

## 2.9.25 Love Overcomes Our Fears Exodus 3:9-14 & 4:1-5, 10-17.

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The book of Exodus describes two defining experiences in Israel's history. The first is God delivering the Israelites from enslavement in Egypt, what's known as the exodus, hence the title of the book. The second is the revelation of God's law at Mount Sinai to make the Israelites a community, bound in relationship with their liberating God and with one another. The first 18 chapters of Exodus are about Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt and their journey to Mount Sinai. Chapters 19-40 are about their time at Sinai where the covenant with God was made and the laws governing their life together were formed and shared. At the center of these memorable experiences is a man named **Moses** who was both the prophetic interpreter and instrument of God's deliverance and the mediator of the covenant between God and the people. Moses is one of the most important individuals in the entire Bible and he laid the spiritual foundation upon which later generations built. While in hindsight, Moses appears to be an incredible leader, as we're hearing today from Exodus 3 and 4, he didn't start out impressively or confidently. Listen to **Exodus 4:1-5, 10-17 (NRSV)** as Moses continues to make excuses about why he can't possibly do what the Lord is telling him to do.

**Then Moses answered, "But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.'"** <sup>2</sup> The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff." <sup>3</sup> And he said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw the staff on the ground, and it became a snake; and Moses drew back from it. <sup>4</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, "Reach out your hand, and seize it by the tail"—so he reached out his hand and grasped it, and it became a staff in his hand— <sup>5</sup> **"so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."**

<sup>10</sup> But Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, **I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.**" <sup>11</sup> Then the LORD said to him, "*Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?* <sup>12</sup> **Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.**" <sup>13</sup> But he

said, **“O my Lord, please send someone else.”** 14 **Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses** and he said, **“What of your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently;** even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. 15 **You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do.** 16 **He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him.** 17 **Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.”**

When you hear the name Moses, who do you think of? What do you imagine or picture Moses to be like? For many people, my age and older it's... **Charlton Heston in the movie The Ten Commandments, a strong, forceful, commanding presence.** For others it's the 1998 animated film, **Prince of Egypt.** The picture we have of Moses in the Bible is different than the bold Moses of the movies. There's a tendency to make individuals like Moses into superhuman figures, when in fact they're much more like us. Rather than being bold and courageous, Moses is afraid, feels inadequate to do what God wants him to do, is worried about what others will think of him, and wonders whether God's plan will even work. He thinks there's nothing in his life that has prepared him for what he's now supposed to do. At one time or another some of these concerns may be yours as well. Given the magnitude and importance of what God is asking, Moses would rather not have the job.

Moses was a reluctant leader and prophet and when the Lord appeared to him and gave him a task to do, Moses gave five different excuses why he couldn't do it. Often our fears can get in the way of what the Lord wants us to do. We see this in the life of Moses and many other people of faith, perhaps including ourselves. Moses gives God not one, not three, but five excuses about why he can't do what God wants him to do. We're going to review Moses' Five Excuses, and you can see if you relate to any of them or to some of them more than others. You can also reflect on how you feel when you ask someone to do something and rather than doing it, they give you an excuse why they can't. We can often be frustrated, upset, or disappointed, but God doesn't respond that way to Moses' first four excuses. God keeps seeking to overcome Moses

fear with love, reassurance, and practical help, hoping that Moses will trust that the God who is calling him to step out in faith to a new adventure, will also be with him and provide what he needs.

**Excuse #1 is You've Got the Wrong Person Exodus 3:11,** But Moses said to God, ***"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"*** Moses felt inadequate to do what God wanted him to do. And who wouldn't? God was asking him to go to the most powerful person in his world and to tell him to his face that he was sinning and needed to free those he was oppressing and enslaving. I don't know how many of us would want that job. It was risky and dangerous, it might cost Moses his life, and in his eyes probably had little chance of success. Moses doubts his own ability, worth, and holiness for this task. Moses basically says, "Why me?" Have you ever felt unqualified or inadequate for something God has called you to do? How did you respond? How does the Lord respond to Moses' fear and inadequacy?

