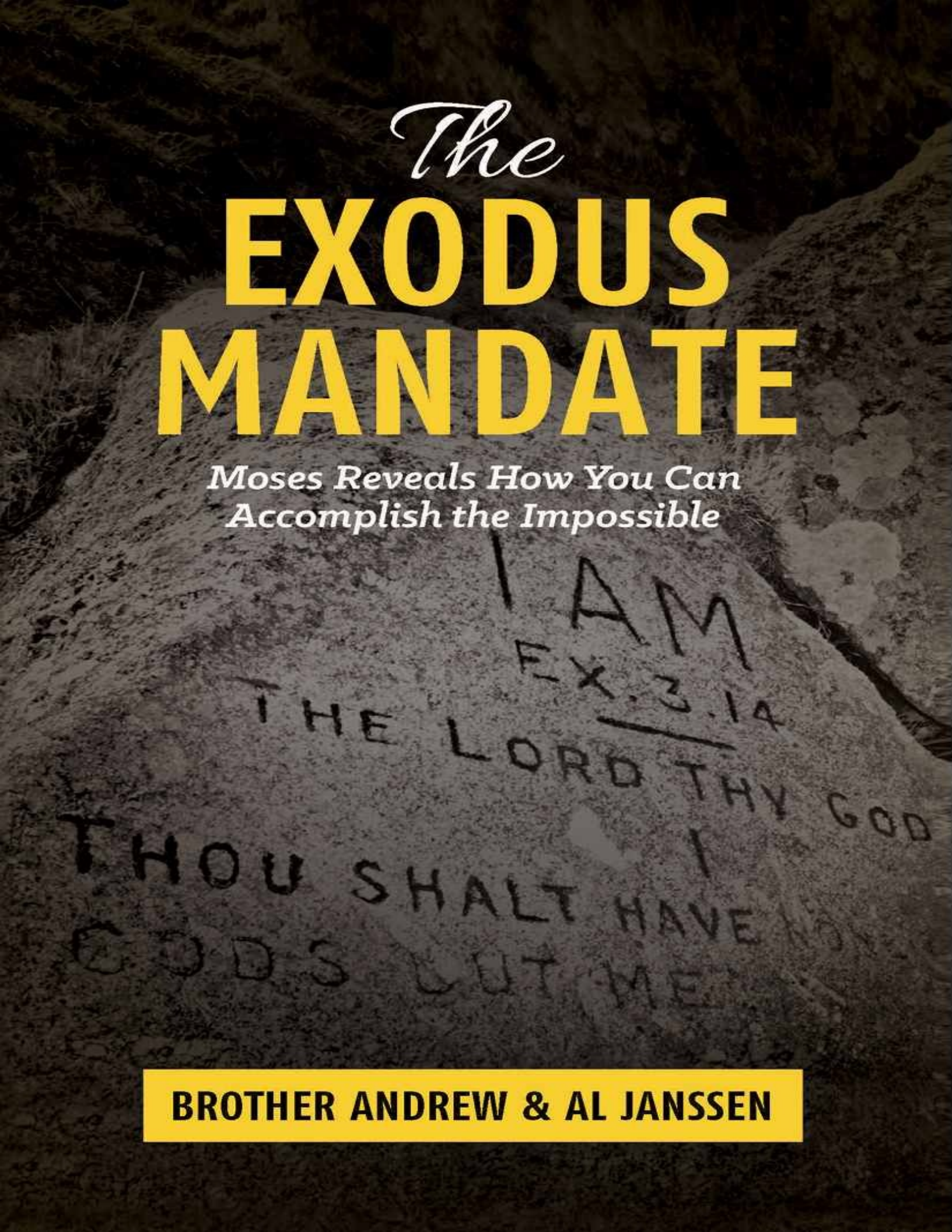
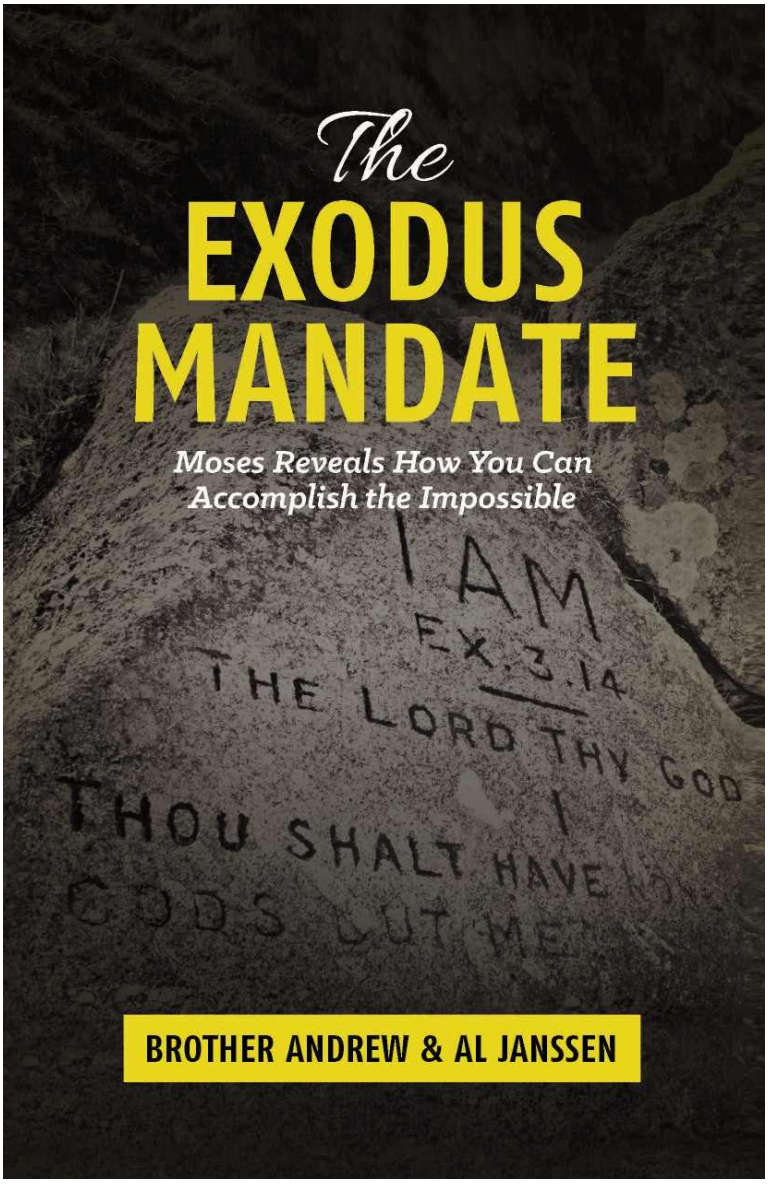

The
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BROTHER ANDREW & AL JANSSEN


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INTRODUCTION

The history of Israel hinges on one man.

There would have been no Israel, covenant or no covenant, without Moses. His faith, his resolve, his courage, and most significant, his prayers made all the difference. In the process, he came to know God more intimately than anyone else in the Old Testament.

The determination of Moses is astonishing. He was so compelled to intercede for the Hebrews that he fasted for forty days not once but twice with hardly a break in between. It nearly killed him but he didn't care. He would pay any price to achieve the salvation of his people.

That is why the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews could say that Moses thought it was better to suffer for the sake of Christ than to own the treasures of Egypt (Heb. 11:26). Moses didn't know Christ, yet he captured the Spirit of our Savior. Jesus even insisted to the Jewish religious leaders that Moses wrote about Him. "There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me" (John 5:45–46). If Jesus lifts Moses up for our edification, we would do well to examine his life.

We will never truly understand who Christ is if we don't take the Word of Christ seriously. Jesus said if we want to follow Him we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him. Somehow Moses learned this truth and lived it out in the most dramatic way possible. He was so committed to God and so identified with His people that he put his very life, even his eternal destiny, on the line. If you really want to experience the full reward of faith, Moses is an ideal guide.

Of course you probably think you can't live up to the example of Moses. Don't be so sure. God loves to put people in impossible situations. The higher the stakes, the more we see His involvement and the more we learn what He is like.

Have you ever considered that the fate of people may hinge on a single choice you make? Moses had no idea that one impulsive moment when he said yes to the Hebrews would cost him forty years of loneliness in the wilderness tending

sheep. Yet because of that one decision, God gave Moses an absolutely preposterous (humanly speaking) assignment—what we are calling the Exodus Mandate. Then God provided all the resources Moses needed to accomplish the mission.

Think for a moment about the lost people in the world today. For example, consider 1.5 billion Muslims. Their fate may be in our hands or your hands. That is not at all meant to lay a guilt trip on any of us but to make us think. We must think and choose and pray, then be *willing* to respond when God calls. You see, once people catch God's heart for the world, He loves to hand out impossible jobs. God won't play safe with you. He may want you to save people. Moses will show you how that works.

When Moses chose to identify with the people of God, he sacrificed his family, his comfort, and his wealth. For forty years it seemed like a stupid decision, a wasted life. It wasn't. Moses didn't know it but he was in school. He was being prepared for a unique assignment. Have you considered that God may be preparing you for a unique assignment that you can never fulfill—unless He is totally in charge?

Many have written about Moses and examined his life in far greater detail that we will attempt. Instead, we will focus on why Moses was so radical. We will see how he could be God's instrument to save two to three million people. And we will learn how we can follow his example.

One note before we get started. At the end of each devotion you will find a question or two labeled "For Reflection." We suggest you keep a written record of your answers. After all, we would not have known any of these great stories about Moses if *he* had not kept a "journal!" Writing down your reflections will help you look back and see what God is teaching you and one day . . . well, you never know what it might mean to others in your family or beyond.

Moses displays a power that is desperately needed today. Believe it or not, you can have that same power. However, it won't come cheap. Let's go to Moses and let him teach us what it will require.

Part 1

MEET YAHWEH

One: **A DEFIANT FAITH**

But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. —Exodus 1:17

Our adventure begins with an act of defiance. Two women named Shiphrah and Puah feared God and refused to obey a direct command of the king. This was a legitimate rebellion. It was through resistance to injustice that Moses' character and faith were seeded.

This was the situation: the Hebrew people were multiplying and that was a threat to Egypt. The king of Egypt, who did not know his history—how Joseph had served one of his great, great, great ancestors and saved the nation—simply observed the facts and assumed, *if war breaks out, these people will join with our enemies. So let's strike first and subdue them. Even better, let's put them to work for us. This is an untapped labor pool!*

It seemed like a good plan but it backfired. The Egyptians forced the Israelites to work in the fields, make bricks and mortar, and fuel their ambitious building programs. An entire city (Ramses) was constructed using cheap Hebrew labor. But the enslavement of the Hebrews did not produce greater security for Egypt. "The Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel" (Exod. 1:12). Like all repressive governments, their response was to ratchet up the oppression.

It's worth noting that unjust methods rarely produce desired results in the long term. When oppressive government policies fail, the tendency is to increase the injustice rather than address the core problems. Pharaoh's "brilliant" solution was to abort the growth of the foreign population. Thus Shiphrah and Puah, who served as midwives to Hebrew women, were ordered to kill all newborn males.

The women would not obey this order. When confronted, they cleverly evaded blame (vv. 18–21). The midwives may not have understood how God was using them. However, they knew instinctively what was right and they acted on it.

Scripture tells us to submit to governing authorities. That's a valid command —most of the time. However, when we fear God, there comes a time when we must resist human government and yield to a higher authority. Government is

given to protect the good and to punish the bad (see Romans 13:3). When government protects the bad and punishes the good, then our submission to legal authority may have to end. This becomes the source of persecution for righteousness' sake.

I (Andrew) had to confront this dilemma soon after the publication of my book *God's Smuggler*. People asked, "Wasn't smuggling Bibles into Iron Curtain countries a rebellion against God-ordained governments?" Well, yes, it was! I had to defend it biblically, which is why I wrote a second book titled *The Ethics of Smuggling*.[1]

The story of the Church is frequently one of rebellion. For example, in many Muslim countries it is illegal for Muslims to convert to Christianity. Yet hundreds of thousands are violating the law and becoming followers of Jesus. This is nothing new. It started in Acts when the Jewish authorities arrested Peter and John, then ordered them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. Listen to their response: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19–20).

The Apostles went right on doing what Jesus commanded them to do—go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel. That required courage. They paid a price. They were constantly in trouble with government authorities. It cost many of them their lives.

Many continue to pay that price today.

