

EXODUS—WEEK 2

GOD CALLS



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is Moses Found by Paolo Veronese (~1528 – 1588)
On display at Museo del Prado, Madrid*

The LORD tells Moses to go back to Egypt, and Moses makes a bunch of excuses. God answers them one-by-one, identifying Himself as I AM and YHVH, and demonstrating His power (even giving some power to Moses). Eventually Moses decides to go back and asks Jethro (his father-in-law) for permission to go.

So far, so good.

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We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.

Exodus 3:7–4:23— God Calls
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1 Exodus 3:7–15 (ESV)

Then the LORD said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” He said, “But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

The people are used to hearing about a lot of gods, each one with a name, so they’ll want to know this god’s name too. But the one true God isn’t thrilled with the idea of being lumped in with all the phonies.

So, God distinguishes Himself as the great *I AM*. He’s poking fun at the Egyptian gods, who aren’t real.

But He’s also doing something else; He’s distinguishing His existence from ours. When we create someone (not beget, create), that someone is a fictional character. The difference between creators and their creations is a level of reality. God “is” in a different way than we “are,” just as Shakespeare “is” in a different way than Romeo “is.” This is pretty tricky stuff, and we’re never going to fully understand it (in this life anyway), but it’s important.

Meanwhile, yes, God does have a name, and He tells Moses to use it. That name is spelled YHVH in Hebrew. There are lots of ways to pronounce it (e.g., Yahweh, Jehovah—the pronunciation rules in Hebrew aren’t like English.) Since the third commandment is to not misuse God’s name, YHVH is typically translated as “the LORD.” That keeps people from knowing the exact name to take in vain.

This section displays the underpinnings of the first *three* commandments.

The more I think about God’s existence, the more I wonder why He would bother to listen to my prayers. Anything I might say must be totally boring.

And yet, we are commanded to bring our prayers before Him. That’s amazing.

2 Exodus 3:16-22

“Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, ‘The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, “I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt; and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.” ’ Then they will heed your voice; and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt; and you shall say to him, ‘The LORD God of the Hebrews has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.’ But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed. But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.”

This is an example of God’s amazing teaching methods. He just finished distinguishing Himself from all other gods as the “I AM.” You might expect Him to tell Moses to deliver the same message to Pharaoh.

But instead, God deliberately avoids this confrontation. He’s going to give Pharaoh every chance to be reasonable. Moses is told to simply ask Pharaoh for three days to sacrifice to YHVH, the God of the Hebrews. For now, Pharaoh’s polytheistic belief system won’t be challenged.

God is setting him up. This is so that he will be without excuse. When things go sour later, Pharaoh can’t claim that the bar was set too high.

God is making this totally easy for him.

He does that with us too. None of the Ten Commandments are hard to obey; a robot would follow all of them effortlessly.

But we can’t. We have this curious “rules are made to be broken” attitude. The fact that God’s commandments aren’t difficult highlights our fallen nature.

And that’s the point. We don’t need to be rescued from some impossible situation we’ve been tossed into; we need to be saved from ourselves.

Just as God’s plan will unfold to His glory by embarrassing Pharaoh, so His plan of salvation glorifies Him at our expense.

Of course, “our expense” here just means losing face.

We gain so much more.

3 Exodus 4:1–9 (ESV)

Then Moses answered, “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you.’” The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A staff.” And he said, “Throw it on the ground.” So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it. But the LORD said to Moses, “Put out your hand and catch it by the tail”—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand—“that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.” Again, the LORD said to him, “Put your hand inside your cloak.” And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. Then God said, “Put your hand back inside your cloak.” So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. “If they will not believe you,” God said, “or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.”

First of all, know that this is all a ruse. Moses isn’t really worried about the people’s reaction; he’s worried about his own inadequacy. This is just him starting to open up and fret about what the LORD is commanding him to do.

Good. He *is* inadequate. That’s the point. God isn’t interested in displaying Moses’s great leadership skills; He’s interested in displaying His own glory.

Moses expects this to not go well because he expects everything to not go well. That’s just his attitude. God responds to Moses’s concerns by giving him some tricks that ought to convince anyone.

