

Strengthening the Soul Your Faith

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Exodus 3.1-12

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week in our series Strengthening the Soul of Your Faith, we are engaging God's call on Moses' life – and thinking about His call on our lives.

II. Connect with Each Other

Think of a memorable or life changing phone call, text message, or e-mail you received. Describe what made it so transformative in your life.

III. Study the Text

- a. Recalling the terrible oppression of the Israelites in Egypt detailed in Exodus 1, read Exodus 2.11-14 and 15-17. These early scenes in Moses' life tell us a lot about his character. List some positive and negative attributes of Moses' character in the space below:

Positive

Negative

- b. Reread last week's text, Exodus 3.1-4, then continue on through verse 5.

Why do you think God instructs Moses to not come any closer? Why do you think God instructs Moses to take off his sandals? What does this tell us about Moses – and about God?

- c. Terence Fretheim writes of verse 5, "The ground is now holy because of God's appearance, not because it was already holy. There is no holiness inherent in the place as such, no natural sanctity, but that which was not holy is now so by virtue of the divine purpose for the place (not just the divine presence). That which is a part of the natural order is sanctified, set apart for special use by God."

What do you think of this perspective? Is the ground "now holy" because of God's appearance – or is all of Creation holy because God is always present?

Why does God sanctify special places?

- d. Reread verse 5 and continue on through verse 6.

Moses did not seem worried about approaching the burning bush in verse 5. Indeed, God told him to not come any closer! And yet, at the end of verse 6 we read, "At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God."

What is the "at this" that changed Moses' perspective? Would this change your perspective, too? Why – or why not?

- e. Read Exodus 2.7-9. As we discussed a couple weeks ago, God sees, hears, becomes concerned, and comes down to rescue His people in the same way that Pharaoh's daughter saw, heard, became concerned, and came down to rescue Moses.

Imagine you are Moses for a moment: Would you immediately connect God's seeing, hearing, caring, and gracious condescension with your own rescue as a child? Why – or why not?

- f. Pretend – for a moment – you don't know the story, and read Exodus 2.10. Does this verse surprise you? Why or why not?

In his book *Jesus Wants to Save Christians*, Rob Bell writes, "God needs a body. God needs flesh and blood. God needs bones and skin so that Pharaoh will know just who this God is he's dealing with and how this God acts in the world. And not just so Pharaoh will know but so that all of humanity will know.

This is the God who liberates from oppression."

What do you think? Does God *need* a body? Does God *need* flesh and blood? Or could God take care of it on His own if he wanted to?

- g. Read Exodus 3.11-12.

John Goldingay writes, "As Moses listened to God I like to imagine him asking himself, 'This is great, but why is God telling me all this? Where's it leading?' I wonder whether he guessed the answer before God got to the outrageous point."

What do you think? Does it seem like Moses saw this coming? Why or why not?

- h. Moses is somewhat famous for his reluctance to respond affirmatively to God's call on his life (you can read more of his protests in chapter 4 – especially verses 1, 10, and 13). Of course, he wasn't the only one in Scripture to do so: Remember Jonah, who was swallowed into the belly of a fish before doing what God called him to do? Or Jeremiah, whose young age caused him to neglect God's prophetic call on his life, though it became like a fire shut up in his bones?

Ruth Haley Barton writes, "Moses tried his best to argue his way out of his calling, and interestingly enough, most of his questions and objections had to do with identity issues and the lack of a sense of self that continued to plague him: Who am I? Who are you? What if they won't listen to me or believe me? What if I'm not good enough? What will I say?"

Recall Moses' journey through life thus far. Where do you think he lost the confidence and passion of his youth? Is this loss a good thing or a bad thing? Or, somehow, both!? Explain!

- i. In his poem *Ask Me*, William Stafford writes,

Some time when the river is ice ask me
mistakes I have made. Ask me whether
what I have done is my life.

It's strange question, in a way: "Ask me whether what I have done is my life." It gets at the heart of calling – whether the author has been true to God's call on his life.

How is God's calling of Moses calling Moses to be more of himself? In other words, how is God's call on Moses' life fulfilling what God has called Him to be and do?

Think back to the two passages in Exodus 2 that we discussed at the outset of this study. If, indeed, God is calling Moses to be who he was created to be, why does Moses refuse!?

- j. Ruth Haley Barton writes, "Our transformation is never for ourselves alone. It is always for the sake of others."

How do you think Moses has been transformed? How could it be used for the sake of others?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Think back through your life. What "scenes" come to mind that illustrate the things you care deeply about?
- b. How do you "take off your shoes and cover your face" in light of God's holiness?
- c. How has God seen, heard, cared for, and come down to rescue you?
- d. In what ways have you heard God's call on your life? How have you responded? Why do you think you responded the way you did?
- e. Is "what you have done your life"? Why – or why not?
- f. John Goldinday writes, "God's leaders often need to be drafted. In politics, you have to run for election by the people. Moses runs from election by God. Being governed by people who want to exercise power is worrying. The person who leads has to be dragged into a position of leadership: It is a suggestive idea. There are few volunteers among the leaders of Israel or the leaders of the early church."

How does this "suggestive idea" shape your understanding of God's call on your life – that we may need to be *dragged* into service?

V. Pray

- a. Lift up Good Shepherd, and the other churches that are seeking dismissal from the PC(USA), that the conclusion of this process would be gracious, peaceful, and God-honoring,
- b. Ask God to call you into areas where you can be faithful to how He has created you,
- c. Pray that the Holy Spirit would direct willing servants to teach our little ones on Sunday morning.