REFLECTION: ***Do you have an example of faith—like Shiphrah and Puah, or the Apostles in Acts—in your family or community? If you do, recall a faithful act that has or could inspire you.***

Two: **SAVING A BEAUTIFUL BABY**

> *By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because . . . they were not afraid of the king's edict.* —Hebrews 11:23

When the midwives rebelled and refused to cooperate with Pharaoh's wicked policy, the king initiated his "plan B." He called on all of his subjects to spy on the Hebrews. Whenever they discovered a newborn male, they were to throw him into the Nile River. Imagine the terror of every Jewish mother.

This reveals a classic strategy of God's sworn enemy. Satan had God's chosen people in bondage. Their situation was hopeless. The devil knew that God promised them freedom—Abraham was told that his descendants would suffer for four hundred years before they gained possession of the promised land of Canaan (see Genesis 15:13–16). God's enemy couldn't allow this to happen. When those four hundred years were about over, Satan cranked up the persecution, using Pharaoh as his unwitting servant. In the process, he figured to destroy the One who would save Israel. Satan didn't know who the chosen Savior would be. That's okay—to insure that his plan succeeded, he would kill *all* the boys. It was a diabolical strategy that he would recycle throughout history (read Matthew 2).

Now meet our next heroes, a man and wife who already had at least two children—a son, Aaron, and a daughter, Miriam. Then the wife gave birth to a son. The parents saw it was a beautiful child (Exod. 2:2; Heb. 11:23)—of course every parent thinks that—and they had to protect the baby. That's where faith enters in. Because they trusted God, they weren't afraid of the king's edict. They hid the baby for three months—he must have had a soft cry and slept through the night. Then . . . well, we all know the story of how Moses' mother wove a basket of bulrushes, covered it with pitch, laid her baby in it, and floated it on the Nile, strategically placing the basket where Pharaoh's daughter often came to bathe. It was brilliant—a mother thinking that another woman just might have compassion on a helpless child.

This was the legacy of Moses who entered a world of oppression.

Unfortunately most of the Hebrews felt trapped in Egypt. They were victims

who saw no way of escape. Resistance was futile. With their spirits broken, they submitted to Egyptian taskmasters. But they did maintain a glimmer of hope—the distant memory of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the promises to them of a land that would one day belong to their descendants. Those stories were passed from generation to generation, but they provided little encouragement when the Hebrews felt the lash demanding they work harder.

The faith of his parents saved Moses and planted in him the dream of freedom for his people. But what could one man do? Sure, he was adopted into the royal family and lived in a palace. He was given every advantage and privilege an Egyptian could enjoy. **So what would Moses do with his advantages? Would he side with the oppressors or choose to identify with the oppressed?**

That's a choice all of us must face today.

REFLECTION: ***What are Satan's tactics today as he attempts to thwart God's plans? Have they changed in 3,500 years (from the time of Exodus)? How? How are they the same?***

Three: **ONE CHOICE, A LIFETIME OF CONSEQUENCES**

> *By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God.* —Hebrews 11:24–25

Moses is about to celebrate a landmark birthday. He's going to turn eighty, and the last forty years have been spent in the land of Midian. It's a natural time for reflection as Moses assumes he is nearing the end of life.

So what did Moses think about while he led a flock of sheep through the wilderness, looking for the next pasture or watering hole? Did he recall the miracle of escaping death as a baby? Did he long for the comforts of palace life? Did he regret the last forty "wasted" years spent far away from his people, powerless to do anything to alleviate their suffering?

For his first forty years Moses lived in a palace. The Bible reveals almost nothing about that period. Historians speculate that he was educated at the Temple of the Sun, the "Oxford of Ancient Egypt."[2] His courses probably included hieroglyphics, literature, science, music, and, of course, religion. It's likely that he was a military leader—some researchers believe he led the Egyptian army to a great victory over the Ethiopians. He may even have been in line to ascend to Pharaoh's throne. Of course that is speculation. What we do know is that he threw all those advantages away in a single fit of anger.

During his second four decades, Moses must have reflected on that life-defining moment. Surely as a boy and young man Moses knew something about his heritage. He probably had occasional contact with his parents. How about clandestine talks with his older brother, Aaron, and his sister, Miriam? He had to understand that his kin were slaves. The Hebrews were everywhere. He might avoid them in the palace but he couldn't miss them when he traveled throughout Egypt and observed how hard they were forced to work (Exod. 2:11). Then one fateful day he decided to go visit his people and witnessed persecution.

That's when Moses made *the choice* that changed his life.

We know Moses made a conscious decision to punish the man who was

abusing “one of his people” (v. 11). He looked around to make sure no one was watching. Then he killed the persecutor. With his military training it couldn’t have been too difficult, but the problem was disposing of the body. The only option was to bury it quickly in the sand. That’s not the best burial ground but it was all the Prince of Egypt had available.

Stop here for a moment. Don’t miss this point! Moses was successful. He had the world’s finest education. He was wealthy. He wore the best clothing. He had servants. He wielded genuine power—even the power of life and death in that culture. Everything about his situation and his future was positive. And **he threw it all away because he chose to identify with the persecuted rather than the persecutors.**

REFLECTION: ***What will you choose? Are you willing to identify with your Christian brothers and sisters who suffer for following Christ? What might that mean to your dreams and plans?***

Four: **A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE**

He thought it was better to suffer for the sake of Christ than to own the treasures of Egypt. —Hebrews 11:26 NLT

Some might wonder if Moses ever considered what he might have accomplished had he stayed in Pharaoh's palace. Given his political clout, might he have done more for the Hebrews than was accomplished by eliminating a single persecutor?

No, Moses chose the right path. But he employed a carnal method. Little is accomplished by responding to injustice in a fit of anger. Later we will see that Moses' temper caused him problems all his life. However, let's recognize that his choice was spot-on. In part this was the influence of his family. Otherwise why would he have left, for even one day, the comforts of the palace? It would never have entered his mind to see how his brethren were doing. He must have known about the courage of his parents who saved him at birth. He likely heard the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—Jacob, whose bones were waiting for the day when the Hebrews would carry them back to Canaan.

As the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews noted: Moses "chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. He thought it was better to suffer for the sake of Christ than to own the treasures of Egypt" (Heb. 11:25–26 NLT).

Already the laws of Christ were written on Moses' heart. No, he didn't know about Jesus—that would come much later. But he acted on principle. Looking at the situation—a nation in slavery to a nation of oppression—the picture was very clear. How could he continue living in unbridled luxury with, no doubt, the immorality that comes with such a life? He couldn't! Moses knew something was wrong. The principle of Christ was already working in his life.

When we recognize principles, it gives us clearer direction on how to judge the actions of politicians. It provides us the direction we need to counter evil. Moses had to take a risk when he recognized injustice. He had to act.

Some may protest that we can't expect people to act on principle if they don't know the laws of God. Well, Moses didn't know the laws of God—they would

be revealed many years later. But Moses knew what was right. Scripture says that everyone does. Just examine the first three chapters of Romans. Anyone can make right choices based on principle even if they have never heard the Gospel.

If you don't believe it, just study the behavior of children. They innately know what is right and wrong—that is, when they are personally wronged. You've heard their protest: "That's not fair!" Where do they get that sense of right and wrong? And why does it vanish in many as they grow into adults?

For Moses the situation was clear and straightforward. The only question was whether he had the guts to act. That's the problem today. **It's not that we don't know the principles of righteousness. The issue is whether we have the courage to act on them.** Moses was simply responding based on the uprightness of God. Later he would learn in depth the character of God that drove those moral principles.

The risk of acting on principle is that you will be labeled a hardliner. Maybe even intolerant. That is a small price to pay for standing up to injustice.

All of us face this choice today. Let's focus on one obvious example. More than one hundred million of our brothers and sisters around the world suffer for the cause of Christ. These followers of Jesus are discriminated against, imprisoned, tortured, even killed. Will you identify with them? Pray for them? Encourage and support them?

That was the challenge I (Andrew) faced on my first trip to Poland in July 1955. In Warsaw I found my brethren and empathized with them because they were denied the most basic right of owning a Bible. That discovery altered the course of my life. Just like Moses choosing to identify with his people, my choice to identify with the Suffering Church set me on a path for life.

REFLECTION: ***What troubles you when you think about standing up against injustice?***

Five: **THE COST OF DOING RIGHT**

When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. —Exodus 2:15

The Prince of Egypt didn't run away immediately when he killed the persecutor. He went home to the palace for dinner and returned the next day to his people. Why? Did he expect thanks and perhaps a medal for his effort? Did he think that the elders might beg him to be their leader? If so, he was most disappointed. For being a peacemaker he received ridicule!

Moses came upon two Hebrews fighting and he intervened. Listen to one of the combatants mock him: "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" (Exod. 2:14). How's that for gratitude! Moses knew immediately that he was trapped. The Hebrews didn't want his help. To complicate matters, Pharaoh somehow learned what had happened and he would certainly execute swift judgment. Moses selected the only option: he ran for his life.

Where could he flee for safety? He had to travel a good distance to evade the resources of an angry monarch. First, he had to avoid the military garrison on the Mediterranean coast between Egypt and Gaza. But he couldn't travel too far south into the Sinai Peninsula—that's where the mines were that provided Egypt with copper, turquoise, and other precious stones. As a young man he may have visited the military bases that protected them.

So Moses wound his way across Sinai, past the tip of the Gulf of Aqaba, then turned south and headed into Midian.

How did he travel? On foot or perhaps on a stolen camel? Did he hide by day and move under cover of darkness? Certainly he was constantly alert, eager to avoid any of Pharaoh's troops. He traveled more than 200 miles (322 kilometers). Did he have any food with him? Did he have to beg for bread and steal a drink of water from an oasis well?

It had to be a miserable time, and for what purpose? Moses had tried to be a hero and look where it put him. He had risked everything to address injustice. Probably he expected . . . just what did Moses expect? That he would lead a

revolt? That he would organize the slaves and they would rise up against their tormenters, break free from their bondage, and escape to freedom?

It's more likely that Moses had no plan. He didn't stop to think of the consequences. He just knew what was right and he knew the Egyptian rulers were wrong. He wanted to help his people. His intentions were good. But good intensions combined with poor judgment leads to disaster.

Making the right choice does not mean we will get the "right" result. When we identify with persecuted Christians, don't expect the world to applaud. They probably won't. In fact this choice may cost you. The price will certainly include prayer. Perhaps it will include travel so that you can put your arm around a suffering brother or sister. There will likely be a financial cost as well—to provide help to the body of Christ in need.

It cost us (Andrew and Al) all of those things and more.

REFLECTION: ***Can you think of a time when you made a choice to stand on principle and it didn't work out the way you expected? Reflect on that experience and think about what God may have been teaching you.***

Six: **WE NEED A FAMILY**

Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah. —Exodus 2:21

When Moses finally sat down by a well in Midian, he was tired. However, he was relatively safe—a long way from Egypt in the midst of desert. Thus, though he may not have realized it, Moses had just enrolled in the master's program of God's school of growth. All that he had enjoyed in Pharaoh's palace would be refined out of him. He would become a shepherd and experience deep loneliness, harsh living conditions, cold nights under the stars, and scorching heat.

The story of Moses' entry into a family is touching. Following his flight from Egypt, for the first time in many days, he relaxed as he sat by a well. Seven young women showed up and began to water their father's flock. This had to be a lovely sight. Moses must have enjoyed watching these sisters care for their flock. Did he notice one in particular—Zipporah, the woman he would eventually marry?

Then trouble arrived. The account in Scripture lacks detail. It simply says, "The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock" (Exod. 2:17). How Moses detested bullies—that's what these shepherds were. Like the abusive Egyptian beating his countryman, Moses couldn't ignore oppression. He had to act. These rough-and-tumble shepherds were no match for a battle-tested Moses. As a result, he gained something he very much needed—a family.

This was a family headed by a priest. He's called Reuel in Exodus 2:18 but he's better known as Jethro, the priest of Midian (3:1). We don't really know what this means. Was he a priest of the true living God? Probably not. But he was the religious leader of the tribe and that was where God placed Moses for his protection. Moses could not survive alone for forty years. He needed to do some meaningful work. He needed a family where he could rest and enjoy meals and talk with an older man. Jethro was a wise father-in-law who would one day help Moses organize the leadership structure of the Israelites.

Moses also gained a wife. Jethro needed to find husbands for his daughters,

and clearly Moses was a good choice for Zipporah; he would protect her. Was their marriage happy? Probably not. We say that based on one incident in Exodus 4 where Zipporah circumcised their son, then called Moses a "bridegroom of blood." Still, Moses needed a wife. He needed a family. It may not have been a perfect home—but then what home is perfect? Moses was an intellectual. Zipporah likely was illiterate. It's doubtful that Moses had many deep and meaningful conversations with his wife. Still, Zipporah was loyal to Moses and saved his life by doing something she hated doing. She was a gift God gave Moses.

