

Series: SO YOU WANNA GO BACK TO EGYPT – May 16, 2010

**GOD MAKES A LEADER FOR HIS MISSION
Exodus 1-4**

1. When historians make lists of the very best Presidents that the US has ever had, there's one name what is always at the top or near the top. And that's Abraham Lincoln.

-What's interesting is how many times he failed before he ever got there. He lost jobs, was defeated at least 7 times in trying for public office, had a nervous breakdown, failed in business. Two years before he was elected President, he was defeated in an attempt to be elected for the US Senate. He could've said, "This is it! I'm just a failure!" My guess is that it was his **failures** that gave him the guts to lead during **the most brutal time** in US history.

-Has anyone here, like me, ever failed at something you've done? How many of you would say, "Yeah, it was no big deal. Didn't hurt at all!" Failure **hurts!** And sometimes it stops us dead. The problem is--failure is part of life. Everyone's life. -Here's my theory. It's not that God sometimes uses people who have failed. No. My sense is that I'm not sure God can use anyone who **hasn't** failed—and pressed through their failure into the power of God. And that brings up the story of Moses.

2. When Moses shows up, it seems as if the Mission of God—to bless the descendants of Abraham, to make them a great nation, and to bless all peoples through them is permanently stuck. Joseph becomes Prime Minister of Egypt—and moves his whole family to live there. They multiply—only to find themselves, 400 years later, treated with contempt and enslaved building cities and shines to dead Pharaohs.

-If you were looking at the whole picture from an outside perspective, the scenario appears hopeless—until Pharaoh's daughter adopts a Hebrew baby named Moses. Then Moses gets educated and trained for the throne. And you think, "Wow—this is brilliant! It's like a rerun on the Joseph story where, through a strange set of circumstances, an **outsider** becomes an **insider**. And, as an insider, he's in a position to make things right—and free the people! That's so cool!"

-You get the feeling that Moses had those same thoughts:

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. (Exodus 2:11-12 TNIV)

- a. Moses was about 40 years old, at the peak of his life, well-educated, and a deep knowledge of the government of Egypt. With his alleged military experience—he knew the weaknesses of Egypt.

-And best of all, he was angry. **Passionate!** He could see the injustice; because of the Hebrew blood running through his veins—he could **feel** the pain

of his people who were being brutalized simply as a source of cheap, expendable labor.

- b. I'm sure Moses thought of himself as being **the** person to deliver the Israelites from slavery—even though God had not officially asked him to. An early martyr, Stephen, said:

Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?'

"But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

(Acts 7:25-28 TNIV)

3. So, Moses is banished, loses **everything**, and ends up on the backside of the desert. It's there he meets a man named Jethro—called the **priest of Midian**—marries one of his daughters—Zipporah—founder of **Zippo** lighters—and settles down for a life in obscurity—chasing sheep that don't even belong to him. The fast life of Pharaoh's palace slows—right—down. And it would appear that all the leadership skills and military skills—and the intense training he would've gone through is a total waste. **Sheep** don't care that you have your MBA in political administration and were voted **Most Likely To Succeed**.

-Some writers speculate that Moses spent 40 years on the backside of the desert developing a wonderful relationship with the Lord. I'm not quite that optimistic. First, there's not a word about that in actual text—there's just a 40 year period with no footnotes...**nothing**—and Moses **wrote** it. Secondly, when God does show up—using a burning bush to get his attention, Moses doesn't seem to know quite what to make of it. And when he's told that he's in the presence of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—Moses hides his face in fear. Then God speaks:

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. 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. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." (Exodus 3:7-10 TNIV)

-Just as a side note, know what I find interesting here? God notes that He has seen the suffering of **His People**—so, they **do** belong to Him. He's heard them crying out. He says, **So I have come down to rescue them...**and then ends by saying, **So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.**

-And this is not unusual. When God intervenes, He inevitably uses a frail—sometimes bumbling, or grumpy, or reluctant human to do it! Why? I mean, He **could** do it by Himself, couldn't He? Yep! But He chooses to use **us!**

- a. Well, God is now asking Moses to do what he **tried...and failed** to do 40 years earlier. And Moses said, "Oh **man! This is so cool! I've been waiting 40 years for this moment!**" Well, actually, he says:

"...Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11 TNIV)

-In a sentence, we see what's happened to Moses in the previous 40 years. In those few words, we hear, "God—if you'd have commissioned me—or at least **been** with me 40 years ago—it would be different. But now? **It's too late!** I can't even **remember** my education and training. I'm an 80 year old red-neck—a washed-up deliverer wanna-be—who spends his days watching a bunch of stupid sheep. Frankly, I like the slow life—and to be **totally** honest, I've lost my nerve."

