

Explore the Bible: Reluctance

August 14, 2017

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Sept. 3 focuses on Exodus 3:4-14; 4:13-16.*

It is fair to say most people do not desire to live aimless lives but are, by nature, easily capable of doing so. In the context of the American Dream, we are told we are capable of achieving more than the previous generation, accompanied with dramatic stories of how others have done so. Sadly, a majority of people, both “successful” and not, live their years without a clear purpose. This is the sad reality that brings us to this necessary lesson: *God calls and empowers people to serve him and his purposes.*

The Approach

Looking at the biblical text, we are reintroduced to an older Moses. The man who grew up in Pharaoh’s household was spending his years wandering the desert as a subservient shepherd. For starters, perhaps we should ask our classes this question: *Like Moses, how have you gone from great potential to a life of purposelessness?* We need to share together not only the captured emotions of such a downward trend, but even more our desperate need for a true and God-given purpose.

When we admit we are aimless, we need to be looking—searching—for God’s divine interruption, such as a burning bush. Even more, just as Moses said, “Here I am” (3:4b), we should be ready to answer God’s divine interruption with what Jewish scholar Nahum M. Sarna calls an “unhesitating response to a call.” (Sarna, *Exodus*, 14).

Once God has our attention, he then speaks his purpose for our lives. You will know it is God giving you his purpose, because it is always God-sized and bigger than human imagination. To explore this, ask your class to *share*

one life example of how God got their attention and gave them a God-sized purpose.

Until we make this more personal, we will see this as only as the story of a Bible character we view as superhuman, when in reality, Moses was as human as we are. Consider Matthew Barnett's story, where he started out with his self-promoted purpose "to build God a great church" in Los Angeles, until God said to him in Echo Park in the middle of the night, "If you reach the people that nobody wants, I'll send you the people that everybody wants. ... Build people" (Barnett, *The Cause Within You*, 10-13). Today, Barnett continues to lead The Dream Center, which has dramatically affected the poverty landscape in Los Angeles, and he also pastors an active, growing and externally focused church.

The Assignment

The assignment God gives each of us will always overwhelm us, because God is speaking from his perspective, not our minimized view. God heard the voices of his oppressed children as they lived aimless lives in slavery—something God never desires for his children—and his big plan was for Moses to have a purpose so that his children would once again gain a purpose for life. After describing the scenario (3:7-9), God plainly says: "So now, go. I am sending you..." (3:10a). This is a pivotal moment for the budding nation of Israel, and it also happens to be the first time that the "messenger prophet" role would be established in Scripture (Sarna, *Exodus*, 16).

Here is where we easily find ourselves in Moses's story: Once God has our attention and shares his purpose, we easily slip back into the well-worn garments of aimlessness. Let us be honest and ask each other: *How have I been guilty of wanting to be comfortable instead of purposeful?*

The Appellation

The next section actually extends nearly a chapter long, with Moses doing what we humans do best: Make excuses. Even God's patience can be tested to the extreme. Notice how after God answered Moses's questions with full answers and miraculous signs, Moses went too far by simply asking God to send someone else: "Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses" (4:14a). While God may deal with our mortal minds in patience and kindness, when we question his purpose for us, he will respond in such a way that we realize we have overstepped our bounds.

This is the sequence we see in this story: It is God who calls us, it is he who gives us purpose, and by his holy name we will fulfill his purpose. Even in God's anger, he gave Moses all that was needed, including the help of Aaron, who was by no coincidence already en route to meet Moses (4:14b).

The Assessment

We come to the assessment thus far with God's *why* and *what*, which he meets with *how*. It is important to remember that our purpose and fulfilling of our purpose completely hinges on God's will. We respond in obedience and leave the details to his divine plan. As Proverbs 19:21 reminds us, "Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." This is made true in our story as Moses at last surrenders to God's purpose, seeing that God's plan is better than his aimless life.

This story now touches us as we must ask: *Will I choose God's plan over my aimless life?* Be clear in stressing that God has a plan and purpose for each of us, and God will not yield his way to aimlessness. It is now our choice to decide whether or not we will trade our aimless ways for God's purpose.

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