A precious verse God used early in my (Andrew's) Christian life is Psalm 68:6. "God sets the lonely in families" (NIV). **By living together in a family some of our rough edges get sanded off.** That's an important part of God's work in our lives. However, much of Moses' education would occur in solitude while he cared for Jethro's sheep.

REFLECTION: ***God has placed you in a family. Think about how God has used them in your personal and spiritual development.***

Seven: **A COURSE IN SHEEPOLOGY**

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro. —Exodus 3:1

When Moses started his studies in the college of wilderness wanderings, how much did he know about God? Probably the basic stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Perhaps he'd heard vague promises that someday his people would be rescued. But personally he had not yet met God. That would change, but not soon.

Have you noticed how important sheep are in biblical history? Consider that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all managed livestock. Hebrews were segregated from Egyptians because they were shepherds. David, of course, was a shepherd before he was a king—his psalm that begins "The LORD is my shepherd" is beloved. Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd—this is the only time He used an adjective when explaining who He is—and tells a parable about a shepherd leaving ninety-nine sheep to find one lost sheep.

So it shouldn't surprise us that God required Moses to take an advanced course in sheepology. The psalmist recognizes the connection, saying of God, "You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (Ps. 77:20). What better training could Moses have for shepherding two to three million Hebrews? Think about the "fun" of keeping, say, one hundred of the wooly creatures together. In the Middle East a shepherd walks in front of his flock not behind. He is constantly scouting places for the sheep to graze. Searching for a shimmer of light in the heat that might indicate water, he is often disappointed by another mirage. Frequently, he checks to be sure that one of the stupid lambs hasn't wandered off—because then he will have to run off and rescue the stray.

Probably Moses did not realize how important this phase of his life was. These weren't even his animals. How had he moved from a lofty position as a prince in the royal family to a lowly shepherd? Did he wonder: *Is this my reward for acting on principle?*

Surely Moses battled despair, maybe even depression. He had no obvious future, and there was nothing he could do about it. He possessed no savings account or investments with which to start a business. There were no industries

where he could find employment. He depended on the generosity of a foreign family.

Slowly, as months turned into years, God prepared Moses for his unique mission. Did Moses understand what was happening? Certainly forty years spent herding sheep in the Arabian desert provided plenty of time to reflect. What did Moses think about? No doubt he missed his relatives back in Egypt—both his natural parents and siblings as well as his adoptive mother and the royal clan.

Did Moses think much about God? Gazing up at the heavens on dark sleepless nights—did he recall the promise to Abraham to make of him a great nation, uncountable like the stars? Well, that promise had been fulfilled, but hadn't God also promised to bring the people back to the land of Abraham? Where was the rescue? Was this just a myth or wishful thinking?

So much for dreaming. What did God mean to the daily life of Moses? Did he have questions like: *Does God see my miserable life herding sheep and goats? What about my kinsmen back in Egypt? Does God care about them? Are my parents and siblings going to die in slavery, one of an endless series of disappointed generations? Why did God give me a burden for these people—if God indeed gave me this burden—then abandon me in humiliation, unable to save even one man or my family much less a nation?* After forty years in the wilderness, he may have looked back on his life and thought, *Eighty years and nothing to show for it. What a waste of a life!*

If that was what Moses thought, he was nearing the time when God could use him. But Moses didn't see it. If you have harbored similar emotions, there is good news for you. **No matter your age, God has a plan for your life. He will use you. Are you willing to wait patiently for God to reveal His plan for you?** Remember, Moses tried to serve God in his own strength and failed miserably. Then Moses gave up and resigned himself to the tedium of tending sheep. Little did he know that the purpose of his life was about to be revealed.

Are you faithfully carrying out your responsibilities—even if they seem mundane, maybe even meaningless? Tending sheep is not meaningless. Neither are your everyday, routine duties. God is using that work to form your character. If we learn to be faithful in the small details of daily life, the day may come when God can do the impossible through us.

REFLECTION: ***In your relationship with God, have you experienced a time in the wilderness? Or perhaps you feel you are in the wilderness now. What have you learned from the experience, or what is God teaching you during this time?***

Eight: **ENCOUNTER WITH FIRE**

> *The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.* —Exodus 3:2

Year after year rolled by with no evidence that God paid any attention to Moses or the children of Israel. The future seemed exceedingly bleak.

What hope did Israel have? All the Hebrews knew was unending suffering. Day after day they were abused. People lived, worked as slaves, and died. Did they pass on the stories of their patriarchs to their children? No doubt they did, but after decades, then hundreds of years, those stories began to sound like myths, like the promise of Santa Claus. And those stories didn't bring them one step closer to freedom.

Don't minimize the bleakness of this situation. The Hebrews had no hope of rescue outside of divine intervention. Of course, they cried out to God for help—there were no other options. But Heaven was silent.

Moses wasn't suffering like his countrymen. Yet on those lonely excursions across the barren landscape, did he question whether God cared? Did he ask how God could allow such an obvious injustice to persist for centuries? Did he wonder if God even remembered these people?

Forty years earlier, when Moses was young and strong, he was eager to do something. Now he was just old. Eighty is a good age to retire from sheepherding. Leave the work to a younger generation. Marry off the kids, enjoy the grandkids, and die in your sleep. But Moses continued leading a herd of sheep and goats around a mountain—one of many in the region. There was no hint that his situation was about to change. The mountain was like any other in the region. There was nothing that would set it apart from dozens of other hills and peaks. That is, until God appeared.

How does God get someone's attention? A burning bush that is not consumed will certainly do the job. Moses said: "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned" (Exod. 3:3). A more contemporary translation might be: *Finally, some excitement! These sheep aren't going anywhere. Let's check this out!*

Now begins an amazing encounter. David writes that God "made known his ways to Moses" (Ps. 103:7). That is the key to understanding all that follows. It starts here on the holy mountain when God begins to reveal Himself to Moses. No one until Jesus experienced anything approaching the closeness Moses had with God. This was a unique relationship. It began there at the burning bush, lasted for forty years, and grew over that time to an intimacy that was almost terrifying. Scripture says Moses met with God face-to-face "as a man speaks to his friend" (Exod. 33:11).

Do any of us want such closeness with God? Probably for most people the answer is no, because such a relationship is frightening and costly. However, it's an adventure that no one should miss. Moses' intimacy with God may have been unique in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament Jesus revealed that he was making it possible for everyone to know God. He took on flesh so people could talk with Him and touch Him and learn what was on His heart.

The Apostle Paul prayed that he might "know [Christ] and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings" (Phil. 3:10). That was the power of the encounter Moses had. One moment there was no hope. Then there was the presence of God—despair turned into glorious promise!

We can have the same kind of close encounter today and we don't need a burning bush experience.

REFLECTION: ***How much do you really want to know God—to talk with Him, to know His heart? What frightens you about that prospect? What excites you?***

Nine: **WHEN GOD'S CONCERN BECOMES MY CONCERN**

> *Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people . . ."* — Exodus 3:7

When Moses chose to identify with God's people, he made a wise choice. However, for forty years he probably thought his choice was meaningless. Perhaps the Hebrews would have been better off if he'd remained a prince. Then he might have used his influence to really help. But he blew his cover by killing a single persecutor.

To make matters worse, God didn't seem to be acting on their behalf. Why make a principled stand, risking his life, if God turned His back and ignored the situation? But God had not turned His back. Moses had made the right choice—even one person being abused is too many, and the persecution of one represented the mistreatment of an entire nation.

We tend to forget that God's time is not our time. A thousand years for us are like a day in His sight or like a watch in the night (see Ps. 90:4). That's only three hours if you are counting. So in God's time not even one day had passed since Joseph led his family to safety in Egypt.

If Moses knew about God's time, it was likely not very comforting. Four hundred years is a long time for humans. So is forty years. Moses needed something more concrete. He got it at the burning bush. Immediately after God announced Himself to Moses as "the God of your father [interesting that God begins with Moses' own father], the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exod. 3:6), He gets right to the point. Read carefully:

> I have *surely seen* the affliction of *my people* who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I *know* their sufferings, and I have come down to *deliver* them out of the hand of the Egyptians and *to bring them* up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Exod. 3:7–8, italics added)

We have emphasized some key words to demonstrate that God understood the condition of His people. He knew they were suffering. He planned to rescue

them and bring them out of Egypt to a new land, a good country, a place filled with tasty and nourishing food and drink.

Now there are not a lot of specifics here. **The point we must realize is that God cares.** When Moses heard these words, God's concerns became his own. When we make the right choice—when we choose to identify with God's people—God will eventually let us know what's on His heart.

REFLECTION: ***Do you feel a burden for a person or group of people? If so, what do you feel is God's concern for these people?***

Ten: **A BURNING BUSH REVELATION**

I have surely seen the affliction of my people . . . and have heard their cry. . . . I have come down to deliver them. —Exodus 3:7–8

God wants us to know His concerns, feel His compassion, and adopt His priorities.

To illustrate, I (Al) had a burning bush experience in Moscow's Red Square on a bitterly cold day in March 1989. This was my first trip behind the Iron Curtain, and as I was walking toward Lenin's Tomb, I heard a shout. As I turned, I saw a man on fire just thirty feet away. Almost immediately two soldiers appeared and a police car brushed past me as it drove up to the man. The soldiers shoved the man to the ground and rolled him to extinguish the flames that had burned up his trousers. Then the rear door to the police car opened and, as the man groaned in pain, the soldiers tossed him into the backseat. With lights flashing the car drove off. The whole event lasted less than a minute.

After the initial shock I asked my interpreter what the man was shouting. The interpreter answered, "The Communists have killed my family and I don't want to live anymore."

I couldn't sleep that night. Around midnight, with snow falling, I left the hotel and walked two blocks up Gorky Street to Red Square. There were no people around. Snow fell gently through the lights of the Kremlin and blanketed the famous square where the attempted suicide had occurred. *No one knows about this*, I thought as I stood over the spot. *There were no television cameras to record this protest. No one knows the man's name. His friends and relatives probably will never learn what happened.*

At that point I clearly heard this reply in my mind: I *know! That man's cry is the cry of the Russian people. I have heard their cry and I will answer their prayers.* It would be another two years before those words made sense, but this was the point when I first became aware that **God knows the suffering of His people. He wants us to know it too.**

I didn't receive an assignment that day—that would come later. But my heart was opened. I began to see God's compassion and started praying a prayer that

you might want to use: “Lord, may I see what You see, hear what You hear, and feel what You feel.” Pray that way, and God’s heart will soon become your heart.

REFLECTION: ***You may want to pray the prayer suggested above; then see what God reveals to you.***

Eleven: **THE EXODUS MANDATE**

Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. —Exodus 3:10

W*ho me? You've got to be kidding!* Ever felt that way?

When Moses realized God's heart for His people—He had not forgotten them, He knew all about their suffering, and He planned to do something about it—then God asked Moses to be His partner.

We've written before that, when we pray, we must be prepared to be God's answer to our prayers. Let's paraphrase what God said to Moses: "Okay, Moses, you now see that I haven't forgotten the Israelites. Today is your lucky day! You are the answer to their prayers. You are going to rescue my people from slavery and lead them out of Egypt." This was the Exodus Mandate!

Put that way, Moses' reaction makes perfect sense: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exod. 3:11). Great question! Forty years earlier, Moses might have responded differently. He might have said, "Yes, God, I'm your man. I can get right into Pharaoh's court, no problem. I've got the language, the training, all the skills you need. Pharaoh will have to listen to me. I've got plans—I can organize the people and if the Egyptian army tries to stop us, I know their tactics so we can thwart them. You just leave everything to me!"

Forty years in the wilderness stripped Moses of that hubris. Now he knew his limits. He was eighty years old and this was a job for a younger man. His language skills were rusty. He hadn't kept up with all the news of Egypt. He was out of touch with the latest palace politics. He had no Internet connection and therefore no email contact with friends and family. Forty years earlier, he was the man. Now it would be a disaster. **Which means God had Moses right where He wanted him.** Moses had to understand that this was an impossible job.

God's answer to Moses' question was simple: "I will be with you" (v. 12).

REFLECTION: ***Has God given you an impossible assignment? What is it?***

Twelve: **YOU AREN'T ALONE!**

I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you. — Exodus 3:12

If you read the Bible, you realize that God loves to hand out impossible assignments. He's done it for thousands of years.