-Well, God is **on mission**—He knows **who** He wants--and He's **relentless!** Unfortunately, Moses does **not** intend to fail again—and is almost as reluctant as God is relentless. It's interesting, isn't it—when Moses says, "Who am I?"—it sounds so...so **humble!**" But God apparently isn't impressed—because it's not **about** Moses! Specifically:

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." (Exodus 3:12 TNIV)

-God is saying, "Of **course** you can't do it! You've already proven that. This is something **I** have to do—and **will** do. But you'll have to trust **Me**—not yourself.

- b. But Moses isn't buying it. Like us—he manufactures more excuses. This time, it's about the fact that he doesn't know enough.

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?" (Exodus 3:13 TNIV)

-Now, this sounds innocent enough, doesn't it? But Moses is likely asking for a kind of secret magic name—where, like saying, **Abracadbra!**—things magically happen. What God does is reveal to Moses who He is—at the core. **I AM THAT I AM!** I exist. Always have; always will. It's that simple!

- c. Then...another excuse.

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

-In Moses mind, he failed before because the people didn't believe him. So God, to help Moses, gives him three signs; a staff that turns to a snake—and back to a staff; a hand that becomes diseased when he puts it in his coat—then whole again; and, finally, Nile water that turns to blood when he pours it out on the ground. God assures him—“**They WILL believe you!** But **Pharaoh won't**—which is part of my plan to completely humble him and break him!”

d. But Moses had another excuse.

But Moses pleaded with the Lord, “O Lord, I’m not very good with words. I never have been, and I’m not now, even though you have spoken to me. I get tongue-tied, and my words get tangled.” Then the Lord asked Moses, “Who makes a person’s mouth? Who decides whether people speak or do not speak, hear or do not hear, see or do not see? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go! I will be with you as you speak, and I will instruct you in what to say.” (Exodus 4:10-12 NLT)

e. Moses has finally run out of excuses—and has to tell the truth.

But Moses again pleaded, “Lord, please! Send anyone else.” Then the Lord became angry with Moses. (Exodus 4:13 NLT)

-Do you see what the issue really was? All these excuses and issues and potential problems were just masks. **Moses didn't want this job!** He had failed before, his training was outdated, he was old and tired, and he'd lost his nerve—and probably his passion. And it was only when God offered his brother Aaron to him as a traveling companion and spokes-person—that he obeyed.

-Man, Moses was a tough sell, wasn't he? And I wouldn't have been any better. This, friends, was a **scary, tough** mission. To confront the most powerful man in the world—who'd already tried to kill you twice—and tell him to let his entire work force go? That is **scary** stuff!

-Think of it. One of the most famous men in all of history—someone who stands tall in three major world religions—someone whose influence is **still** felt around the world—almost... **almost** turned down the opportunity to do something no one has **ever** matched! The Exodus. The reference point for an entire nation for 3500 years! But this God he knew and served was on a **mission!**

-And His mission was bigger than just getting a few million people out of slavery. He was creating a **nation**. He was creating a **people**. **Why?** For God's mission—of blessing all the peoples on this planet—and rescuing all that has been lost through rebellion. To bless what has been cursed. To create a context for Jesus, the Messiah. To forgive sin; to right wrongs—to make ultimately make all of earth—**His** once again. And that is **still** God's mission.

-Here's the deal friends—and this is at the very core of everything I want to say this morning. God cares about the suffering, the mess, the oppression, the

brokenness—the **slavery to sin and curse** that our world is stuck in. And He is still calling people like you and me to engage; to set people free; to do what seems impossible. And **sometimes** I would **rather** make excuses than obey. Can anyone relate?

