

“The Trustworthiness of God”
 Exodus 3:1 – 4:17
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 Dr. Jerry Nelson

“I was just walking along minding my own business when suddenly...”
 If **you** were writing the story, how might you finish that sentence?

- I was just walking along minding my own business when suddenly **a shot rang out.**
- I was just walking along minding my own business when suddenly **a light blinded my eyes.**

Even to the oldest of us, forty years is a long time.

Most people under 50 years of age either can't remember 40 years ago or weren't even yet born.

For Moses, 40 years ago was a different life – he was the son of the Princess of Egypt, the best schools, everything a boy could want growing up – what a different world that was.

Moses was a Hebrew, raised as an Egyptian, but he killed an Egyptian and had to run for his life.

At first the loss of all those advantages was hard to accept and maybe he dreamed of going back.

But 40 years passed and everything changed.

Oh, it wasn't Pharaoh's palace he lived in now, but it was home.

Life had settled into a good routine.

Married, two kids, a job, and the health to enjoy them; really, what more could a man want?

“One day I was just walking along minding my own business when suddenly...” – see how Moses would finish the sentence.

Open your Bible to Exodus 3 and stand as God's holy word is read. Please plan to use your Bible, we are not projecting the text.

It's a fairly long passage but reading less is incomplete.

Exodus 3:1 – 4:17

“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight--why the bush does not burn up."

^{EX 3:4} When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

^{EX 3:5} "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

^{EX 3:7} The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey--the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

^{EX 3:11} But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

^{EX 3:12} And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

^{EX 3:13} Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

^{EX 3:14} God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

^{EX 3:15} God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, '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, the

name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.

EX 3:16 "Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers--the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob-- appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. ¹⁷ And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites--a land flowing with milk and honey.'

EX 3:18 "The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.' ¹⁹ But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. ²⁰ So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.

EX 3:21 "And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. ²² Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians."

EX 4:1 Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you?'"

EX 4:2 Then the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?"
"A staff," he replied.

EX 4:3 The LORD said, "Throw it on the ground."

Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. ⁴ Then the LORD said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. ⁵ "This," said the LORD, "is so 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."

EX 4:6 Then the LORD said, "Put your hand inside your cloak." So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was leprous, like snow.

EX 4:7 "Now put it back into your cloak," he said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh.

EX 4:8 Then the LORD said, "If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second.⁹ But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground."

EX 4:10 Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."

EX 4:11 The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?¹² Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

EX 4:13 But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."

EX 4:14 Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses and he said, "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you.¹⁵ You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do.¹⁶ He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him.¹⁷ But take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it."

May God bless the hearing of his inspired word.

Pray: Spirit of God, apply your word to our minds and situations today. May we trust you more as a result of what you show us today.

Well, Moses got to finish the sentence: "I was just walking along minding my own business when suddenly **a voice spoke to me out of a burning bush.**"

That experience changed everything.

But most importantly it changed him!

How he changed him and what changed him is what I wish for us to explore in these verses.

Moses had settled into a new life.

Two sons, a job, a routine - life wasn't as comfortable as in the Pharaoh's palace but it wasn't bad either.

Being in a place in life of peace and enough to get by on is okay.

There's something to be said for the mundane.

We have our homes, our church, and our community of friends.

We can settle down and just enjoy life.

But that is not the extent of God's call on our lives.

That is not the whole of the mission he has given us.

Eugene Peterson wrote, "If I am not reminded of the foundational realities with which we are dealing – (The realities of) God, kingdom, and gospel – I am going to end up living a futile, fantasy life." (Peterson [The Contemplative Pastor](#))

So God steps in, taps us on the shoulder and reminds us of his desire for our lives – for us to give, to serve, to be reconciled, to maybe even change the whole course of our lives.

What's the hardest thing God has ever asked you to do?

What has he been urging on you lately?

Moses is tending sheep far from home when he sees a bush burning but not being consumed.

Curious (Who wouldn't be?), he goes closer.

A voice from the fire, calls his name – that's weird!

I'm guessing in an almost knee-jerk reaction, Moses responds with "Here I am" or "I'm here" or "Yes?"

Then the voice identifies himself as the God of Moses' father and forefathers – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Being told to take off his sandals and stand clear because he is on holy ground, Moses is now afraid – he recognizes he is in the presence of The Holy.

And so there he stood barefooted in the presence of God and heard God tell him what to do.

The problem for Moses was not with God's great plan **but the part God had for Moses** in that plan.

In verses 7-9 God tells Moses what God plans to do.

He has heard the cries of his people in Egypt, he is concerned about them and plans to deliver them from their slavery and, as he promised hundreds of years earlier, give them a rich land of their own.