- Noah, build a boat 450 feet long and 3 stories high.
- Abraham, offer up your son as a sacrifice.
- Joshua, lead the army in attack against the impregnable fortress of Jericho.
- Gideon, defeat the massive army of Midian with just 300 men.
- David, step up and fight the giant Goliath.
- Jonah, go preach to Nineveh, the capital city of your worst enemies.
- Elijah, challenge 450 prophets of Baal to a divine contest.

On and on it goes. One crazy, impossible job after another. Why? Because these assignments can never be accomplished by human effort. Thus **God must step in and do the impossible, and He will get the glory.**

Jesus did the same thing with His disciples. Remember when he preached to five thousand men plus women and children. The disciples urged Him to send the people away so they could eat, and Jesus said, "You feed them." *With what? We have only five loaves and two fish!* That's enough—when they are in the hands of Jesus.

Jesus wants us to take the Gospel all over the world, to make disciples of every tribe and nation. Each of us is called to play an important part. One family goes to Africa, another couple to the Middle East, while a team heads into the jungles of the Amazon. Meanwhile others fund the missions, feed the poor, build hospitals for the sick, tackle the problem of AIDS, feed and house the homeless, educate children mired in poverty, rescue women enslaved in the sex trade, and many more good works.

None of this is accomplished without divine help. Listen to Jesus:

"I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you

forever” (John 14:16).

“The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things” (v. 26).

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing”(15:5).

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you” (v. 16).

There’s more, much more. But this should convince us that what God requires of us, He also provides the resources to accomplish. If we don’t think we have what we need, all we have to do is ask.

Moses had an impossible task. He couldn’t possibly succeed unless God acted. And God wasn’t going to leave Moses without the resources he needed.

REFLECTION: ***How will God get the glory when your impossible assignment is fulfilled? What resources has He given you? If you feel inadequate, tell Him right now and ask Him to provide what you need.***

Thirteen: **WHAT IS IN A NAME?**

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" —Exodus 3:13

Moses had a legitimate concern. He realized that he could not speak on his own authority. He knew Egypt. He understood the awesome powers there. He realized his people were overwhelmed by the clout of Pharaoh and the temples of Egyptian gods, and don't forget the whips of their slave masters.

For centuries the people of Israel had known about the God who appeared to their forefathers—a God with no name. Egypt was populated by deities with names: Osirus, the god of the river Nile; Heka (or Heki) the frog goddess; Heb (or Seb), the earth god. There was the god of beetles, Khepara. And Beelzebub, god of flies. So Moses could not speak for an unnamed deity.

You should detect a pattern in the list of Egyptian deities. Soon the God who spoke to Moses will confront each of the Egyptian gods through a different plague. He will demonstrate that He is greater than the mighty Nile, that He rules over frogs and gnats and flies and beetles as well as the gods of livestock and weather and trees. Even the great sun god Ra will be obliterated by darkness. Finally, the tenth and last plague will expose the god Bloed, touching every household in Egypt and demonstrating that Bloed has no ability to save. Israel meanwhile will be saved by blood.

So Israel's God needs to reveal His name. God provides two answers. First, He says, "I am who I am" or "I am the One who is" or "I will be what I will be." *Yahweh* is the Hebrew word that means "I am." Moses is instructed to tell Israel "I am has sent me to you" (Exod. 3:14). With this name, God reveals that He is self-existent, uncreated, and undefined by any other.

This is a breakthrough concept. God, the eternal Spirit who spoke into existence the universe out of nothing, who crafted the earth and then molded man and breathed life into him—He has now formally introduced Himself.

That name, I Am, will become even more significant when Jesus reveals His identity by using this name. He says:

- *I am* the bread of life.
- *I am* the light of the world.
- *I am* the good shepherd.
- *I am* the resurrection and the life.
- *I am* the way, and the truth, and the life.
- *I am* the true vine.

God provides a second answer to Moses' question, and He repeats it again so Moses can't miss the significance. "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations" (v. 15).

God is the great I Am, Creator of all things. He is also a personal deity—the God of your fathers, and yes, Moses, *your* God! God says He's not just the God of spiritual giants like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is also the God of every Hebrew suffering in slavery in Egypt. He is the God of every person living today in bondage to sin. He is a personal God. Note we said *personal*, not private. This is the God who will lead the people of Israel to freedom. He will liberate a nation. He will rescue each individual in that nation.

This God who freed Israel from the bondage of slavery, He can also save you from the bondage of sin.

REFLECTION: ***What do the two names of God revealed to Moses say to you about who God is?***

Fourteen: **LET'S TALK!**

Then Moses said to God . . . (Exod. 3:13). God said to Moses . . . (v. 14). Then Moses answered . . . (4:1). But the Lord said to Moses . . . (v. 4).

One thing we really enjoy about many of the Old Testament heroes is how they interact with God. They don't just talk. They argue, debate, negotiate, disagree, explore options, and reach understandings. These are not sound-bite chats, though, because of space considerations, we're pretty sure the Bible provides only highlights of most conversations.

For example, look at Abraham (in Genesis 18). Abraham practiced Middle Eastern hospitality and shared a meal with God when He and two cohorts showed up unexpectedly. Then Abraham and Deity took an after-dinner walk during which God confided that He was going to judge Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham's nephew Lot lived in Sodom with his family, so naturally Abraham was alarmed. "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" he asked. "Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it?" (v. 24).

Good question. But Abraham didn't stop there. He rebuked God: "Far be it from you to do such a thing! . . . Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (v. 25).

Wow, that's bold! How dare anyone challenge God's authority! But—and I imagine maybe He said this with a smile—God answered, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake" (v. 26).

Whew, good move, Abraham. But he wasn't satisfied. Suppose the number fell five short of fifty? "God, will you still destroy the city just for the lack of five?" God answered, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there" (v. 28).

Now Abraham moved into serious negotiation. Okay, God, suppose the number is only forty? God conceded He would spare Sodom if He found forty righteous. So, what about thirty? Or twenty? How about just ten righteous? God: "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it" (v. 32).

We've wondered why Abraham stopped there. Why not negotiate down to five—that's Lot's family plus one. Did Abraham believe that surely there must be at

least ten righteous people in Sodom? The amazing thing is that God seemed to welcome Abraham's haggling. In the centuries that followed, other Jewish leaders followed suit.

Elijah was so depressed that he told God he was the only prophet left. God corrected his thinking—actually there were seven thousand faithful who hadn't bowed the knee to Baal.

Jonah pouted and complained that God had not destroyed Nineveh. God patiently appealed to Jonah, because, of course He had pity on Nineveh.

Daniel persisted when his prayers weren't answered and received an explanation for the delay.

David in his psalms demonstrated that there are no limits to the emotions we can express to God.

Moses from the very start of this relationship was not just listening for instructions. He was fully engaged, proposing alternatives, exploring options, explaining why he wasn't the right person for the job. God patiently answered every objection. God lost patience only when Moses told Him, "Send someone else" (Exod. 4:13).

How typical! Today many men would answer God's call with, "Here I am, Lord! Send my sister." (Did you know that there are far more women on the mission field than men? Makes us wonder how many Christian men have ignored God's call.) Still, God answered Moses by telling Him that his brother would help him, and that was the end of their discussion. However, their talks continued over the next forty years. A deep intimacy grew between them until we can safely say that Moses had a closer relationship with God than anyone else prior to the arrival of Jesus.

Is such intimacy possible for us today? Surely we can't meet God face-to-face as Moses did. Or can we? When Jesus died on Calvary, the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom, indicating that all people could now approach a holy God based on the blood of Jesus. **Anyone can have the same closeness with Almighty God that Moses enjoyed.**

The Apostle Paul writes: "Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now

come boldly and confidently into God's presence" (Eph. 3:12 NLT).

REFLECTION: ***Are you boldly and confidently entering into God's presence? Why or why not?***

Part 2

FOLLOW YAHWEH'S INSTRUCTIONS

Fifteen: **THE NECESSARY TOOLS**

Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.'" —Exodus 4:1

What does this initial conversation between I Am and Moses, covering one-and-a-half chapters of Exodus, consist of? Notice that Moses was not concerned about things we tend to bring up. For example, he never protested, "God, that's not safe. If I go to Pharaoh, he will kill me." That seemed a legitimate concern, but Moses never mentioned it.

Or Moses could have said, "What about my support? What's the budget? It won't be cheap to rescue two million people. Are you going to pay me or will I have to raise the money? That will take time." No, Moses seemed confident that God would provide for his financial and material needs.

Okay, what about the family? "God, I have a wife and kids. They won't want to move away from Midian. What if they say they don't want me to go to Egypt —do I just leave them?" Moses had a family, but responsibility to his family would not inhibit God's clear call on his life. Somehow the needs of the family would be met as Moses obeyed.

It's natural when we sense God's call to mission to ask many practical questions, but practical details weren't covered in Moses' discussion with God. Two important areas were covered. God introduced Himself and revealed compassion for His suffering people. Then Moses asked God to reveal His name. **Mission begins with these two vital points: knowing God and knowing God's heart for people.** When we understand these two things, we are on the right path.

God did provide a few instructions. He told Moses first to go to the elders of Israel and He told Moses what to say. Then, together, Moses and the elders were to go to Pharaoh, and again God provided the script Moses would deliver.

God also anticipated an obstacle: "I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go" (Exod. 3:19–20). That's not much detail, but it's enough for Moses to start

moving. Moses had to act on faith that God would deliver on His promises. Clearly, this was God's show. Moses knew enough to start the mission. More details would be revealed as needed.

REFLECTION: ***What questions do you want to ask God about His call on your life?***

Sixteen: **IF NOT YOU, WHO?**

Moses said to the Lord, ". . . I am not eloquent" (Exod. 4:10). But he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else" (v. 13).

During discussion with the Hebrew elders, Moses anticipated that his authority would be challenged. "The LORD did not appear to you" the Hebrews would say (Exod. 4:1). So God provided Moses with the signs of authority he would need. The staff he carried, when thrown on the ground, would become a snake (some Hebrew experts claim this word could be translated "crocodile"). Pick it up by the tail and it would become a staff again. A second sign: Moses would put his hand in his cloak and when he removed, it the hand would be leprous like snow. When he repeated the move, the hand would be restored. A third sign: he was to take some water from the Nile and, when he poured it on the ground, it would turn to blood.

Pretty powerful signs, don't you think? Moses had everything he needed but he didn't see it that way. He protested, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue" (v. 10). Now as we will explain in a moment we have to disagree with Moses' assessment. We don't know exactly what his problem was. Some have speculated that Moses stuttered. Probably he felt insecure about the assignment. Any one of us in that situation would have felt anxious. After all, it had been forty years since he had lived in Pharaoh's court. His language skills were rusty. It's doubtful that he'd talked much to his sheep.

Patiently God addressed the concern. "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak" (vv. 11–12). Those are powerful words. **This should provide us with the assurance that what God requires of us, He will provide.** He's the creator. He will not give us an impossible assignment and then leave us without the tools to accomplish the job.

So Moses ran out of excuses. All he could sputter was: "Lord, please send someone else." That's when God became angry. Yet even here, we observe His

compassion. God offered Moses a partner, his brother Aaron, a man who was articulate. Moses just had to tell Aaron what to say, and he would speak for Moses.

Moses indeed relied on Aaron early in the mission. You see it the next few chapters of Exodus. Aaron stood next to Moses and spoke to the elders and he spoke for Moses to Pharaoh. But notice that after the third plague, we no longer hear from Aaron. Moses spoke directly to Pharaoh and the people. By the end of his life, as we read his speeches in Deuteronomy, we recognize that Moses was a powerful and eloquent speaker. All this goes to demonstrate that God had the right man with the right tools for the job.

So you can trust God to provide exactly what you need to fulfill His mandate.

REFLECTION: ***As you consider God's mission for your life, where do you feel inadequate? Talk to God about this. Then listen for His answer—how has He provided what you need?***

Seventeen: **BURNING BUSHES TODAY**

> *The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.* —Exodus 3:2

Not everyone will have a burning bush experience, or at least not one as dramatic as that of Moses. But it's not uncommon. I (Andrew) have rarely shared what I'm about to write. Before I relate what happened to me, I should state that you should not expect or demand a burning bush experience for you to fulfill God's mission. We have plenty of direction available in Scripture, plus the body of Christ, His Church, to give us further guidance. Still, sometimes in His grace God provides an experience that confirms the course of your life.