4. Let's talk about leadership for a minute. Leadership, from the outside, sometimes looks glamorous. People who are naïve think, "Wow, *I* want to have people follow me like they did Moses! *I* want to be great—to be remembered as someone who made a difference in history! *I* want to stand at the front of the crowd, and be able to give the orders—and create a great future! *I* want to have the power leaders have, have people know my name, write my history, have people report to me...!"

-That stuff, friends, is about 1% of leadership. The other 99% involves hard work, intense criticism, agonizing over tough decisions, taking responsibility for when things go wrong—and evenly distributing the praise when things go right. And, at some point, it usually means getting fired or voted off the island when you don't meet people's expectations. Or shot. I want you to think about what **leadership** meant for Moses:

*On his way back to Egypt, God almost took his life because he hadn't circumcised his son. **Why?** Because God had called him, as a leader, to **model** obedience.

*When he had to face down Pharaoh, he was caught between an arrogant, stubborn leader who would rather take down his entire country than give in to Moses' demands. And on the other side, Moses had an entire nation of slaves—people he was supposedly representing—who were furious with him because things got harder. People who took out all their anger and frustration over their oppression on...**guess who?**

*Leading them out of Egypt meant getting trapped between the mountains, the sea, and Pharaoh's army with only a **big stick** in his hand and 2 or 3 million helpless people cursing him and wailing about wanting to go back.

*Remember how God gave Aaron, Moses' brother, as his mouthpiece—the person who would speak for him? Well, Aaron—when he had the chance to lead as he'd always wanted—allowed the people to lapse into pagan revelry and even made them an idol—while Moses was on the Mountain getting the 10 Commandments. He and Miriam criticized Moses' wife—and eventually rebelled against his leadership until God stopped them in their tracks!

*And the people? Oh my goodness! They whined and complained and rebelled—pretty much about everything; about the food God gave, about the lack of water, about going into the promised land, about **not** going into the promised land. An entire division of Moses' relatives rebelled against his and Aaron's leadership—until, in a final showdown, God opened up the earth and swallowed the whole gang and all their stuff alive.

*On one occasion they **so** provoked and angered Moses by their complaining and grumbling and whining—this time over water—that Moses lost it. See, Moses had anger issues. God had told him to speak to the rock—and in a fit of rage—with a little

arrogance mixed on—Moses hit the rock with his staff and—probably to claim a little credit instead of giving glory to God—said, “Must I bring water for you from this rock!!!???” And in that one act of disobedience, lost his chance to enter the Promised land. He spent **40 years in the wilderness leading a bunch of griping, critical, rebellious people and never got to actually take them where he had been called to lead them!** There were times, friends, when **everyone** was against Moses—even his wife!

*Moses finest moment, ironically, was when God tested him. God told him that He was fed up with the whole lot of them—done...finished...angry—and that he was going to destroy them—and make a nation out of **Moses**. And Moses laid himself on the line, interceded, became a Mediator between the people and God--and said, “If you’re going to kill them, then send me to hell!” That was Moses’ finest hour—because that’s when **self** became totally irrelevant.

*Jesus said when it comes to leadership—that in **God’s** system, being the leader doesn’t mean being a big shot, giving orders and having everyone admire you and think you’re wonderful, wise, insightful and spiritual. Leadership means becoming a servant. Ironically, Jesus said, that **true** greatness means being a **slave**. And it would appear that Moses became a **slave** so that Israel could be **free**.

*Leading on God’s behalf means having **self** crushed out of you. Leading means being the first to make things right; being the first to take a hit; being the one who takes the initiative to **fix** things that are broken, **figure out** how to solve difficult problems. Leading means having your life, your motives, your actions held up to the scrutiny of others. Know why? Because if this **doesn’t** happen, pride and stubbornness and arrogance will **strangle** you—while everyone is shining you up and telling you how wonderful and brilliant you are.

5. There are some things I’ve noticed in this particular story about how God developed Moses into a person He could use for his mission.
 - a. The first thing is that God allowed him to receive **excellent** training in Pharaoh’s palace. But that was only one **tool**. Sometimes training just makes you arrogant and self-confident. People aren’t great leaders in God’s Mission because of the stuff they know. In fact, it would appear that God had to assign him the role of watching sheep in the wilderness for 40 years until his self-confidence tank was pretty much drained.

