



RELUCTANCE

God calls and empowers people to serve Him and His purposes.

EXODUS 3:4-14; 4:13-16

Most of us likely have doubts about our capabilities in some area. Christians are not exempt from those feelings of doubt. Christian history is marked by reluctant leaders, struggling sinners, feeble doubters, and weak workers. God has accomplished His work through humans in spite of their human limitations and failures.

What can cause a person to doubt his or her ability to accomplish a challenging task? How do our doubts feed our reluctance and hesitation to act?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EXODUS 1:1–4:31

In the first chapters of Exodus we are introduced to Moses. He is mentioned many times in the New Testament and is almost always shown in a positive light. Among God's people, Moses is rarely criticized or disparaged; he is always honored. However, when we encounter Moses in the first chapters of Exodus, we get an initial picture of a weak and fearful man.

The Israelites had moved to Egypt with Jacob (1:1). (See Gen. 37–50.) The people of Israel living in Egypt grew into a large group (1:7). Because of their great number, Pharaoh and the Egyptians no longer regarded them with friendliness but with fear. The Egyptians pressed the Israelites into slavery, causing God's people to suffer greatly (1:8-11).

In chapter 2, Moses entered the story. His name sounds like the Hebrew verb meaning “to draw out.” His name alone foreshadows God's purposes to use Moses to “draw out” Israel from Egypt. Moreover, the preservation of Moses at birth points to his destiny. Moses' mother declared that “he was a goodly child” (2:2). The word translated “goodly” (good) echoes the words of creation in Genesis 1. Moses would be representative of the new creation of God's people. Moreover, Moses was set in a basket (or “ark,” KJV) to be saved from the death that would come from Pharaoh's hand in the slaughtering of the firstborn sons of Israel (1:22; 2:3). In other words, Moses was selected as God's means to deliver His people from a tragic fate. Everything one needs to know about Moses' purpose is established in his birth and circumstances.

In the exodus story, we see both the strengths and weaknesses of his leadership and character. Moses initially had significant reluctance based on his feelings of inadequacy to act in accordance with God's will. At this point, Moses' significance is not primarily based on his godliness and faith. Rather, his significance is based on how God's plan and power worked through him to accomplish His will—despite Moses' doubt and fear. The story of Moses is the beginning of redemption for God's people, setting the stage for a supernatural act of salvation by God for a people powerless to help themselves. For Christians, weakness should not lead to despair but to reliance on God's power to accomplish His will.

Read Exodus 3:4-14 and 4:13-16 in your Bible. Observe God's proclamations and promises in this dialogue, as well as Moses' responses. What do Moses' responses reveal about him?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE APPROACH (EX. 3:4-6)

⁴ And 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. ⁵ And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. ⁶ Moreover 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.

VERSE 4

Exodus 2:11-22 describes the events that led to Moses' fleeing to Midian, marrying the daughter of a priest named Jethro, and tending sheep at Horeb (also known as Mount Sinai). It was on this mountain that Moses encountered God in a burning bush (3:2). In Exodus, God's presence is often revealed in a flame of fire (13:21-22; 19:18; 40:38). It is not difficult to imagine why Moses stopped and approached this mysterious burning bush that was not being consumed by flames (3:3).

Moses did not figure out the mystery of the burning bush on his own. Instead, we see the Lord reveal Himself to Moses. God was going to initiate a great work in the life of Moses.

Here was Moses, standing before the Almighty God. There was God, manifest in the flames in His beautiful glory, burning purity, and consuming holiness. And what did God do? He called Moses by name: ***Moses, Moses.***

VERSE 5

God lovingly declared a warning, reminding Moses that he was standing on ***holy ground.*** Just as God did not consume and destroy the object of His revelation (the bush), He also would not consume or

destroy the recipient of His revelation (Moses). This shows us God's grace and purpose, for no sinful man can survive a close encounter with the Almighty God. In response, an encounter with the living God calls for a respectful change in posture, a fearful reverence that treads lightly. This shows us that though God is transcendent, He is also imminent.

God is not required to reveal Himself to humanity, but He chooses to do so out of love and for His purposes. Even so, God is holy and should be approached with reverence.

VERSE 6

God specifically revealed Himself to Moses as ***the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*** (see Ex. 2:24). It was in this announcement that Moses came to see clearly who was addressing him. In awe and fear, Moses ***hid his face***. One must remember that Moses was in exile from God's enslaved people in Egypt (2:15). In fact, Moses had been alienated from them since birth. With this declaration, God reminded Moses of the long line of people that he was a part of as the offspring of Abraham (2:23-25). One has to imagine Moses' curiosity at this point: *Why has God chosen to reveal Himself? What does the God of my fathers want with me?*

What does our response to God reveal about our view of God? About our view of ourselves?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God*

The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

THE ASSIGNMENT (EX. 3:7-10)

⁷ And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; ⁸ And I am come down



to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

VERSES 7-9

The God of Israel was not a distant deity, detached from His people. He had intimate knowledge of their sufferings. God had heard their cries. The words **seen ... heard ... know** reveal God's deep covenant love for His people (see also Ex. 2:23-25). Then God revealed His plans. He had **come down to deliver** the Israelites out of the hand of the enslaving Egyptians. You can imagine Moses' awe as the God of his fathers revealed His plan to deliver His people from approximately four hundred years of slavery in Egypt. Moreover, God would deliver them to a land of their own, **a land flowing with milk and honey**.

