

So how does God feel about our excuses? Well, *“then the LORD’s anger burned against Moses...”* I think we can understand why, right? God had created, blessed, and guided Moses to this point in his life, and yet Moses didn’t see it! There was just excuse after excuse. It was sin. So God was angry! But what did God do? He didn’t turn his back on Moses. He didn’t give up on him. God forgave him, and God still used Moses to serve him in amazing ways. That’s grace! God forgave him because Jesus didn’t make excuses. Jesus didn’t say, “Send someone else!” He served us with his whole life and death, to forgive us for every time we haven’t served him.

Later in our service, we’re going to sing the hymn, “Just As I Am without One Plea.” It was written by a woman who suffered from depression. At one difficult point in her life, someone reminded her that God loved her just as she was. Just like God loved Moses just as he was. Just like God loves you just as you are. That doesn’t mean that you are good enough just the way you are. You are a sinner. But God accepts you because of Jesus. You are perfect in his eyes, because you have been baptized and forgiven in Jesus’ blood. You are precious to God, just as you are! This is why it’s an honor to owe everything to Christ!

So who am I? That’s a question that will come up again and again in your life. When you ask, “Who am I?” you always have two choices: To focus on yourself or to focus on your God. Without God, Moses was a murderer, a lowly shepherd who was scared of talking. With God, Moses was a forgiven man, a powerful prophet, and a famous leader. This moment at the burning bush changed his life, because he realized what he had in God. When you focus on Jesus, you realize that for every sin in you, there is forgiveness in Christ. For every weakness in you, there is strength in Christ. This is who you are: You are God’s child, free and able to serve him!

I hope you realize all the opportunities you have to serve God. Just like he called Moses, God calls you. Just like he prepared Moses, God prepares you. Just like he forgave Moses for all of his excuses, he forgives you for yours. Because God knows that the best way for his church to grow and spread and change the world is when Christians—all Christians—live their lives for Christ. God lets you and me do his work! You don’t need to free God’s people from slavery in Egypt, but you could be a youth group leader or a Sunday school teacher or a coffee hour server or a snow shoveler or an offering counter or a choir member or a shut-in visitor or a church cleaner or a neighbor inviter or a faithful prayer. There’re a lot of us. What has God prepared you to do?

Moses learned that there is only one prerequisite for serving God: A full heart! Asking “Who am I?” is really the wrong question. As long as you focus on you, you will always be disappointed. You’ll find a lot of excuses. The right question is, “Who is God?” He is “I AM.” He is love. He is power. He is forgiveness. He is yours. And you are his. Here’s what happened when Moses realized that: He went from being a fearful, excuse-filled shepherd to a powerful leader. Not because of him. Because of God. Because he let God’s forgiveness cover his sin. He let God’s strength cover his weakness. He had the one thing necessary for serving God: A full heart. Just like yours.

Exodus 3:1-4:17
Pastor Nathan Nass

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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....⁷ The LORD said, “...¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.” ¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” 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.” 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?” 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.’” ... Moses answered, “What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you?’” ... 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.” 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.” 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.” ¹³ But Moses said, “O Lord, please send someone else to do it.” ¹⁴ Then the LORD’s anger burned against Moses and he said, “What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? ... 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.”

“Who Am I?”

Last fall, we had some surveys and meetings to assess our congregation. We got some great feedback, and there was one thing that you said again and again. Can you remember what it was? Member involvement. We want as many people as possible involved in serving our Savior. That’s great! And that’s especially true now that we will go a number of months without an additional pastor. It wouldn’t be good if we expected our pastors to do the ministry of our church, because then now we’ll only get half done! But the truth is that when the Rauh family left, our staff didn’t go from 2 to 1 or from 3 to 2. It went from 736 to 731. There’s unlimited potential for what we can do together. I’m glad you see that!

But there’s a question that gets in the way of using our talents to serve Jesus: “Who am I?” Does that ever cross your mind? Maybe you put it a little different way in your head.

“What can I do? What do I know? What am I good at?” Sound familiar? “I can’t do what she does. I’m not good at it. Somebody else can do it! Who am I? I’m not the pastor!” If that ever crosses your mind, you’re not the first person to think that. Moses did too.

You’ve all heard about Moses, right? Moses was one of the most important people in the history of the world. It was Moses who went to Pharaoh—as the Israelites were slaves in Egypt—and demanded, “Let my people go!” When Pharaoh refused, it was Moses whom God used to carry out the ten plagues. Remember? Water into blood, frogs, gnats, flies, sickness, hail, locusts, darkness, death. When they finally left Egypt, it was Moses who split the Red Sea. It was Moses who received the 10 Commandments on Mount Sinai. The Bible even says, “*The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.*” Wow! Who am I? I’m not Moses!

