

A black and white photograph of a person from behind, wearing a backpack and looking out over a vast, hazy landscape. The person's hair is short and dark. The background is a soft-focus view of a valley or plain under a bright sky.

SESSION 2

OBJECTIONS OVERRULED

The Point

God will work through us despite our shortcomings.

The Passage

Exodus 3:11-12; 4:10-17

The Bible Meets Life

We don't have to look far to find someone who can do something better than we can. Because our culture puts a lot of value on talents and skills, we can be tempted to make comparisons and think we are not as important or significant. God doesn't judge by such standards. He doesn't need whatever we consider our assets nor is He concerned about whatever we consider our limitations; He just wants us. Our weaknesses do not override what God can—and will—do through us to accomplish His purposes.

The Setting

Fleeing the Pharaoh of Egypt after murdering an Egyptian for abusing a Hebrew slave, Moses had settled in the land of Midian (Exodus 2:11-22). While tending his father-in-law Jethro's sheep in the wilderness, most likely in the Sinai Peninsula, Moses encountered God at Mount Horeb (3:1-6). The Lord informed Moses He was going to send him before Pharaoh and use him to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (vv. 7-10).

What does the Bible say?

This mountain (3:12)—This refers to Horeb, “the mountain of God” (Exodus 3:1; also known as Sinai), the mountain on which God met with the Israelites through Moses.

My mouth and my tongue are sluggish (4:10)—Moses protested that his inability to speak well disqualified him as a candidate for the mission to which God was calling him.

The Levite (4:14)—The Levites were the descendants of Levi, the third son of Jacob and Leah.

Exodus 3:11-12; 4:10-17 (CSB)

^{3:11} **But Moses asked God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”**

¹² **He answered, “I will certainly be with you, and this will be the sign to you that I am the one who sent you: when you bring the people out of Egypt, you will all worship God at this mountain.”**

^{4:10} **But Moses replied to the LORD, “Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent—either in the past or recently or since you have been speaking to your servant—because my mouth and my tongue are sluggish.”**

¹¹ **The LORD said to him, “Who placed a mouth on humans? Who makes a person mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹² Now go! I will help you speak and I will teach you what to say.”**

¹³ **Moses said, “Please, Lord, send someone else.”**

¹⁴ **Then the LORD’s anger burned against Moses, and he said, “Isn’t Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, he is on his way now to meet you. He will rejoice when he sees you.**

¹⁵ **You will speak with him and tell him what to say. I will help both you and him to speak and will teach you both what to do.**

¹⁶ **He will speak to the people for you. He will serve as a mouth for you, and you will serve as God to him.**

¹⁷ **And take this staff in your hand that you will perform the signs with.”**

Exodus 3:11-12 Commentary

God is with you. Verse 11: The Hebrews (Israelites) had been enslaved in Egypt for 400 years (Genesis 15:13; Acts 7:6). Though he was born a Hebrew, Moses was raised in the Pharaoh's palace in Egypt as the son of Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2:1-10). About 40 years later, after killing an Egyptian who was mistreating a Hebrew slave (Exodus 2:11-15; Acts 7:23-29), Moses fled to the land of Midian. There Moses met a priest named Jethro and eventually married one of the priest's daughters. Moses then settled in to the life of a shepherd, taking care of Jethro's flock for about 40 years (Exodus 2:15-22; Acts 7:29-30).

While shepherding the flocks in the wilderness (Exodus 3:1), Moses encountered God through a burning bush at Mount Horeb (v. 2). God introduced Himself as the God of Moses' ancestors (v. 6). God noted He was aware of the suffering of the Israelites, His people (v. 7). God informed Moses that He had a plan to deliver the Israelites from bondage (v. 8). God then commissioned Moses to go back to Egypt to free the Israelites (v. 10).

Moses, however, didn't seem convinced this was a good plan—at least not his involvement in it. Most likely he had no desire to return to the place where there was a possibility he could be brought to justice and put to death. So Moses protested God's call: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" This could have been a simple expression of his humility (Numbers 12:3) or could have reflected a poor self-identity.

Verse 12: For this objection and every other objection Moses would raise, God had a response. He immediately promised, "I will certainly be with you." The presence of God would guarantee the success of the mission. Based on Moses' next question (Exodus 3:13), however, it may have been that Moses wasn't quite certain about this promise from God—or about God Himself. Moses may have known about God from his ancestors, although after 400 years of slavery the Israelites may have wondered if God really cared for them or if He even existed. It seems Moses did not know God very well. Moses could not see or touch this God—he only heard a voice from a bush that was on fire but was not burning up.