The year was 1958 and in the Netherlands there was a brief period of revival. It seemed that everyone was talking about God. There were manifestations of power, healing, and deliverance, and people came from all over Europe to my country for meetings. While I was not deeply involved in the movement, on several occasions as I started a mission into Eastern Europe, I would go to one of their prayer gatherings.

At one of those prayer services the leaders invited me to kneel and they laid hands on me. Suddenly I experienced a searing heat as though fire were burning in my bones. It was totally unexpected and it terrified me. It's impossible to describe. I felt as though I were choking and the fire would consume me. I wanted it to stop and cried out in my mind, *Lord, I can't take any more!* I don't know how long it lasted—a minute, an hour—I have no idea. I do know that from that moment on I realized I had God's power to do the work he'd called me to do.

Yes, people can and do have burning bush experiences. Pentecost was a burning bush event for 120 disciples. They even saw the fire and it didn't scorch their hair!

In the same way that Moses wasn't looking for an encounter with God, we can't anticipate it either. But we still need to be willing to accept it when and if it occurs. Moses could have seen the phenomenon of the burning bush, exclaimed to his sheep, "My, isn't that unusual!" and continued walking. Of course that

would have been foolish. God doesn't give us an experience like that for our entertainment. It's intended to be a life-defining event.

It also seems evident that such an experience initiates or confirms God's call to do the impossible. The burning bush was how God revealed to Moses the crazy mandate to lead the Hebrew nation to freedom. Pentecost marked the empowering of a movement for global evangelism that turned the world upside down. For me (Andrew), my burning bush experience confirmed that God had empowered me to do His work of strengthening the Church in persecution.

However, we don't need a dramatic manifestation to respond to the Gospel or to obey the commands of Scripture. The Great Commission is for every Christian—go into all the world and make disciples. When I had my burning bush experience, I was already going behind the Iron Curtain. This event simply confirmed and blessed it. Within God's commission there may be a unique direction God wants you to take—one in which you can't possibly succeed without His leading and His power. That's when a supernatural calling may occur.

The experience is often associated with fire. It's not uncommon to say about a passionate person that her heart is "on fire." But this experience is bigger. Oswald J. Smith called it a fire in his bones. It encompasses your whole body. Jeremiah had it: "There is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (Jer. 20:9). That burning compelled Jeremiah to speak God's message even though it was highly unpopular. That same fire compelled me to keep going to the Communist countries, then to the Islamic world, and eventually to proclaim the Gospel to Muslim fundamentalists.

There is a lot of cheap talk about experiences with the Holy Spirit. Be careful. An experience without life change is worthless. God never gives an experience for the sake of an experience. This is not something you brag about. It's power for service. The essence of what happened to Moses was proved in his encounter with Pharaoh and the leadership he gave to the Israelites.

One more thing. **People who have a genuine burning bush experience are not balanced. They are driven by a holy calling.** They give their lives for God's service. They cannot deny the call—though they may debate it with God,

as Moses did. From that point forward they are on a single-minded God-inspired mission. When you meet people with fire in their bones, you know it—and they know it. These are the people who accomplish the impossible.

REFLECTION: ***Have you had a burning bush experience? If so, what did it compel you to do? If not, have you met someone who has? What did you observe about this person?***

Eighteen: **CONSEQUENCES OF OBEDIENCE**

So Moses took his wife and his sons . . . and went back to the land of Egypt.
—Exodus 4:20

Moses obeyed God. He didn't really have any choice—that's the reality of a mandate from the ruler of the universe. He started by asking permission of his father-in-law, Jethro. That seemed appropriate—after all, Jethro had provided him with a family and employment for nearly forty years. But Moses didn't reveal what God had told him to do. That was also proper. Would Jethro—would anyone—have understood God's divine call to Moses? We need discernment when we have a burning bush experience; we should not be in any hurry to broadcast that information.

As Moses acted according to God's direction, we see two things. We notice God's encouragement: "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead" (Exod. 4:19). That concern was not addressed at the burning bush. No doubt Moses still worried about it. God removed any reason for worry.

Second, Moses received further instruction, a little at a time, so that he was prepared for what he would face in Egypt. God even warned Moses that Pharaoh would not listen to him. God ordered Moses to tell the king, "Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve me.' If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son" (vv. 22–23). So Moses heard God's heart for His son and gained insight into the consequences that would befall Pharaoh when he didn't obey. That had to encourage Moses.

How do we gain such divine direction? A dramatic experience or two will not carry us through the months or years of work that may be necessary to fulfill God's mission. We need regular daily encouragement and guidance. That's why we have Father's book! Moses didn't have any written Scripture—he would later write five volumes of it—so he needed God's regular revelation. We can receive God's input daily, and we must, for it provides the sustenance that we need.

Personally, I (Andrew) start each day reading several devotionals, beginning with the Moravian daily Scripture texts that have been published annually since 1731. Often the Scriptures presented provide the exact direction I need. Then I

read The Book. For years I've read through the Bible at least once, often twice over fifty-two weeks. I read various translations in Dutch, English, and German. Sometimes I read through, looking to understand a theme, such as faith or prayer. I also read commentaries—it's amazing how much light the Bible throws on commentaries of the Bible!

From the beginning I have advised every Open Doors worker to read through their Bible at least once a year. Of course, I can't dictate that. But I'm convinced that it's necessary for anyone involved in ministry which, by the way, includes every Christian. The reason we need to start the day in Scripture is that it is the way we are strengthened for the battle. You will be attacked. You will get discouraged. You will be tested. Scripture is the barricade you throw up against the ongoing attacks of the enemy.

The Word of God needs to saturate our minds if we want to know and follow God's will.

REFLECTION: ***What is your plan for reading Scripture? Is it adequate to give you the direction, encouragement, and strength God wants you to have for your ministry?***

Nineteen: **INITIAL SUCCESS**

But Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go?" —Exodus 5:2

Forty years after running away, Moses returned to Egypt. He connected with Aaron and told his older brother all that God had revealed. Together they gathered the elders of Israel. Aaron spoke the words Moses gave him. They performed the signs. And . . . the people believed!

What a great start! If Moses was a missionary writing home to his supporters, he would eagerly report on the favor he'd received and how the elders had bowed their heads and worshiped God (Exod. 4:31). The first big hurdle was overcome, and Moses and Aaron were ready to advance to phase two: an audience with Pharaoh. Moses would no doubt urge his supporters to pray about this meeting.

With confidence, the pair delivered God's message: "Let My people go." Pharaoh was convicted, agreed that he had abused God's people, and repented of his wicked ways.

"Wait a minute!" you protest. "That's *not* what happened." But isn't that what we expect when we follow God's directions? In one sense the Egyptians could have repented had Pharaoh led the way. If we've learned anything from Jonah and Nineveh, not to mention numerous examples in the New Testament, we know that there is always the possibility for repentance.

It's sad that Pharaoh did not repent. He revealed his true nature by challenging God. "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice? . . . I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go." So Pharaoh threw down the gauntlet. God had warned Moses that He would harden Pharaoh's heart. Now we see it.

Then the situation deteriorated. The ruler made life miserable for the Hebrews. He demanded more work from the slaves—because obviously they didn't have enough to do if they wanted to take a holiday under religious pretenses. So the people suffered.

This is where following God becomes a serious challenge. **Obedience never**

guarantees a smooth path because the forces of evil and hell do not cooperate with God's plan. We should not be surprised by opposition yet it seems we often are. Jesus warned us: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18).

Sometimes when we witness answers to prayer, the consequences are surprising. For years in Egypt thousands of Christians prayed weekly in three-hour-long prayer services for God to open up their country for the Gospel. God heard those prayers. You know the story of the protests in Tahir Square that led to the downfall of the dictator Mubarak. In the months following there was great openness for the Gospel. Christians were even able to speak for the first time about their faith on television. Many people responded. But that didn't result in ease for the church. Challenges increased. In some cases persecution grew. More than sixty churches were burned in Upper Egypt. By some estimates tens of thousands of Christians fled post-revolution Egypt because of rising Muslim conservatism and general instability under a government that could not or would not prevent attacks against Christians.[3]

Do we give up when opposition arises or increases? It is natural to recoil when facing hatred. We must focus on the calling of God and realize that His promises will come true—in His timing. Moses was only starting His work. Soon God would reveal just how powerful He is.

REFLECTION: ***Have you seen things "go wrong" by obeying God? Did you give up or persevere? Why?***

Twenty: **DON'T EXPECT A PAT ON THE BACK**

> *[The foremen of the people of Israel] said to [Moses and Aaron], "The Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us." —* Exodus 5:21

We tend to assume that things will "go right" if we follow God's leading. When we do what God says, we expect to get the proper result. Well that didn't happen with Moses. In fact his problems increased. Slave masters demanded more work out of the Hebrews and stopped providing the straw they needed to make the bricks for Pharaoh's massive building program. So the people turned on Moses. They said in essence, "It's all your fault! We were doing okay until you came along. [They weren't really.] Now look at what you've done."

Don't expect everyone to understand and sympathize with you when times get tough. Often we've found that Christians say the meanest things. They are quick to accuse that you haven't really followed God's lead because, if you had, this disaster wouldn't be happening.

Moses could very well have argued with the people. He could have told them to hold tight—God has promised to free us and we just have to be patient. He could have reminded them of the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the trials they experienced as they followed God. Or of Joseph, who suffered slavery and imprisonment for many years before advancing to Number Two Man in Egypt and saving Israel. He could have told them how God had foretold that this would happen—we can't expect Pharaoh to just sit back and let us leave, depleting his cheap workforce.

However, Moses didn't argue with the people. He didn't try to convince them of the rightness of his action. He didn't urge them to focus on the promise of freedom. He didn't defend himself or God. Instead, Moses turned to the Lord. He spoke to God frankly: "Why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all" (Exod. 5:22–23). Translation: What's taking so long? Things have gotten much worse and, God, it's all Your fault!

Ever felt that way? Most of us have.

The beauty of Moses is that he expressed his frustrations in the right place. He could have tried to reason with the elders. Instead, he spoke to God. These weren't polite words. He accused God of doing evil (some translations soften that prayer—instead asking God why he has brought this trouble on the people). **We don't need to be cautious when speaking our hearts to God.** He knows our thoughts already, so why not be honest? Moses was frank and God didn't rebuke him.

Here is God's reply: "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh" (6:1). Hang on, Moses. Now the real fun begins! Then God reminded Moses of something He didn't give Abraham or Isaac or Jacob His name. That's significant. He recalled His covenant with the patriarchs to give the people the land of Canaan. He repeated that He had heard the groaning of the people—He understood their suffering—and He had promised to deliver the people from slavery and to do so with great acts of judgment. Then He would bring them to the Promised Land, deliver it to them, and be their God.

There's a lot here. It's a reminder of how we need to continually, daily, hear God's promises to us. Are you committed to spending time every day feeding your mind with the Word of God?

Moses was revived by the words from God. Finally, he was able to face the people. With God's clear message, he spoke to the people of Israel to assure them that all would come to pass as promised.

So did the people respond positively to God's message? No, they did not listen. They were frustrated and discouraged. Moses was all alone. That's tough for a leader. Could Moses persevere in the face of such disappointment?

REFLECTION: ***How do you respond when your expectations of God are not met?***

Twenty-One: **SOURCE OF CONFIDENCE**

The Lord said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh." — Exodus 7:1

Here's the challenge. The people Moses is supposedly leading are discouraged. Actually, it's worse; their spirits are broken. God tells Moses to go back to Pharaoh and repeat the demand to let the Hebrews go. Moses answers by saying in essence, "What's the point?" The people of Israel won't listen to him. Why should Pharaoh listen to him? So far, God's plan feels like a disaster.

Then God makes an amazing statement to Moses. One that should grab our attention and shake us to the core. "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet."

Now I'm sure Moses doesn't feel like God to anyone. That doesn't matter. Regardless of how he feels, it's a fact. This is vitally important because the king must learn who God is. He must know Who is behind all the disasters that will soon befall his kingdom. How will he learn? The only way he can is through another person who knows God personally. God reveals Himself to Moses, and Moses passes that knowledge to Pharaoh and others through his words and actions.

What makes this more poignant is that Pharaoh is supposedly god in Egypt. Therefore a confrontation is inevitable. Human god will meet the real God and learn who is more powerful. That is the drama behind the ten plagues that occupy chapters 7 through 12 of Exodus.

There is additional significance. If Moses is like God to Pharaoh, then Moses is untouchable. Isn't it likely that the king wanted to kill Moses? This man was a threat to Egypt's economy and security. The obvious solution was to eliminate the leader of this rebellion. But Pharaoh can't touch God's man. God won't allow it.

