very first time; you have no religious background or training. You read in Exodus 2 about how God protected Moses when he was an infant and of his upbringing in the household of Pharaoh. You read about how Moses killed an Egyptian and that he fled from Egypt because of that offense. In the third chapter, you find Moses, many years later, taking care of sheep in a wilderness area in the Sinai Peninsula near a mountain called Horeb (Mt. Sinai). Would the thought even enter your mind that God was about to use Moses as one of the greatest leaders in world history? But God *would* do this.

 *Why do you think God so often does things people least expect?*

Moses had married a woman name Zipporah (see Ex. 2:21), daughter of **Jethro**, a Midianite **priest** (*Jethro* also was named Reuel; see v. 18). As Moses was tending his father-in-law's sheep in the wilderness, God appeared to him in a most unusual manner. Moses saw **a bush** that was burning but **not consumed** by the fire. **The angel of the LORD appeared to him.** Such an occurrence is called a *theophany*, a visible appearance of God to man. While we see several examples of *theophanies* in the Old Testament (see Gen. 17:1-22; 18:1-33; 28:10-15; 32:24-32; Dan. 3:25), in the New Testament Jesus is the complete and full revelation of God (see Col. 2:9).

God told Moses to remove his sandals because he was standing on **holy ground**. God's presence transformed a wilderness pasture into a holy place. Moses, understandably, **was afraid**. God is awesome in power and completely holy in nature. Sometimes, in an effort to make God more approachable, we diminish His holiness. The miracle is that holy God has made it possible for sinful man to be reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ. Christ, therefore, has made it possible for us to approach God and encounter Him in an intimate way. God wants to have a relationship with us, but we must come to Him on His terms. Those terms require us to affirm God's holiness as well as our own sinful condition. Because of Christ we do not have to be terrified of God, but we do need to approach Him with great respect and reverence.

Discover Deeper Meaning

The Hebrew noun translated **holy** identifies something that is removed from common use and set apart or consecrated for the use of the deity. Thus, things that are *holy* belong to God. This includes God's character, His activity, His Word, His name, and His Spirit. Places, people, and vessels were made sacred by God's holy presence. When God met Moses at the burning bush, that place became "holy ground." The tabernacle, the temple, and everything in them received their holiness from God's presence. Jesus is "the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24), and through His presence believers also are called holy ones or "saints" (Acts 9:13).

Understand God's Name

Exodus 3:10-15

¹⁰Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

¹¹And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

¹²And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.

¹³And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?

¹⁴And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

¹⁵And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers,

the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name forever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.

Exodus 3:7-10 offers a very important insight into how God deals with people. God told Moses He had “seen the” plight of His people in Egypt and would “deliver them” (vv. 7-8a). But He went on to say to Moses, “Come now therefore, and I will send thee” (v. 10). God chose, as He almost always does, to work through people or a person—Moses in this case—to accomplish His work.

➔ *Why does God involve people in His work?*

Hearing God planned to send him to deliver the people, Moses offered several reasons—excuses, actually—as to why he couldn’t possibly be the right person for the job. **Who am I?** Looking back to Moses’ experience as a young man in Egypt, we might get the impression Moses had attempted to begin to deliver the people by his own will, his own strength, and his own actions (see 2:11-12). By the time God met Moses on Mt. Horeb, Moses had become a humble man, well aware of his inability to deliver God’s people.

🌀 *Why is it necessary that we be keenly aware of our own limitations when we contemplate fulfilling God’s call?*

God promised He would **be with** Moses. He then promised to give Moses a **token** or a sign. God’s response to Moses is significant: **When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.** God essentially told Moses, “Once you accomplish what I am sending you to do, you will know that I sent you to do it!” The sign would be at the completion of the task, not the beginning. Obeying God is a matter of doing what we know He wants us to do. Often, it is in looking back that it becomes clear to us that we have done God’s will in our lives. At the same time, we are to remain faithful to perform His will on a daily basis, to the best of our ability and with His help.