-What do you think would’ve happened if Moses had tried to lead Israel out of Egypt—based on his position, his education and his experience—with his **I-can-do-this!** ego still intact? He would’ve blown it and ruined his life. What God **most needed in him**—and needs most in us—is a sense of our own profound inadequacy. The issue wasn’t just freeing the Israelites from slavery and giving them a better life. The issue was God’s public judgment on all the gods worshipped by the super-power of that day--and, to be honest, the Hebrews themselves!

-Moses **thought** his training and experience was complete. But God **still** had to teach him humility—as well as **Wilderness Survival 101—and WS202, 303!** See, he was going to have to lead a couple of million people—not for 6 months in the wilderness—but **40 years**.

- b. Something else I see here. God had to help Moses get over his failure. He was a murderer and a fugitive—and a failure at getting the Israelites to follow him. And he had to go **back** to his home, back to where he started—to overcome his shame and shattered confidence.

-By the way, I've noticed that God usually takes us home to deal with our junk—not to some glitzy, shiny new place where no one knows our faults. Remember Paul, early leader in the church? Man, once he met Jesus in Damascus—he was **on fire!** I mean, if **anyone** could reach the Jewish people, **he** could. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees! And yet, instead of winning the Jewish people he infuriated them. He created so much chaos that he was sent back to Tarsus, his home, for anywhere from 7 – 10 years. What did he **do?** Well, we don't know—there's silence. He does later say that he saw all his credentials as a pile of **skubala**. And when he emerges from Tarsus—God could then use him as the apostle to the **Gentiles!**

-We talked about Joseph a few weeks ago. He was cocky, self-confident—I mean, **he knew he could lead!** The only way God could knock the cockiness and pride out of him and have Him be a **servant** was to allow him to be a slave—then a prisoner. Then He had to face his family again—deal with stuff. And **then** God could use him.

-David? Same thing! He was **the man!** Killed this giant warrior that had everyone scared spitless, headed the armies, was anointed as the next king, married the princess, had all the teeny-boppers crooning his name... Then he lost **everything**—and spent the next 15 years of his life in hiding—leading a band of 400 discontents! And **then** God could use him!

- c. If you're thinking that you want to make a difference in this world—that you don't want to just slide out of life into the grave—and leave a few small ripples as you go under the surface—then you need to be prepared for how God tends to make leaders. And it's **not** on a straight line up and to the right. And it's **probably** not in some distant exotic place—you know, where people **really** appreciate how extraordinary and wise and gifted you are.

-My guess is that God's plan is to use where we already **are**—before He calls us anywhere else.

- d. I guess what God is dealing with in us is the attitude of self-confidence that **we** can handle things. Know why that's wrong? Look at the word. **Self-**confidence. That kind of confidence doesn't cut it in a spiritual battle where we can't even **see** the enemy. And that's exactly why Jesus would say:

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for you to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit your very self? (Luke 9:23-25 TNIV)

-After Paul had been entrusted with some astounding visions from God, he was given something he calls a **thorn in the flesh**—a chronic need that he begged to be healed of. God's surprising response was, **No!**

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians. 12:9-10 TNIV)

-See, our thing is to, in subtle ways, try to impress others with how spiritual and knowledgeable and insightful—and **humble** we really are—so we will be respected and followed.. In his book, **The Life You've Always Wanted**, John Ortberg says something we think, but would never say; "What if I'm humble—and nobody notices?" And that's **not** Jesus' way!

6. Friends, God **still** has a mission. His mission is **still** that every person on this planet come into a relationship with Him—and find healing. His mission is that everything that is broken would be fixed forever. His mission is that everyone who is oppressed and enslaved be set free—whether their slavery is because of their own addictions and choices—or whether it's through the evil of those who oppress them.

-God **still** hears the cries of people who moan in the middle of their pain. God **still** hears the whips crack—and people cry out in pain. God sees the disease and suffering and need. God hears the cries of mothers who watch their children starve—**and** the cries of mothers who watch their children get rejected and victimized because they're overweight.