**God says, I will be with you (3:12a).** God doesn't respond to Moses' objection by stating Moses' credentials for the task. God doesn't say, *"But Moses, you're so talented, so brilliant, a courageous leader, you have a Ph.D. in crisis management with a minor in tactical maneuvers with large groups of unruly people."* God says nothing about Moses' worthiness or his qualifications, all God says is, ***"I will be with you."*** Is the fact that God assures Moses of constant Divine companionship enough? Would it be enough for you? Yet that's all that matters. God gives Moses the assurance he won't be setting out on this new venture to an unfamiliar place alone. God promises to be with him. If we're walking by faith, seeking to respond to God's call on our life and what God wants us to do in any moment or situation, even if we have fears, concerns, or misgivings about it, the promise that God will be with us helps to mitigate and override our fears. God doesn't call us to do something new or challenging without also promising to be with us all the way.

You might think God is feeling better about the whole venture by promising to be with Moses and giving him the guarantee of success by saying when you've brought the people out of Egypt you're to worship me on this mountain. That's like going into an

important game against a tough opponent knowing you're going to win. But if excuse # 1 is basically, who am I to do this? Excuse #2 is based on, who are you to ask me?

**Excuse # 2 I'm Not Ready Yet Exodus 3:13.** Moses asks, "*what shall I say to them?*" Moses didn't think he had enough information to move forward. That can often be the case when God is calling us to step out in faith and obedience. We may have to start moving without having every single last piece of information we might like to have. Moses didn't think he'd be able to answer all the questions people would have. He thought he had nothing to say. He asks God, somewhat understandably, who are You? (Exodus 3:13). Moses questions both God's identity and authority. You might think you'd never do that, but we can ask ourselves, in what ways do we sometimes struggle to trust God's character or promises when faced with challenges?

In response to Moses' question, "*What shall I say to them?*" **God says, this is what you're to say** (Exodus 3:14). God gives Moses the answer about who is charging him to pack up and head to Egypt and to lead the people out. God said to Moses, "*I AM WHO I AM. Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'*" God reveals the divine name and identity to Moses in a way we haven't seen to this point in the Bible. In a similar way to how God answers Moses, the Lord gives us the words or the message we need at the right time. This is something Jesus said to his disciples when he warned they were going to be handed over to the authorities in **Matthew 10:19**, "*But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what you shall speak.*" If we're striving to be faithful, God will give us the words we need to speak at the right time. Moses is still not convinced which leads to Excuse # 3.

**Excuse # 3 is I Might Fail** (Exodus 4:1), Then Moses answered, "*But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.'*" Moses fears rejection and doubt. How does fear of others' opinions hold us back from obeying God? How can we overcome this fear with God's help and courageous action? Our fear of failure can prevent us not only from obeying God, but from doing things that we might genuinely love or enjoy doing if we tried them and persevered in doing them. We can fear looking bad or awkward trying to learn something new and as a result we

never take a risk or a chance to try. **Fearful, negative thinking rarely ever leads to success**, Moses' mind isn't where it should be yet. He's thinking about everything that could go wrong with going to Egypt rather than on the presence and power of God that will be with him when he goes.

In response to Mose's fear of failing and his lament, *"but suppose they don't believe me or listen to me,"* **God showed Moses his power** (Exodus 4:2-9) with a staff that transforms into a snake and back to a staff. This is clearly extraordinary, yet it's understandable given the seriousness, size, and scope of what God was asking Moses to do, that he needed an amazing demonstration of God's power. In our lives, God still shows up in ways to assure us that God is with us, God loves us, we're not alone, we haven't been abandoned. It might not be a miraculous staff, but there are signs everywhere that we may notice if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. Even with the assurance of the Lord's presence with him, of God giving him the words to speak and a miraculous staff with which to perform signs, Moses is still not satisfied, confident, or prepared to be obedient and to leave for Egypt. He is so like us; God can answer our prayer and then we have another one coming right behind the previous one which the Lord just answered. It's kind of, "Yeah, but what about..." sort of prayer, which leads to

**Excuse # 4 I Don't Have the Skills Exodus 4:10**, But Moses said to the LORD, *"O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."* It seems that far from speaking with a commanding voice like Charlton Heston, Moses may have stuttered, or had a speech impediment, or he may have, like many people, simply gotten quite nervous if he had to do any public speaking. He says, in **Exodus 6:12**, *"I speak with faltering lips."* Moses points out his weaknesses to God, in case perhaps God wasn't aware of them. Do you ever feel like your personal limitations disqualify you from serving God? How does God's response to Moses encourage you today? God is relentlessly addressing Moses' excuses and questions and doing so in love and covering them.