Even so, God made another promise to Moses. It would be a sign to confirm both God's call to Moses and the success of his mission. This sign would be given one day in the future, after Moses had brought the people of Israel out of Egypt. God promised that Moses would return again to that very place. But he would not be alone. Both Moses and the Israelites would return to the mountain of Horeb (or Sinai) and worship God there. All the people of God would gather in that place to praise Him for His deliverance.

Exodus 4:10-12 Commentary

God created you just as you are. Verse 10: Moses went through more question and answer sessions about God's identity and what Moses was to tell the Israelites about God, what the Israelites would experience as they left Egypt, and how Moses would respond to any objections from the Israelites (Exodus 3:13–4:9).

God's responses, however, still didn't seem to be enough for Moses. The reluctant shepherd had another objection. Part of Moses' mission was to meet with the Hebrew elders as well as the Egyptian king and speak God's words to them. Moses had a great concern about this aspect of the task. He protested, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent." Bible scholars have long debated the meaning of this objection. Did Moses have a physical speech impediment, some emotional issue, was there a language barrier, or was this simply another expression of his humility?

Moses referred to his whole life (the past and recently) as he downplayed his speaking ability. He noted that not even his current encounter with the Lord (when God had been speaking to him through the burning bush) had changed the reality that "my mouth and my tongue are sluggish." These words, along with God's response, seem to validate the physical or emotional aspect of Moses' objection.

Verse 11: Despite the continued objections Moses raised, God did not take offense. God did, however, remind Moses of an important fact: He is the Creator. God "placed a mouth on humans." It is God who gave human beings the ability to speak, to express themselves through verbal communication. He is the one who also makes people "mute or deaf, seeing or blind." God created Moses and knew all about him. Neither his strengths nor his weaknesses were the primary issue in fulfilling the calling God had given him. [Note: This is not the place to delve into questions about whether God intentionally causes people to have disabilities. Leaders should be sensitive to those dealing with issues regarding the question of human suffering. The question of "Why did God allow this to happen to me . . . or to the one I love?" is one which every believer wrestles with and ultimately only God alone can answer.]

Verse 12: God wrapped up the conversation when He commanded Moses, "Now go!" Essentially God was saying, "I've heard enough of the objections and protests. Be on your way." Even so, God added another promise to the commission: "I will help you speak and I will teach you what to say." Our weaknesses do not override what God can—and will—do through us to accomplish His purposes.

Exodus 4:13-17 Commentary

God equips you with all you need. Verses 13-14: Moses said to God, “Please, Lord, send someone else.” Moses effectively but respectfully refused God’s call and rejected His will. At this admission of his unwillingness to heed God’s call, “the LORD’s anger burned against Moses.” The Hebrew word for anger in this verse is used in the Old Testament to describe the anger both of God and humans. When applied to God, anger is never unpredictable or unjustified. Rather, it is always directed toward sin and evil, which are absolutely opposed to His will. In this case God’s anger was raised because Moses would not trust Him. Yet in His anger, God showed grace to the stubborn shepherd. God’s grace, however, didn’t relieve Moses of the responsibility to carry out the mission.

The Lord reminded Moses of his older brother, whom he probably had not seen in 40 years or more. While we know from Moses’ birth narrative that Moses had an older sister (Exodus 2:4), this is the first time Scripture mentions Aaron, whom we later learn was three years older than Moses (7:7). Like Moses (2:1), Aaron was a Levite, which refers to a descendant of Levi (Jacob’s third son, Genesis 29:34). While Moses might not have known Aaron very well, God knew all about him. God noted that Aaron could speak well. God also revealed that Aaron was en route to meet Moses.

Verse 15: God went on to reveal what would happen in the future. As God’s prophet, Moses would first hear the word from the Lord. Afterward Moses would speak with Aaron and “tell him what to say,” and then Aaron would do the talking. God promised to help both of them to speak and teach them what to do as they gave leadership to God’s mission to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

Verse 16: God reiterated the relationship between Moses and Aaron. Moses had earlier questioned whether the elders of the Israelites would believe God’s message as Moses related it to them. Now that would be a moot point because Aaron would “speak to the people” and relay God’s message as received by Moses. Aaron would serve as Moses’ mouth. The Lord then noted that Moses would serve as God to Aaron, telling his brother what to say and do.

Verse 17: One of Moses’ earlier questions about God’s call related to what he would do if the Israelites didn’t believe him (Exodus. 4:1). God told Moses to throw his staff on the ground. When he did it became a snake and Moses ran away from it. Then God instructed him to grab the snake by the tail and when he did so, it became a staff again. God noted that Moses could later use the staff in a similar manner to confirm to the people that God indeed had sent him (vv. 2-5). Here, God told Moses to be sure to take his staff on the mission for he would use it to perform the signs God promised—miracles that would convince the Israelites of his authority from God.