This is a vital point to remember. **When you follow God's directions, you are protected until such time as your mission is accomplished.** That doesn't mean it's safe. It was dangerous to tell and repeat an unwanted message to an obstinate tyrant. Likewise, it was dangerous for a teenage boy to fight a giant

warrior (see I Samuel 17), or for a prophet to deliver God's message to his country's worst enemies (read Jonah). Think of Ananias being told to go minister to Saul, a terrorist who was on assignment to shut down the church in Damascus. Of course he was afraid. God said, "Go!"

So we must obey when God commands. He is responsible for our protection while we fulfill His mandate. Is it possible that we may not return? Yes, it is possible. Go anyway! Go with confidence because you are on a divine assignment. And when you go, be prepared to proclaim God's message.

This leads to the purpose of Aaron—"Aaron shall be your prophet." Moses and Aaron didn't have to make up a message. God told them exactly what to say. That should also give us confidence. Today we preach what we know. If you aren't confident of your message, that's a clue that you need to spend more time in The Book learning and absorbing the message we are commissioned to deliver.

Confrontation is never comfortable, but it is necessary. Moses was the first major prophet to confront a world power. Others would follow, people like Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and the Apostle Paul. Effective confrontation requires people with conviction. These prophets had it because they knew God.

REFLECTION: ***How confident are you to deliver God's message? What do you need to do to have more confidence to fulfill His mission?***

Twenty-Two: **HOW TO “BE GOD”**

The Lord said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh.” — Exodus 7:1

Jesus gives us the same privilege God gave to Moses—to speak for Him to a hostile world. Jesus could have started the Church Himself. He didn’t need the Apostles. He took a risk working through those men. We are in the same position. God is taking a risk with Al and Andrew . . . and you! God still looks for men and women who will step forward and become His visible presence.

I (Andrew) have written before about my encounters with leaders of radical Islamic groups, such as Hezbollah and Hamas.[4] My first such meeting occurred in the mid-1980s. A relative of someone I knew had been kidnapped in Lebanon, chained to a radiator, and held hostage by a radical Islamist group for more than three years. No one knew where he was being held, but we had word that he was very ill.

During this time, a powerful Shi’ite leader was preaching a revolutionary message in one of the Beirut mosques. Tapes of his sermons were selling by the tens of thousands on city streets. His name was Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah. Under his inspiration, a new political and military force emerged in Lebanon, the Hezbollah or “party of God.” Apparently this was the primary group responsible for capturing and holding the hostages.

I travelled to Lebanon (I visited twice per year during the fifteen-year-long civil war) and managed to arrange an appointment with Fadlallah through a man whose name, ironically, was Jihad. Carrying a large, gilt-edged Arabic Bible wrapped in plain paper, I waited in the lobby of the Garden Hotel in West Beirut and wondered what would stop Hezbollah from adding this Dutchman to their collection of hostages. Suddenly several heavily armed men burst into the lobby. Loiterers quickly exited as the man in charge asked me if I was Andrew. I was ordered to ride with Jihad and follow a van that had been converted into a crude armored personnel carrier. I could see gun barrels pointing out the windows of the van and another car behind us as we tore through the city streets.

After passing through a heavily protected checkpoint and having my body and

package searched, I was escorted to meet with the sheikh. Fadlallah, who later was known by the title ayatollah, waited for me, dressed in a long gray caftan covered by a black cape-like robe, and wearing a black turban on his head.

After a brief introduction I told the leader, **"I am a Christian and I am here representing Jesus Christ, attempting to do whatever I can to help bring peace to Lebanon."** Fadlallah nodded as his left hand fingered a string of prayer beads. As I offered him my gift, I said, "That is why I want you to have a copy of the Bible. I don't know what the Quran says about hostage taking, but I know what the Bible says, and God is against it. That is why I hope you will read this book. This is my present to you."

Fadlallah graciously accepted the Bible and in a soft baritone voice said, "We are friends with Christians. If both Muslims and Christians would read their holy books, they would understand each other better."

Not a bad start. This man was a man of his book, as committed to the Quran as I was to the Bible. I wondered how he would respond to my proposal.

REFLECTION: ***Have you ever felt God direct you to go and confront someone more powerful than you, someone who perhaps scared you? How did you respond? If you didn't go, can you honestly confess to God why you didn't?***

Twenty-Three: **FOLLOW-THROUGH**

You shall speak all that I command you. —Exodus 7:2

I was sitting with Ayatollah Fadlallah, the spiritual leader of Hezbollah. He had accepted my gift of a Bible. Now it was time to deliver my message. Taking a deep breath, I said, “In the spirit of cooperation, I believe God wants you to release the hostages. All of them.”

The ayatollah didn’t respond immediately but finally said, “I don’t see how I can help you.”

“You are leader of Hezbollah. Surely you can order the hostages released.”

With a wry smile he answered, “You can meet with Hezbollah leaders, but I do not represent Hezbollah.” It was also obvious that he could deliver a message to those leaders.

So what was my message? I told him about the man, a devout Christian, who was among the hostages. “I have put my house in order. I am fully prepared to stay here and take the place of this man. He has suffered enough. Chain me to the radiator and let him go.”

Clearly this request caught the sheikh by surprise. I could see it in the momentary shock on his face. Then like a champion poker player he covered his emotions. Quietly he asked, “How can you say that?”

“This is the spirit of Jesus,” I answered. I stood and spread out my arms to demonstrate. “He died on the cross to let us go free. He died so we could live. Now I’m ready to give myself up so my friend can go free. That is what Christianity is all about.”

“I have never heard about this kind of Christianity,” Fadlallah said.

Like Pharaoh the ayatollah did not grant my request to let the hostages go. But we did start a conversation that lasted for several years before he died in 2010. This included a visit in which I offered my condolence after his sister died in a bus crash. I introduced him to several Lebanese pastors, scholars, and evangelists. I felt it was important to build bridges between local Muslim and Christian leaders. This is the kind of witness I believe God wants us to have with those who do not know Jesus. **How will Muslims or any other religious**

followers or atheists learn of Jesus if we don't show them what He looks like in our lives?

Whether I had any lasting impact on Ayatollah Fadlallah, I will never know. But I learned from this experience that it's easy to talk with fundamentalists. I find them honest and inquisitive. Yes, they are also direct and outspoken—maybe that is why you can speak your message without fear. Why won't more Christians do it?

There are some people I find harder to reach. For example, I met several times with Yasser Arafat, leader of the PLO. He was a politician. When I saw him, he'd pull a cross from his pocket. It was just a game. There was a big difference between Arafat and Fadlallah. Arafat wanted to gain and hold onto power and would say whatever he thought would make you happy. Fadlallah was firm in his convictions. He would quietly declare what he believed was true even if it made you mad.

Whether politician or fundamentalist, everyone needs a chance to hear God's message. They deserve a chance to meet God's Son. You and I are the only Jesus they may ever meet.

REFLECTION: ***Are you letting Christ shine through you so that people around you can know Him? How can people observe Jesus in you?***

Twenty-Four: **THE SECRET OF ACCOMPLISHING THE IMPOSSIBLE**

So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded.
—Exodus 7:10

Let the battle begin! The gods of Egypt versus the Creator of the universe. The god Pharaoh versus the God of Moses. A pantheon of deities versus Yahweh, the great I Am.

Most of us avoid confrontation. By nature we are compromisers. Moses, however, at God's instigation, embraced confrontation. Did Moses realize that he was entering into spiritual warfare? Pharaoh had real power, and it included the occult. So when Aaron threw down his staff and it became a serpent (Exod. 7:10), the king called on his magicians, and they duplicated the feat. Then Aaron's staff swallowed up the magicians' staffs. That show didn't convince Pharaoh of God's superior power. It would take much more to change his mind.

The first plague, changing the water of the Nile into blood, Pharaoh's magicians duplicated by their secret arts. The second plague, calling up the frogs, was likewise matched by the conjurers, although those men couldn't stop the frog problem—Pharaoh needed Moses to pray to Yahweh for that to happen.

The third plague revealed the limit of human tricks. The magi-cians could not turn dust into gnats and they admitted to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." Pharaoh refused to listen.

So the war escalated—the powers of the occult, political might, and God Himself collided. As a result, people suffered. They endured boils, their crops were destroyed, their livestock was wiped out. Did the people of Egypt realize the spiritual significance of these events? Probably not. They just suffered.

Never enter into spiritual combat lightly. **We must engage the enemy only under the direction and protection of God because victory by human means is impossible.**

It's important to remember that on their own Moses and Aaron were powerless. They could not perform a single miracle. They acted only at God's direction. They had no ability of their own to defeat the gods of Egypt unless

God Himself provided it.

REFLECTION: ***Where do you see evidence of spiritual warfare in the world around you? How can you pray against it?***

Twenty-Five: **THIS IS WAR!**

> *The magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.*
> —Exodus 8:19

Don't think the confrontation between God and Pharaoh was a unique event. Like Moses, we are called to be God's instruments in spiritual combat.

However, spiritual warfare in this world is too great for us to handle. If we try to fight in our own strength, we will be like the Jewish exorcists who attempted to expel an evil spirit in the name of Jesus "whom Paul proclaims." The evil spirit attacked them and overpowered them so that they fled naked and wounded (see Acts 19:11–17). Jesus expects us to confront the powers of this world while knowing always that He said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). We depend on being connected to the vine, the person of Christ Himself. We must be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

In addition, we can call on the Father in prayer and ask for any resources we need to accomplish His Son's mission. Jesus said if we believed in Him, we would do the works He did and greater works. That's impossible! No it isn't. "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it" (14:13–14).

Paul the Apostle never shunned a confrontation with the occult. Paul and Barnabas were in Cyprus (see Acts 13:4–12) and met a false prophet, a sorcerer named Elymas who had influence with the governor. The governor wanted to hear the word of God from Barnabas and Paul, but Elymas interfered and urged the governor to ignore the Gospel. Luke, the author of Acts, emphasized that Paul was full of the Holy Spirit when Elymas confronted him. He faced the false prophet, calling him "son of the devil," and exposed him as a fraud. By today's standards Paul wasn't very tolerant! Then Paul declared the deceiver would be struck blind, and immediately Elymas began groping in darkness. The governor became a believer.

That's the kind of Spirit-inspired boldness we need today. A few years ago in the Netherlands, there was a man who claimed he was god and couldn't die. He held meetings and did some miracles, drawing a crowd. When he announced

he was starting a congregation in the town where I (Andrew) lived, I gathered a few friends. We prayed fervently and then attended the meeting. While the false prophet was speaking, I stood up and yelled so that all could hear: “This message is cursed.” My friends and I handed out tracts as people left the meeting. That cult never appeared in our town again.

The spiritual forces in the world are strong. Never minimize them. Occultism is widespread and we should naturally fear it. However, it must be confronted. If we are convinced something is wrong, why don’t we say it? If you know God, there is no need to fear the enemy. The gates of hell cannot withstand the power of the resurrected Christ.

REFLECTION: ***Is there a part you are called to play in the spiritual conflict around you? How will you recognize the leading of the Holy Spirit?***

Twenty-Six: **TIME TO CHOOSE**

They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. —Exodus 12:7

Moses can only do so much for the Hebrews. There comes a point in which the people have to choose whether or not they believe God by following the instructions of His servant.

At first, the instructions must not have made much sense. Each family was to choose a male lamb or one-year-old goat—one animal per family (if it was a small family, they could share with a neighbor). Five days later they were to kill the lamb and—this is the critical part—the blood of the lamb had to be smeared outside on the sides and the top of the doorframe of the house where they ate the animal. Oh, and the meat had to be roasted, not boiled or eaten raw. They were told to eat the meal quickly and be ready to depart. They must have wondered why each family had to select a lamb or goat and why a male lamb. What difference did the sex make? The strong impression they got was that they had to do all these things as if their lives depended on it. And, in fact, their lives did depend on it!

So, you're a Hebrew. What do you say to these strange instructions? There isn't much explanation given, but the stakes are sky high. Obey, or the firstborn in your home dies. No exceptions. Every house in Egypt—native or Jewish, palace or one-room hut—is affected. Wealth and social status make no difference. Education won't save you. It's impossible to talk or buy your way out of this. Either someone dies or an animal dies in his place.

The only protection available is blood. If there is no blood on the doorframe, the firstborn will die. Every Egyptian home was struck with disaster. Every Jewish home was spared because: "All the people of Israel did just as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron" (Exod. 12:50).