Moses certainly would have been happy to hear **that**.

He had heard of the promise of God and it now appears that the time has come for God to fulfill that promise – Excellent!

It's verse 10 that stops him cold: "So now, go, (God says,) I am sending **you** to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

Whoa! "Hold your horses", say again!"

Exodus 3:11 "But Moses said to God, "Who am **I**, that **I** should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

God, I'm an honest man, an honorable man, I do my job, I take care of my family, I help people out; I'm trying to live life according to your standards.

Isn't that enough?

I have little doubt that the exchange, in the next many verses, between God and Moses is central to a dramatic change in the way Moses thought – to the very way Moses saw life.

What's the hard thing God is asking you to do?

What has he been urging on you lately?

God's "call" is on **our** lives as it was on Moses' life.

It is not likely to be as dramatic as the task set before Moses but it may be just as hard for us to imagine.

- Is it to serve in some way we don't think we're equipped for?
- Is to give in a way that may make life less comfortable?
- Is it to forgive, to be reconciled to someone who has treated us unjustly?

Not so incidentally, if the task is something you CAN do on your own, without God's help, it probably isn't of greatest value.

What's the "God thing" that He is calling you to?

Listen to some aspects of God's call on our lives:

Romans 12:1-2 "Therefore, I urge you, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God

John 15:16-17 "I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-- fruit that will last... This is my command: Love each other.

Matthew 28:19 "Go and make disciples of all nations..."

Hebrews 10:24-25 "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

Colossians 3:23 "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord..."

Ephesians 4:1-2 "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

We can't just dismiss those words.

They are God's call on our lives.

The particular applications of those words to your life today, I don't know, but you do – God has been speaking to you.

Is it too big, too hard, to unlike what you are comfortable with?

Then you are right where Moses was.

Exodus 3:11 "But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

- "I have no business doing this; this is a job for the almighty."
- "Without being impertinent, you've got to be kidding!"
- "You expect me to walk up to the leader of the strongest nation on earth and tell him that I'm going to lead 2 million people, including his hundreds of thousands of slaves, out of the country."

Do you remember that I'm a wanted man?

If I go back I'm dead.

What I love is that God doesn't draw back in anger at Moses' questions; he engages Moses.

God doesn't overwhelm him; he doesn't use a "power play."

He enters into a dialog with Moses to draw him in rather than bully him.

God encourages the conversation as bit-by-bit God reveals to Moses what Moses then can hear.

Exodus 3:12 "And God said, "**I will be with you.**

Moses asks, "Who am I?" God answers, "I am with you."

Moses, the point is **not who are you but who is with you!**

I've told the story too many times, but it is a good example to me.

Walking home from our one-room grade-school building in the country, we had to pass a woods, thick with underbrush.

Having angered some other boys in my school (how, I can't imagine!) they threatened to get me after school.

And sure enough as I passed that thick underbrush they attacked and beat me up.

But they were not satisfied and threatened to do the same the next day.

I, however, thwarted their plans when I asked my older, taller, and much stronger brother to walk home with me.

I can still remember walking past those woods with something of a smirk on my face.

Moses, it's really not a matter of who **you** are but **who** you are with.

God said he would be with Moses in all he undertakes.

It gave Moses possibilities he would not otherwise have dreamed.

We are assured of that same divine presence and provision.

What should that mean for you and me today or tomorrow?

Imagine the possibilities if God is truly with us.

But Moses wasn't satisfied.

Exodus 3:13 "Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

God, not only do I think I have no business doing this job, **everyone else** will think the same thing.

God, I know I have no authority, what authority do **you** have?

That question is not as impertinent as might think.

God had introduced himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

It's one thing to be the "god" of individual ancestors but are you "god" enough to take on the most powerful nation on earth?

So Moses asks, "What is your name?"

A name in ancient times was not just something you called someone, a name represented who they actually were – the name described their character and ability.

As some of you already know this brings us to the high point of the passage.

We will now hear from God one of the most important things about God that Moses or we could possibly know.

It is **this** about the person of God that makes everything else possible.

Exodus 3:14 "God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.' "

God uses the Hebrew root word meaning "to be."

It's a four letter word without vowels and is transliterated as Yahweh.

In most of our Bibles it is translated into English as LORD (all upper case letters) to distinguish it from the more generic word for god, the word "elohim."

God says I'll tell you who I am, I am the I AM.

- I am the God who has always existed and always will exist.

- I am the first cause of all other things that exist – they exist because I exist.
- I am the infinite, absolute, undetermined One.
- Everything else is caused, I am uncaused, I **simply “AM”**.
God gives himself a name that describes his essential character.