God's purposes are accomplished not by our power, but by His.

VERSE 10

Immediately, Moses was told that God would use him to orchestrate the events that would change history and become embedded in the minds of the Israelites as one of the most significant moments in their story as a people. God is a saving God and a sending God.

Moses is a prime example of how God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). God's purposes are accomplished not by our power, but by His. God sent Moses as the deliverer to rescue His people from slavery to lead them to dwell in the promised land.

God commissioned Moses by His word and power to do something that seemed impossible. He was sent to lead a huge group of slaves out of bondage. He was sent by God to stand before Pharaoh and call for the Israelites' release. It would be possible only if God supplied the power.

Even today, God is not a distant deity. He hears the cries of His people and is moved to action. How does this depiction of God in these verses comfort you in times of suffering and affliction? How do the cross and the resurrection of Christ remind us that God has ultimately heard our cries?

BIBLE SKILL: *Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.*

Review the following passages: Joshua 1:9; 1 Chronicles 28:20; Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5-6. Notice who was addressed in each passage. Why was it important for the person addressed to be assured of God's presence? How does God's presence serve as a motivator to action?

THE AUTHORITY (EX. 3:11-14)

¹¹ And 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?

¹² And 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. ¹³ And

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? ¹⁴ And 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.

VERSES 11-12

Moses' response is understandable: ***Who am I*** to do such unfathomable things? God graciously responded: ***I will be with thee***. Note that God did not answer Moses' question in the way that he asked but rather pointed back to Himself to show how this would be accomplished. In the Old Testament, when God declares that He will



be with someone, He is saying, *I will do this by my own power* (see Gen. 26:3; Ex. 4:12). Moreover, God confirmed His promise by stating that once the Israelites were delivered, they would serve God on the very mountain where Moses stood.

The “I AM” Sayings of Jesus

- *I am the bread of life (John 6:35).*
- *I am the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5).*
- *I am the door of the sheep (John 10:7,9).*
- *I am the good shepherd (John 10:11,14).*
- *I am the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).*
- *I am the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).*
- *I am the true vine (John 15:1,5).*

VERSES 13-14

The words **I AM** have been the focus of much theological study. The wordplay on the Hebrew verb “to be” is understood well in the Septuagint’s translation, “I am the One who is.” God’s nature is not dependent on anything other than Himself. He is beyond our exhaustive knowledge, and yet He graciously chooses to reveal Himself to humanity. He lovingly shows that He is knowable by revealing His personal name.

God simply is. God will be who He is. This required Moses to trust Him, His word, and what He chose to reveal at that time. In Hebrews 1:1-2 we are told, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.” Jesus is the clearest revelation of God to man. For this reason, the name **I AM** anticipates the “I am” sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John, which show His deity. Moreover, God’s promise to be with Moses foreshadows Jesus’ promise to be with the disciples as they go on mission with God (Matt. 28:18-20).

How did knowing God’s identity bring assurance to Moses? In a world filled with unreliable people and broken promises, how does God’s promise enable us to trust Him despite our challenges or circumstances?

THE ASSURANCE (EX. 4:13-16)

¹³ And he said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send. ¹⁴ And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and he said, Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart. ¹⁵ And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do. ¹⁶ And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God.

VERSES 13-16

Even though God had clearly revealed Himself, explained His purpose, and promised His presence, Moses still doubted (see Ex. 3:17-18; 4:1). Even after God had given Moses further confirmation (4:8-9), Moses pleaded for God to send someone else. Moses felt he did not have the credentials (3:11-12), he did not know how it would be accomplished (3:13-22), he did not have the people's trust (4:1-9), and he did not have the communication skills (4:10-12). In Moses' eyes, it would seem that he had built a pretty strong case against God's plan. The text then tells us that ***the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses***. But while God reproved Moses for his questioning, He also provided ***Aaron the Levite*** as Moses' spokesperson to help accomplish His purposes.

God would provide the power to accomplish His will. He would provide the message through Moses that would accomplish His will. God also provided the mouthpiece through Moses' brother, Aaron, to speak into action what He willed. Believers can be assured that God provides the resources for them to be successful in their God-given responsibilities as well.

How did God plan on demonstrating His power through Moses' weaknesses? What does this passage teach about how God uses our weaknesses to accomplish His purposes?



IN MY CONTEXT

- God is holy but demonstrates His grace by approaching unholy people.
- God selects specific people to serve His purposes and lead His people. Even so, like Moses, we often doubt our ability to live according to God’s will.
- Believers can be assured that God provides the resources for them to be successful in their God-given responsibilities.

Record your understanding of the role God desires you to play in redeeming His people. What steps do you need to take to carry out the mission you have identified?

List the resources God has provided you to accomplish His will. Discuss with your group how you can use each resource. Ask God for the courage to fulfill His will using the provided resources.

Reflect on Exodus 3:14. Take time to praise God for always being true to His character. Memorize this verse this week.

Prayer Needs