Jesus: "I AM" in the Flesh

Several passages in the Gospels report instances in which Jesus used the term "I AM." John 8:58-59 gives us perhaps the clearest example: "Jesus said unto them, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.' Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple." The Jews correctly understood that Jesus was identifying Himself as God in the flesh, the very same God who had made Himself known in the Old Testament. The Jews considered such a claim to be blasphemy.

In Matthew 14:27, Mark 6:50, and John 6:20 we read reports of another instance, but this one isn't as clear at first. When Jesus was walking toward the disciples on the sea during a storm, He essentially said to them (not necessarily in this order): "Don't be afraid but be of good cheer; I am." The disciples would certainly have understood this to be what it was—a claim to deity.

Moses asked God His name so that he could tell the people about the authority behind the things he would say to them. **God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM...Thus shalt thou say...I AM hath sent me unto you.** Included in this divine self-declaration are the ideas that God is living, self-existent, eternal, fully sovereign, totally independent, and completely capable of accomplishing His will. Moses would go to **the children of Israel** and to Pharaoh having been authorized to so by Almighty God.

God further identified himself as **the LORD**. This Hebrew word representing the personal name for God appears over 6800 times in the Old Testament. It is often translated, as it is here, by the English word *LORD* in small caps. The Jews, for fear of profaning or blaspheming the name of God (see Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 24:16), would not speak aloud this name for God, transliterated *YAHWEH*, but would instead substitute the word *Adonai* (*Lord*). Our English word *Jehovah* is actually a combination of the consonants for *Yahweh* and the vowels for *Adonai*.

God promised Moses He would be with him. God will not call us to serve Him and then leave us on our own. We can know He will never abandon us or forsake us (see Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5).



Moving out in obedience to God's call, Moses would encounter much hardship and opposition (see Exodus 5 for an account of some initial difficulties). How would remembering God's name help Moses in the days, months, and years ahead? How can remembering His name help us?

Depend on God's Power

Exodus 4:10-12

¹⁰And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.

¹¹And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?

¹²Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.

In Exodus 3, Moses essentially asked God, "Who am I?" and "Who are you?" Chapter 4 begins with Moses effectively asking, "What if the people will not believe me?" (See vv. 1-10.) God gave Moses two miraculous signs that he could use to convince the people it was the Lord who had appeared to him. The first sign to Moses was that his staff became a serpent, then a staff again (see vv. 2-4); and the second was that his hand become leprous, then whole again (see vv. 6-7). In his experience of hearing God's call, Moses had seen several miracles, yet he still was not fully convinced God could use him. Our primary focus always needs to be on God's power, not on our own limitations.

The next excuse Moses offered was that he was not a good speaker. God reminded Moses it was He, the Lord, who gave people the abilities to speak, to hear, and to see. After all, God

made **man's mouth**. God assured Moses, **I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.**

Moses, no doubt, was sincere in claiming to be inadequate. The truth is that none of us is adequate to do the spiritual work to which God calls us. But God equips and enables the people He calls. He will empower you as well.

Exodus 4:14 says God's anger burned against Moses at this point. I believe if Moses had offered any more excuses, God would have gone on to someone else. As it was, He did make Aaron the "spokesman" (vv. 14-16). When God calls, we do well to answer and to walk in obedience to His call, however inadequate we may feel. This is what Moses ultimately did.

➔ *What are the dangers inherent in saying no to God's call?*

The Life Word

Jill Briscoe wrote a book titled *Here Am I; Send Aaron* (Victor Books, 1984). Isn't this how we typically feel? We can't imagine that God would use us for such important work. The truth is, God uses us not because of who we are, but because of who He is. It's about making Him—not us—look great.

When we think of God's calling someone to serve Him, we usually think of vocational ministry. I think we sometimes make distinctions that God does not make. Every believer is equally important to God. Every call is important to God. For me the call has been to be a pastor. For you it may be to be a Christian businessman, teacher, plumber, nurse, electrician, or construction worker. Or it may be to be a godly homemaker, a profession that we should esteem just as much as any other. The question is not so much about the particular task He calls us to, but about obeying Him in answering His call in our lives, *whatever* He asks us to do. I encourage you to say yes to anything and everything God may call you to do.