We’ll see about that. Today we see Moses before he became famous. Moses grew up in Pharaoh’s palace in Egypt, but then when he was 40, he had to leave Egypt and flee for his life. For 40 years, he lived as a shepherd in the desert. One day, as he was watching his sheep, he saw a bush that was on fire but didn’t burn up—the “burning bush.” God himself was there and began talking to Moses. He told Moses, “*Go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.*” Can you imagine if God personally commanded you to do something? What would you do? I hope I’d do it! “Yes, Lord. Here I go!”

Except, that’s not what Moses did. He was a lot more like us than we might think. You’re going to need to have your fingers ready this morning to count something—excuses! He said, “*Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?*” He asked the same question that you and I often ask when asked to serve in some way. “Lead the Israelites out of Egypt? Who am I?” He was a shepherd. Now he was supposed to lead God’s people? Who am I? It’s easy to feel unequipped for the situations God places in our lives. We feel like there’s got to be some mistake. You want me? Who am I?

Here was God’s answer. It’s beautiful! “*I will be with you....It is I who have sent you.*” God’s answer wasn’t: “You are so great, Moses! You can do it!” God’s answer didn’t have anything to do with Moses. The answer had everything to do with God: “*I will be with you!*” Moses was thinking about himself and his weaknesses. God wanted to focus him on something else. It’s not about who you are. It’s about who God is. God himself was always with Moses. God was sending him. So Moses jumped up and said, “Let’s go!”

Not quite. Ready to keep counting? Here’s excuse #2: “*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?’*” That’s really not a bad question. First, Moses had asked, “Who am I?” Now he asks, “And who are you?” He gave God the chance to explain exactly who he is.

And God’s answer is one of the most important statements in the Bible. He said, “*‘I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’*” At first, that sounds like a strange name for God, right? “*I AM.*” But what’s God like? He is. He is all-powerful. He is changeless. He is loving. He is. God’s constancy gives us confidence. We wa-

ver and falter. Other people hem and haw. God is always the same. He is, always! Isn’t that good to know? Moses must have thought, “Wow! With you, I can do anything. Let’s go!”

Nope. He had another excuse. If you were God, at what point would you have gotten mad? It’s good God is not at all like you and me! Are you still counting? Here’s excuse #3: “*What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you?’*” Did you catch how his question started? “*What if...?*” Isn’t this exactly what happens when we really don’t want to do something we know that God—or someone else—wants us to do? To get out of it, we try to think up a “What if...” “What if they don’t believe me?”

God’s answer was simple. “I got your back!” He gave Moses some of his power. Moses threw his staff on the ground, and it became a snake. He put his hand inside his cloak, and it was covered with leprosy. God had his back. The truth was, Moses wasn’t going to get the people out of Egypt, God was! Maybe even we ask today: “How can I do it all?” Who are you focusing on when you ask that? You! You can’t do it all. God does it all! God said, “I—the all-powerful, changeless, one true God—am going to be with you, and I will give you everything you need to carry out your work...” Great! What more could we need?

Moses needed more. Here’s excuse #4: “*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.*” I bet Moses thought he was being humble. “I can’t do it, God, because I’m not a good speaker.” But it’s not humble to deny God’s blessings to you. Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself. Humility is thinking of yourself less. Do you see the difference? The problem was that Moses was thinking of himself more. Note the back and forth. Moses points to himself and makes an excuse. God points to himself and makes a promise. Moses points to himself and makes an excuse. God points to himself and makes a promise. What’s the solution? “Moses, look to God! Stop thinking about yourself. Look to God!”

So that’s what God does—points Moses back to himself: “*Who gave man his mouth?... Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.*” It was really an insult to God for Moses to say that he wasn’t talented enough to serve him. God had made him. God had prepared him. Remember how God had saved Moses and let him grow up in the palace of Pharaoh with the best education in the world? Whether he realized it or not, he was ready. So how has God uniquely prepared you in your life? What could God use you to do? He gave you your mouth and hands and brain... God equips each of us to serve him. He wants to use you!

So...Moses made one more excuse. How many are we up too? It’s excuse #5: “*O Lord, please send someone else to do it.*” Finally the truth came out. When it came right down to it, all of Moses’ excuses were just a cover for the fact that he didn’t want to do it at all! If we’re honest with ourselves, how often isn’t this the root of the excuses we make? “I’m too busy. I’m too tired. It’s too hot.” Really? “I don’t want to. Send someone else to do it!” It just sounds worse to say it that way, right? Here’s the real problem: When we focus on ourselves, we get discouraged by our weaknesses and make excuses for the fact that we often don’t want to serve God!