That same verb God uses to describe himself could be translated this way: “I will be who I am/I am who I will be. (Fretheim, 63)

He is the unchangeable God.

One scholar wrote, “God foresees all circumstances and has no weaknesses. Nothing in all creation takes him off guard and backs him into a corner where he might have to act out of character or compromise his integrity. He is who he is, and therefore, as James says, “With him there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17). He is the same yesterday, today and forever. His absolute name is the granite foundation of our confidence in his ongoing faithfulness.” (John Piper in a 1984 sermon on Exodus 3)

God says, “What authority do I have Moses? I AM!”

It’s a silly comparison, but I’ll try it:

Imagine you are touring the White House and the President shows up, singles you out and invites you to enter the east wing.

You demur saying you don’t have any authority to go in there.

Does the President have to do any more than look at you to communicate, “Do you not know who I am?”

So God says, “Moses, you are right, you have no authority but I do. Exodus 3:18 “The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The LORD (Jehovah, the I AM), the God of the Hebrews, has met with us.’”

But in spite of God’s revelation of himself, Moses still hesitates.

Exodus 4:1 "Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, `The LORD did not appear to you?'"
 God, they won't believe me. I have no authority to make those statements.

Moses, get your eyes off of yourself!

Don't you get it Moses, the great I AM is with you.

You are right, you don't have any authority, but you have borrowed authority; you have God's authority.

And God uses three signs to show Moses that **God** has the authority. He has Moses throw down his shepherd's staff and it turns into a snake.

Given the prominence of snakes in Egyptian culture even to the point of the symbol of a snake on the crowns of the Pharaohs, Moses would probably catch the significance.

The great "I AM" can set kings up and take them down.

Next God tells him to put his hand in his vest.

The hand becomes leprous.

He'd told to put the leprous hand back in his vest, which he does and when he withdraws it, it has returned to normal.

The great "I AM" can make sick and he can heal.

The third sign is not done at the moment but God promises that when Moses pours water on the ground in Egypt it will turn to blood.

In a few days, this will be the first of the plagues used to convince the Pharaoh to let the Israelites go.

The great "I AM" is above nature, he controls the natural and the supernatural.

"See Moses, you're not credible on your own, but I am and I make you credible."

But still Moses resists:

Exodus 4:10 "Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."

“God, **you** may be the eternally present “I AM” but I’m still the same old Moses.

“I’m not equipped to do this; I’m not adequate.

Peter Enns wrote, “Moses seems to resist God’s call because Moses assumes that he is playing the central role in the deliverance of the Israelites.” (Enns, 111)

Exodus 4:11 “The LORD said to him, “Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹² Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”

The Lord says, in essence, it may be true that you are not equipped, and it certainly is true that you are inadequate, but it’s not really relevant.

The great “I AM” is with you and will help you.

God doesn’t call only “perfect” people to service because effectiveness is not the result of perfection but the God who is with us.

Exodus 4:13 “But Moses said, “O Lord, please send someone else to do it.”

God has patiently answered every objection but now Moses crosses a line.

This is no longer honest questioning.

This is unbelief.

Exodus 4:15 “Then the LORD’s anger burned against Moses...”

We aren’t given information about what the Lord and Moses thought next.

But what we see is that the LORD accommodates Moses’ weakness and sends Moses’ brother Aaron to help him.

And we see that Moses must have finally understood that eventually it is not information you need it is decision.

It’s as if God said, “Moses, no more.

“You know who I am.

“Will you trust me?”

Moses begins the encounter with God by objecting to God's call on his life.

I think Moses, like many of us, wants to be left alone to enjoy the life he has built for himself.

And so he tries to put God off:

- He says he has no authority.
- He questions the authority, the capability of God.
- Moses says he has no credibility.
- He says he has no ability.
- Lastly he admits he is afraid, he's not certain he can trust God.

But God answers every objection and then puts the question squarely to Moses, "**Will** you trust me?"

The fundamental character trait of a man or woman of God is not competence but dependence – dependence on God.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 The Apostle Paul wrote, (the Lord) "said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (And Paul said,) "When I am weak, then I am strong."

What would it look like if you or I trusted God completely?

What ministry might you be willing to undertake if you had absolute confidence in God to make it effective?

What would you be willing to give financially to kingdom work if you had complete confidence in God's ability and willingness to take care of you and your family?

What will it take for us to believe him?

- Will it take a burning bush that talks?
- A stick that turns into a snake?

Is it more evidence we need?

Creation, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, God's providence in our own lives?

Do we really need more?

Or do we need to decide?

Isaiah 43:1-3 "But now, this is what the LORD says--
he who created you... he who formed you...
"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.
For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One...your Savior..."