These cheap tricks seem beneath God’s dignity—even out of character—but He’s answering Moses’s objections directly and completely.

With those silly objections dispatched, Moses will be forced to open up and tell God what’s really bugging him.

We’re just as whiney as Moses is. God calls, and we make excuses.

Yes, there are some Christians who really answered the call, but I’m not one of them. If you are, I don’t speak for you. The next two paragraphs may not fit your experience.

But most Christians have never fully stepped out in faith and taken a big risk for the LORD. We’ve had moments when the idea crossed our minds—when something tugged at us—but after weighing the practicalities and our responsibilities, we decided to stay safe. That may not have even been the wrong decision.

Still, that choice leaves an annoying residue—a nagging sense that we let God down.

4 Exodus 4:10–17 (ESV)

But Moses said to the LORD, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.” Then the LORD said to him, “Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.” But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.” Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. 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 both what to do. He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs.”

Moses, you're arguing with a bush! That's not a good look. You might want to rethink your whole strategy here. This is going on your permanent record.

Oh, and by the way, this will be the mother of all permanent records. So, how 'bout you try letting God be God, and stop acting like everything is about you, okay?

This is the beginning of a long and beautiful lesson in how God transforms His servants. Right now, Moses is just a whimpering sack of low self-esteem, and God's response at this stage is the equivalent of saying, “Now there, there,” and handing him a hankie.

But Moses is on the fast track in God's school of hard knocks. We will watch as Moses grows in wisdom and in stature. God's agenda for Moses will be relentlessly creative. Every time he grows into his shoes, he'll be given a bigger pair to fill.

Moses is right when he says, “*I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.*” Yet he will go on to write what is arguably the most significant literary work in history—the Pentateuch.

Moses has a lot of personal issues that he needs to overcome (or outgrow). So do we.

That's what keeps us from answering the call. Most modern Christians just can't picture themselves as something other than what they are.

Curiously (gloriously) God often uses trials to kick us out of our comfort zone. We need to recognize this in our prayers. We pray for our friends going through trials, but we often pray for the wrong thing. The same holds when we're in a trial and praying for ourselves.

It's okay to pray for trials to end, but since trials have a purpose, don't be surprised if you feel led to pray for strength and growth instead.

And of course, pray for peace and a growing sense of His presence.

5 Exodus 4:18–23

So Moses went and returned to Jethro his father-in-law, and said to him, “Please let me go and return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see whether they are still alive.”

And Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace.”

Now the Lord said to Moses in Midian, “Go, return to Egypt; for all the men who sought your life are dead.” Then Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand.

And the Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord: “Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.” ’ ”

Why is God going to harden Pharaoh’s heart? This is nuts! If the goal here is to get His people to the Promised Land, why make it so difficult?

Well, it’s not nuts, and the reason is that getting His people to the Promised Land is *not* the goal. The goal is God’s glory. It’s always God’s glory. Yes, He will get His people to the Promised Land.

But, make no mistake, God’s glory is the purpose of everything. So, the plot’s going to be a lot more complex than some quick escape or great military victory. It will have many twists and turns, even great disappointments. Man’s sinful nature will spoil everything, over and over. We will learn more, and God will be glorified more.

People often wish that the LORD was the kind of god who would make our lives easy—the kind of god who would just liberate the Hebrews quickly and march them straight to Israel.

But a cheap, Hollywood-style victory wouldn’t really be all that glorifying.

It wouldn’t even be all that interesting.

People who know God are amused by the curse, “*May you live in interesting times.*” Knowing God makes times more interesting, not less.

We’re called to significance, not comfort. If you seek a quiet life, avoid Christianity like the plague. Any Christian can be assigned an important, even suffering, role to play in God’s kingdom. *The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding* (Philippians 4:7a) isn’t about tranquility.

But there is a wonderful peace in the midst of all the action, a peace that is greater and more satisfying than simple tranquility—God’s peace. And we’re not going to understand it.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. How should we open our prayers?
2. Jesus gave us some commands that are night-and-day tougher than the Ten Commandments (e.g., love your enemies). Why the big shift?
3. Have you witnessed someone answer the call (having known them beforehand)?
4. Do you know of anyone who was “awakened” by a trial?
5. In times of trial do you still have peace?