-God's heart is deeply, **deeply** moved by the mess that this world is in. By the weirdness of a world system that grieves over the mess created by promiscuity—and then promotes it in almost every way. By the strangeness of economies agonizing over the oppression of debt—that also fans the flame on greed—and hands out credit cards like Wal-Mart fliers.

-And God's heart is also frustrated by his people who say they **want** to be used to make a difference—but are quick to say, "But, can it be about me? Can I be the star? Can I have everyone oooh and aahhhh about how talented and wonderful and self-giving I am—and still get credit in Heaven? Can I do your will—and still choose **how** and **where** and **when** I'm going to do it? Can I do what You want and stay in my comfort zone?" And to all of the above? No.

- a. To be honest, I find myself **strongly** pulled by God's mission, by the chance to make a difference, lessen suffering, bring justice, see people transformed for all

eternity—and see God’s Kingdom—see God’s power and leadership and goodness bless everyone. **And** I find myself pulled by self-interest. It’s subtle—I would like it to **not** be a factor—but self runs **deep** in my heart—even though time and again I’ve nailed it to Jesus’ cross. The heart, friends, is **deceptive!**

-And **that’s** why following Jesus, doing anything worthwhile, seeing needs met, injustice stopped, hunger filled, hope given, people set free—comes with a personal price tag. And the price tag is not like an entry fee that you never have to pay again. Stepping up to the plate—loving and serving God--and loving and serving others continues to have a cost to it.

- b. The cost to leading is sometimes subtle. Sometimes it’s something as simple as biting your tongue—when you’ve got a **really** good come back! Sometimes it means listening when you’re being unfairly criticized. Sometimes, like Moses, you’ll have family members say, “Who does **he** think he is!” Sometimes the decisions you are clearly led to make will mean having close friends distance themselves from you—or abandon you. Or talk about you—behind your back. Sometimes you’ll be on your face in front of God saying, “God, I don’t know what to do—**please show me!**” And he’ll wait—for uncomfortable lengths of time!

-But **then** there will also be those days when what you have given your life to—and for—begins to make eternal sense. And you’ll see lives changed—forever. You’ll look at someone and realize you had a small part in them being set free—or finding eternal life. And you’ll be **glad, so glad** you laid your ego, your future, and your personal dreams on the line.

Q & A

7. It’s possible, this morning, that you are feeling the tug of God on your life. And you have mixed feelings. Part of it is the panic of what it will cost you. Part of it is the fear of failure—because, like Moses, we **all** have a personal failure file. And the thought of failing again is **too** hard.

-Like Moses, over time we get into a rut—and think how much easier it is to chase sheep on a mountain—than lead people **to** a mountain. The thought of **intentionally** signing up for the pain and cost of joining God’s mission seems crazy. Yet there’s something in us that knows that it is the path to growth; that **not really living** is worse than dying.

-And, of course, Moses’ excuses are still being used:

*“I don’t have what it takes. **I** can’t do that!” And you’re right. That’s the **point**, isn’t it? That’s why God says, “I’ll be with you.”

*Here's a good one; "I don't **know** enough! God, if only I could lay out the whole plot of the Bible, read 64 books **I'm not capable...or ABLE**" God simply says, **I AM! I AM ENOUGH! I AM SUFFICIENT!**

*Here's another good excuse. "I'm not good at speaking or expressing myself!" Well, who said you had to be? I don't think our main problem as believers is **knowing** more or **saying** more. It's living what we do know—so that when we say something it makes sense.

-Moses finally got down to what he was trying to say all along. Basically, "I'm comfortable. I'm 80 years old. Send someone else, because I **don't want to go!**" And it's at that point that God got angry. **Anger...**is not where I want God to be with me! Moses didn't want that either. So, he stepped out—and **never** looked back! How many of you think Moses was glad he said **Yes?** Most days, Moses was glad. And since then, the **world** has been glad. And this broken world will be glad if **you** say **yes**.

8. Where do you start? Well, I think that's what God was getting at when He said to Moses, "What is that in your hand?" It was just a shepherd's staff—just an ordinary big stick. But when **God** got ahold of it—seas parted!
-So. **What do you have in your hand?**