Some may protest that this doesn't sound like a loving God. Where is the grace? The grace is in the blood. It was true then and it's true today. **Without the shedding of blood there is no grace.** Either we pay the price for our sin or we follow God's instructions and allow another to pay the penalty. We may think we

can earn God's favor but what we think is irrelevant.

The only hope for the Hebrews was to follow the clear instructions of God. That's still the case today. In western cultures it's not considered tolerant to insist that the only way of salvation is through the blood of Jesus Christ, which was shed on the cross. Yet that is fact. There is only one way in which we can be saved (John 14:6).

The Israelites couldn't choose how they would be saved. Neither can we.

REFLECTION: ***Do you think it's unreasonable for God to insist that our salvation be dependent on the blood of Jesus? Why or why not?***

Twenty-Seven: **TRAPPED, IN NEED OF A MIRACLE**

> *Then the Lord said to Moses, "Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea."* —Exodus 14:1–2

Our tendency is to seek easy solutions. Think about this situation from the perspective of the Hebrews. They have been saved! The Israelites trusted in the blood of a lamb and as a result were released from slavery and were headed to a new life in the Promised Land. After all the suffering they had endured, shouldn't it be clear sailing now?

Of course, that wasn't the case. Within days of gaining their freedom, the Hebrews ran into problems. God led them from Rameses to Succoth to Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. (You can read the details in Exodus 12:37; 13:20; 14:1–2; and Num. 33:5–7.) Then they doubled back and wound up hemmed between a natural barrier and an army bent on revenge. Now why would God place them in such a pickle?

Some think that simply believing in Jesus—saying a prayer, asking Him to forgive your sins, and inviting Him into your heart—is the end of all trouble. Those who receive Christ with this expectation are inevitably disappointed. So many people say, "I've done everything I'm supposed to do." They've prayed. They've tithed. As though faith were a vending machine—insert some coins and see your prayers answered.

There is no automatic reward for doing what you believe is God's will. For two reasons. First, there is an enemy who won't give you up without a fight. Second, God leads the journey and He is likely to direct you into the wilderness so that you can grow in character.

That's the pattern we find in Exodus. God had a plan and he explained it to Moses (Exod. 14:1–4). Like a coach drawing a diagram for his team, God instructed Israel to change direction—they had escaped from Egypt in the most direct way possible. And God told them exactly where to camp, which was directly in front of the sea (most likely a body of water known now as the Bitter Lakes). Well, obviously this put the people in a precarious situation because, if the Egyptians were watching, they would know this was the perfect opportunity

to crush their former minions.

From a human perspective, it was a stupid move. But for God's purposes, it was perfect. God explained that Pharaoh would think that the Hebrews were leaderless, wandering lost in the wilderness, and decide this was the opportunity to gain revenge. Listen to God's punch line: "I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD" (v. 4). If the Egyptians didn't know already, this would eliminate all doubt.

We need to remember that God's plan is not for us individually—though it does include each of us—but for the whole world. Dozens of times in Scripture reference is made to God's work among the nations. So don't be surprised if His plans for the world don't take our comfort into consideration.

REFLECTION: ***What is the most hopeless situation you ever faced? Did you see God come through and rescue you?***

Twenty-Eight: **DON'T JUST PRAY, MOVE!**

The Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward." —Exodus 14:15

The people following Moses are thinking only about their needs. When they realize they are bound in front by the sea while the Egyptian army bears down on them from behind, they panic. So, obviously, they pray. Right?

No, they complain! **Take note, complaining is not the same as prayer.** It doesn't require any spiritual insight to grumble.

The people complain that their situation is hopeless. That's what countless years of slavery will do to you. They desperately need another perspective, which is what Moses provides.

Moses confidently tells the people to shut up and watch!

Okay, what he really says is: "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent" (Exod. 14:13–14). Spoken like the true prophet that he was. Does Moses believe it? This is really a hopeless situation. The Hebrews trusted Moses to lead them and he led them into an impossible dilemma.

The people really should pray, but they can't. So Moses prays!

God answers, "Why do you cry to me?" Well, isn't it obvious?

Then this: "Tell the people of Israel to go forward."

What? Moses must have thought. *That's a big body of water in front of us. You want us to move* where *forward? Wouldn't left or right make more sense?*

Again Moses must obey God's instructions. He lifts his staff and stretches his hand out over the sea and God divides it.

It's important to feel the hopelessness and darkness in this situation at the Red Sea (or Bitter Lakes). Only then can we truly appreciate God's rescue.

Now jump forward another millennium and feel it again four hundred years after the Old Testament concludes with the prophet Malachi. Silence, hopelessness, darkness. God hasn't spoken in centuries. He must have forgotten his people. Then the incarnation occurs in Bethlehem.

Now, feel the hopelessness and darkness of billions of people today, people who haven't heard once from God. They are trapped. They see no escape. Religion can't free them.

That's the context in which we, like Moses, must act on God's leading. That's why we introduce people to the sacrifice and victory of Jesus.

REFLECTION: ***Think about a lost person, preferably someone you know who has rejected the Gospel. What hope do they have for this life? What about life after death? Spend some time in prayer for him or her.***

Twenty-Nine: **WHERE TO NOW?**

Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. —Exodus 15:22

Saved! For the second time in just days, God rescued the Hebrews. This time the army of their oppressors was destroyed. It was a miracle! Finally the people believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses. They sang and danced in celebration (read Exod. 15:1–21).

Now, can we get on to Canaan? We believe you, God. Take us to the Promised Land!

No, God hadn't finished the training program. In fact it had only started—the Hebrews had much to learn. Just three days after victory, they were grumbling against Moses because they couldn't drink the water at Marah where they were camped. The Lord was testing them. Would they listen? Would they follow His instructions?

The path of instruction is through wilderness. With every trial the people whine. *We are hungry. We're thirsty. We want some bread. We miss the meat we had in Egypt. Why did you bring us out here to die?*

God met the needs in abundance. Meat flew right into the camp. Bread (manna) appeared on the ground six days a week. Still the people had short attention spans. They wouldn't follow instructions. When problems arose, it was never their fault. Poor Moses suffered the brunt of their complaints.

It takes time to move two to three million people with all their animals, tents, and other possessions. It took at least two months for them to arrive at the mountain. We don't want to make a big issue of this, but we don't believe the real Mount Sinai is located where tourists visit today. That location was chosen by the mother of Roman Emperor Constantine. My (Andrew's) research leads us to believe that Mount Sinai is in the region of Midian where Moses lived for forty years, in what today is Saudi Arabia. The mountain is probably the one called Jabal Al Lawz—it even has a blackened peak apparently caused by fire.

I (Andrew) tried once to visit the mountain but was prevented by Saudi authorities. No one is allowed near Jabal Al Lawz—Muslims consider it too

holy.

Whether this place or the popular location or some other unknown mountain is the real Mount Sinai is not important for our purposes. What we need to see is that Mount Sinai is a gigantic classroom where the people had to learn all the rules for worship and daily life that they would need to apply in the Promised Land. You can read these instructions primarily in Exodus and Leviticus.

There are two basic ways to learn how to live as God wants His people to live. One is through formal education, primarily gained through His Book. The second is to learn through life experience. Either way education takes time. Both were the purpose of the wilderness. The Hebrews needed to learn to trust God daily. No water? Pray and see God provide. Hungry? Every morning God offered nutritious manna for them to collect. Enemies attack? Watch God give the victory.

It's no different today. **We believe that without exception everyone whom God uses experiences time in the wilderness.** It could be a time of spiritual dryness. It may mean enduring a meaningless job. It could express itself in a frustrating relationship or perplexing circumstances. These are the places where God forms His people. Don't forget that Moses needed forty years tending sheep before he was ready for God's mission.

Don't look at trials and tests as unbearable burdens. And don't do what the Hebrews did: grumble and complain. Look at difficult circumstances as opportunities to trust God and see Him provide.

REFLECTION: ***What situations has God used to teach you how to trust Him?***

Part 3

GETTING TO KNOW YAHWEH

Thirty: **A DIRECT WORD FROM GOD**

". . . do not let God speak to us, lest we die." —Exodus 20:19

The Hebrews were excited. They were going to meet the One who had saved them! They had spent three days at the base of Mount Sinai preparing and purifying themselves, putting on their best clothes as though they were meeting a head of state—actually, the Master of the universe. Thunder and lightning and a thick cloud announced God's arrival. It was quite a show.

Don't you wish you had been there? We love a celebrity event or political rally or a pageant, especially when it includes fireworks. "Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain" (Exod. 19:17). Smoke rose from the mountain. The ground shook. The sound of the trumpet rose in crescendo. God warned Moses to hold the people back—there would be no rushing the Hero of the Exodus. Anyone who set foot on the mountain would die.

God had everyone's undivided attention!

Then Yahweh introduced Himself: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (20:2). A huge roar erupted from the crowd. Okay, the Scriptures don't say that, but can't you imagine how those first words impacted the people? They were excited. They were witnessing history!

Just a few minutes later the people backed away. They begged Moses to be the intermediary. "Do not let God speak to us, lest we die." What happened? All God did was explain the terms of His covenant with them—what we commonly call the Ten Commandments. In the process, the Hebrews experienced the fear of God. Actually, it is more accurate to say they were terrified.

Do you sometimes wish that God would speak directly to us? It would eliminate so many objections. Many people say God hasn't spoken to them so why should they believe He exists? Well at least two million people heard God with their own ears and they didn't like it one bit.

People really don't want such a direct encounter with God because then they have no excuse if they disobey Him. God's laws are so black-and-white.

We’d rather be free to choose if we will follow Him in any given situation.

REFLECTION: ***How well do you want to get to know God? How close do you want to be to Him?***

Thirty-One: **WHAT'S THE CATCH?**

You shall have no other gods before me. —Exodus 20:3

The problem at Mount Sinai was "exclusivity." God had freed the Hebrews. They were no longer slaves in Egypt. They were headed to their own country where they would raise their own crops and build their own homes and cities without cruel taskmasters beating them. There was just one catch. The God who won them this freedom, performing all the miracles to spring them from their prison, this God insisted that He be the sole object of their worship.

Sounds reasonable, don't you think? But look at it from the Israelite perspective. *Sure we appreciate our freedom. Don't misunderstand; we are grateful. Thank you very much! But don't box us in a corner. We want to keep our options open. After all, there are many religions. Numerous gods. Who's to say that one religion is greater than another?*

When the people glimpsed the raw power of God, they realized this was not Someone they longed to get close to. They could handle a nice, loving deity who left them alone except when they were in trouble. But a God who put strict demands on them—well, it was safer to keep your distance. Frankly He seemed more like an angry Pharaoh. "Moses, you talk with Him," they said. "You tell us what He says. But keep Him away from us."

So Moses became the intermediary. He also received the blessing.

God instituted the priesthood through the tribe of Levi because the people of Israel were unwilling to approach God themselves. Many people today prefer a go-between like Moses to a direct encounter with the Almighty. We tend to view pastors this way. Our "job" is to listen to a preacher on Sunday. He prays, hopefully, and listens to God and does all the work, delivering God's message. We sit in the pews, listen, and decide whether or not it applies to us. If we like the message, we slip a buck in the offering basket. We hope that's not your approach.

Sure we all need good preachers. We also need more people like Moses—people who meet directly with God. You can be a person like that. However, there is a genuine risk in engaging directly with God. When the people told

Moses to deal with God and leave them out of it, he ascended the mountain to meet with God and entered into a dark cloud (Exod. 20:21). What was it like? We don't know. It's that uncertainty that makes us hesitate to fully commit ourselves to the relationship with God. As C. S. Lewis wrote about Aslan, the Christ-figure in the Narnia stories: "He's not safe, but he's good."

Do you really want to know God? Moses did. The relationship started at this same mountain, with a burning bush. It grew as Moses saw the miraculous works of Yahweh. Now he was about to enter into a whole new depth of relationship. Moses had no idea what he would discover.

REFLECTION: ***Is there anything that frightens you about really getting to know God? What is it?***

Thirty-Two: **DON'T BE SO IMPATIENT**

> *When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."* —Exodus 32:1

Six weeks isn't a very long period in which to lose one's faith. Why would people turn so quickly away from God after all the miracles He had performed? Wasn't the securing of their freedom enough to earn a little loyalty? How could the children of Israel even consider making and worshiping a golden animal?

Actually, we should not be surprised at this behavior. The prayers of the Hebrews were answered. They'd received what they wanted. Isn't that the way we like our religion? We prefer a one-way relationship. We have a need, so we pray. God answers and, hopefully, we receive what we want. That's it! You put a coin in the religion machine and out pops the desired result.