God says, **"I will help you speak and will teach you what to say** (Exodus 4:12), ***Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to***

**speak.**” God’s answered Moses’ first four excuses and it seems the Lord’s patience is starting to get a bit thin. **“Now go,”** is the Lord’s way of saying get moving, start taking steps to where I’m sending you. Yet God is so merciful and kind and God’s strength is made perfect in weakness. God fills in our gaps for Moses and for us. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul, like Moses, also had some kind of physical limitation, his may have been related to his vision. He describes it as a “thorn in the flesh” and when he asked God to remove it, God didn’t. Paul writes in **2 Corinthians 12:9** (ESV) But he said to me, *“My grace is sufficient for you, **for my power is made perfect in weakness.**” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*” Even with God’s promise to give him the very words he is to speak, Moses is still reluctant and holding back from obeying God’s call which leads to his fifth and final excuse.

**Excuse # 5 Send someone else.** It can be easy to think in the face of a challenging invitation from God, someone else will do it or someone else could do it better than me. Moses is still in the grip of fear when he says, Exodus 4:13, **“O my Lord, please send someone else.”** Up to this point, God has shown tremendous patience, but Moses is being called to be a prophet, and a prophet has one job - to be obedient to whatever the Lord tells the prophet to do. With this 5<sup>th</sup> excuse, Moses is more like Jonah than Isaiah. Isaiah came forward boldly offering himself to the Lord saying (Isaiah 6:80, *“Here am I, send me!”*) Moses says, *“Here am I, send Aaron!”* Like Jonah who sought to flee from the presence of the Lord and went in the opposite direction of where the Lord told him to go, Moses is trying to get out of his prophetic call and responsibility to go where the Lord wants him to go.

God wasn’t pleased, and we’re told (Exodus 4:14), **Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses.**” And God says, I think with no small amount of exasperation, well how about if your brother speaks for you? And the Lord sends Aaron to be with him and God promises 4:15b, **“and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do.**”

God shows extraordinary grace and love in responding to Moses’ excuses. God doesn’t say, “You cowardly, fearful, twit, what’s the matter with you?” God shows

tremendous patience and provision for Moses and for all whom God calls to serve. God meets each of Moses' excuses with a promise. While we may not be called to a task as monumental as Moses – there are still jobs to be done, needs to be met, challenges to be overcome, lives to be touched, and God wants you to be a part of God's plan to bring hope and deliverance to God's people.

God's love for Moses and for us is so great, that God's presence and guidance can overcome our fears and like Moses we may find we're capable of facing difficulties and challenges and realize that with God's help that we can do far more than we ever imagined. God's love can overcome our fears.

**Prayer:** God deliver me from all my fears and excuses and help me to be part of your plan to deliver others that they may know your love and grace and the promise of your good future. Amen

### **Questions for Discussion or Reflection**

1. Moses doubts his own ability and worth (Exodus 3:11). Have you ever felt unqualified for something God has called you to do? How did you respond?
2. Moses questions God's identity and authority (Exodus 3:13). In what ways do you sometimes struggle to trust God's character or promises when faced with challenges?
3. Moses fears rejection and doubt (Exodus 4:1). How does fear of others' opinions hold you back from obeying God? How can you overcome this fear?
4. Moses points out his weaknesses, "*I am not eloquent*" (Exodus 4:10). Do you ever feel like your personal limitations disqualify you from serving God? How does God's response to Moses encourage you today?
5. Moses ultimately asks God to send someone else (Exodus 4:13). Have you ever resisted God's call on your life out of fear or insecurity? What happened when you finally obeyed (or if you didn't, what do you think you missed)?
6. What do you notice about the way God responds to each of Moses' excuses? How does this show God's love, patience and provision for those God calls?
7. Which of Moses' excuses do you relate to the most? How can you take steps of faith to trust God despite that excuse?