The Hebrews understood religion. It was plastered all over Egypt. There were idols and images and deities with names. You prayed and they didn't talk back. They certainly didn't fire lightning bolts and demand exclusivity. No, they were tolerant of multiple gods. You tipped your head in their direction, then partied.

When it comes to the Divine, people want the visible, the touchable, something they can handle. Yahweh, the God who is, doesn't translate into something tangible like a beetle or a cow or even the sun. Just what does Yahweh look like? It's one thing to see lightning and smoke. Fireworks are fun for a few minutes. But now there is only a thick cloud shrouding the mountain. And silence. Let's get on with it. *We want to go to the new land where we will live. Enough of this waiting. We waited four hundred years—that's long enough.*

Whom do the people turn to? Aaron, Moses' brother. "Do something!" they demand. "You're number two—and number one is who knows where." One translation of Exodus 32:1 has the people telling Aaron, "Get to work." Doing anything is better than waiting and doing nothing. **So let's make up in speed what we lack in direction.**

Aaron responds by taking an offering. He collects gold earrings and melts

them down. Now what? He lived in Egypt many years so he copies what he knows. He molds the molten metal into a calf. Strange—the idols of Egypt were crushed in god-to-God combat. Why would anyone want to return to the inferior while they stand in the shadow of the superior Yahweh? Maybe because they were terrified of this God. How much simpler it is to offer a few sacrifices to an idol, then sit down and party and enjoy a little orgy.

REFLECTION: ***What idols compete with God for your affections?***

Thirty-Three: **A TRAGIC LEADER**

Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord." —Exodus 32:5

What is true leadership? Many of us are used to democracy where leaders supposedly yield to the will of the people. If we don't like our leaders, we vote them out of office and replace them with someone "better."

But what if the people are wrong? Sometimes a leader needs to step up, speak the truth, and try to sway the crowd. They may reject his message. Or they may not.

Aaron faced a serious crisis. The Hebrews put tremendous pressure on him. Rather than ask for time and seek wisdom, Aaron yielded to the pressure of the people, built an altar, and declared "a feast to Yahweh." Yes, that's what the Scripture says—Moses' brother called the idol by God's own name.

In a genuine crisis, Aaron yielded to democracy rather than theocracy. **Aaron was not radical and radical is what this situation demanded.** Acting by consensus is not leadership—not when you ignore reality. Aaron had one foot with the people, the other foot with God—he covered his backside, just in case. That's not leadership.

When Moses confronted Aaron with his sin, Aaron gave the most pitiful excuse. "It's not my fault," he whined. "The people made me do it." (He could have said the Devil made him do it—that was probably more accurate.) "They gave me their gold and I threw it in the fire and look—out jumped a calf!" (That's a paraphrase of verse 24). It was a miracle!

Aaron could not have been serious! Why couldn't he admit his failure? Because it would make him look weak. He'd seen numerous miracles, so maybe he figured he could lie and claim another miracle to get himself off the hook. When cornered, we tend to grab for the first available excuse, no matter how ludicrous.

We should feel the utter heartbreak of this situation. The tragedy is that a whole nation was throwing away their salvation, and Aaron didn't realize it. Did it never occur to him to stop and pray? *What is Yahweh's will in this situation?*

No, Yahweh was his brother's God. Moses met with God, told Aaron what to say, and Aaron repeated the message. Only Moses wasn't there and Aaron had an unruly mob on his hands. What could anyone reasonably expect of him?

Likewise, the Hebrews didn't fall on their knees to pray; they rose up instead to play. While the people partied, God planned their destruction and they were clueless.

Aaron was completely incompetent. He took a poll to see which way the wind was blowing and set policy according to popular opinion. Polls are not a tactic of God's Kingdom. A majority of sinful minds will never deliver failsafe policy. We need clear direction from the Monarch Himself, and Moses was the only one in a position to receive that.

Where will we obtain such direction today?

REFLECTION: ***When you hear the latest popular opinion poll, how do you compare it with God's revealed direction?***

Thirty-Four: **AN OFFER MOSES CAN'T REFUSE**

The Lord said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves." —Exodus 32:7

If you have children, have you ever been upset at them and told your spouse, "They're *your* children, not mine"? It's natural that, when someone we love doesn't behave as we expect, we tend to distance ourselves from the offender.

Here's the situation. Moses and God are having a delightful time. True, Moses is fasting but he's not focused on his body. For days God has revealed plans for an exquisite tabernacle where the people of Israel can meet Him. Moses has captured every detail—all the measurements and specific blueprints for each piece of furniture. Then suddenly God's mood changes completely. Moses has seen God angry before—he got a glimpse at the burning bush when Moses suggested God send someone else to rescue His people. This outburst is worse. Much, much worse!

First, God disowns the Hebrews. These aren't His people anymore. *Moses, they belong to you! You deal with them!* Moses probably wondered what could produce such outrage. Then God explains:

- The people have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them.
- They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it.
- They have said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt."

God's conclusion was right on—the Hebrews were indeed a stiff-necked people. So what was He going to do about it? What Moses heard next absolutely rocked him: "Leave me alone. I am so angry that I will destroy them all. I'm going to start over. Moses, I will make a great nation out of you" (Exod. 32:10 paraphrase).

Has anyone ever had an offer like that? Maybe Noah—God wiped out the whole world and started over with one family. If He did it before, He could do it again. As Creator, He alone possessed that right.

What about Abraham? He received the promise of countless children but

never lived to see it. Moses could see two to three million descendants of Abraham. All he had to do was walk down the mountain and observe the masses. It wouldn't take much to imagine them all dead. He just had to think back three months and remember the dead Egyptian soldiers washing up on the shore of the Bitter Lakes after God destroyed Pharaoh's army.

If Moses wondered about the ethics of this, he might quickly realize that he was a descendent of Abraham. Trace the line through Isaac, Jacob, and Levi to Moses and it was clear that God wouldn't be breaking any promise to Abraham.

Still, God's declaration presented Moses with a difficult choice. He was stuck with a bunch of ingrates and infidels who turned their back on God at every opportunity. Here was his big chance to escape the job of being their leader, a role he didn't want anyway. The slate could be wiped clean and he could become the patriarch of a great nation. How many of us could say no to such an offer?

However, Moses felt a heavy responsibility. He acted on principle when he left Pharaoh's palace and chose to align himself with Israel. How could he turn his back on these people now? **If Moses could just calm God down—how does anyone do that?—maybe he could present another perspective.** That sounds crazy but it's what Moses was thinking.

> **REFLECTION:** ***Have you ever thought that a group of people were so wicked that God should wipe them out? What do you do with such thoughts?***

Thirty-Five: **AN OFFER MOSES MUST REFUSE**

Moses implored the Lord his God. —Exodus 32:11

How do you talk with an angry person? That's what God is—furious! He feels betrayed, like a jealous husband who catches his wife in an affair. No, it's worse. This is total treachery. The Hebrews are attempting a coup d'état. The purpose is to replace the legitimate ruler. It's barely three months since God miraculously rescued the Hebrews. Now they say a blob of metal rescued them. What an insult! God's honor has been shamed. In the Middle East, then and now, such shame cannot be ignored.

This is a major crisis in the history of Israel and the people have no clue that their future is at stake. Moses understands the gravity of the situation. His response is instructive. He says in essence, "God, You can't do this!" **Moses does not accept a word from God as the Word of God.** Not yet, anyway; not without some prayerful discussion.

At first, nothing can calm God's rage—after all He's done! The great Liberator of Israel utters threats in the heat of the moment. If the Offended Party will just calm down, He might realize that He still cares for the offender. But someone must intervene to provide a balanced perspective.

That's what Moses does. Various translations of Exodus 32:11 say, "Moses sought the favor of the LORD" (NIV), "Moses implored the LORD his God" (ESV), "Moses entreated the LORD his God" (NASB), "Moses tried to pacify the LORD his God" (NLT), and "Moses tried to calm his God down" (The Message). All of those translations feel too tame. In His current state, nothing Moses says will make a difference. But if he can tenderize the anger, maybe then he can speak a little logic into the situation. We combed lexicons and commentaries and learned that the Hebrew verb here conveys the idea of touching, or more accurately, massaging. The picture is of Moses hesitating, then reaching out and touching the face of God, caressing it to mollify Him. Have you ever seen wrinkles appear on the forehead of an angry person? We imagine Moses' "touch" was intended to smooth God's wrinkles, so to speak. What a deep friendship and fellowship Moses had with God! He was so close to God that he could touch

Him.

Of course some would argue that Moses couldn't literally see or touch God's face. Later (see Exod. 33:11) we learn that Moses met with God face-to-face as with a friend. That's exactly what is happening here. Still later, Moses wants to see God's glory and God insists that no one can see His face and live. So what is actually happening? Without many details to go on, we know Moses and God are in close proximity. We don't know what Moses actually sees. Still, somehow, Moses reaches out to calm an angry God so that he might speak words that would save his people.

Certainly Moses has reason to feel frustration with the Hebrews. Nevertheless they are his people. That was settled more than forty years ago when he chose to identify with the Hebrews and reject the life of royalty in Pharaoh's palace. Does Moses throw away that investment? No, he can't! But how does anyone reason with an angry God?

REFLECTION: ***Do you agree that Moses was correct to try to calm down God? Why or why not?***

Thirty-Six: **WHY APPEAL TO GOD?**

Moses implored the Lord his God and said, "O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people?" —Exodus 32:11

Moses knew God's compassion—he had seen it at the first encounter at the burning bush when God said He had heard the cries of the people. God knew how they had suffered. So Moses played on that compassion and more. He reminded God that He had brought the people "out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand" (Exod. 32:11). Moses was saying, "God, this was your doing, not mine. I was just your human instrument."

Then Moses appealed to God's reputation. Why should the Egyptians slander God by saying that He brought them out of the land "to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth?" (v. 12). What goes unsaid is that God had defeated all the gods of Egypt. He had demonstrated favoritism to the Hebrews. All those miracles would go to waste because no one would ever want to associate with Yahweh.

Finally, Moses recalled the promises God had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Remember those promises, he says. Yahweh, you said, "I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever" (v. 13). So God, are you going to keep Your promise?

Now, we've acknowledged that technically God could fulfill that oath through Moses and still destroy the Hebrews who had turned away from Him . But that certainly wasn't the spirit of those ancient covenants. Unspoken was the deeper root issue—would the descendants of Moses fare any better? The problem of sin was systemic throughout all humans.

Based on these three arguments Moses begged God not to carry out His threat to destroy the people. Miraculously, God listened. And God changed His mind.

We are confronted with this challenge. **Are we willing to go toe-to-toe with God and plead for the salvation of people?** Are we willing to appeal to Him based on His reputation? We can be sure that, if all we do is pray for personal needs for ourselves and our friends, we will never know God the way Moses did.

And we will never make an impact on the world.

REFLECTION: ***Have you ever pleaded with God for a person or group of people based on His promises and reputation? What perspective on prayer does this give you?***

Thirty-Seven: **CAN GOD REALLY CHANGE HIS MIND?**

So the Lord changed his mind about the terrible disaster he had threatened to bring on his people. —Exodus 32:14 NLT

In 1990 I (Andrew) wrote a book called *And God Changed His Mind*. Many people objected to that title, arguing that God is unchanging. He chose us before the creation of the world. He knows the beginning and the end. He's omniscient, the author of providence. How could God possibly change His mind?

So let's surrender to God's will and accept our fate! In fact why bother to pray at all if everything is predetermined according to God's will? That's a good question. Why didn't Moses submit to God's revealed will in Exodus 32:10—". . . let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you." Shouldn't Moses salute and say, "Aye, aye, Lord! Your will be done." Moses didn't do that. There is passion as he attempts to persuade God not to carry out His threats.

Including this crisis, there are at least seven times in the Old Testament when God changed His mind. Some versions translate the Hebrew word as "relented" or some similar word. Twice Amos pleaded with God to change His mind. God revealed to the prophet that He would send a plague of locusts. Amos prayed, "O Sovereign LORD, please forgive us or we will not survive, for Israel is so small" (Amos 7:2 NLT). Later in another vision God revealed that He would punish Israel with a great fire. Again Amos prayed: "O Sovereign LORD, please stop or we will not survive, for Israel is so small" (v. 5 NLT). Both times "The LORD relented from this plan" and said, "I will not do it" (vv. 3, 6 NLT).

Was God toying with Amos? Was this a game? We don't think so.

In Jeremiah, God tells the weeping prophet that He will not carry out His planned destruction if the nation "renounces its evil ways" (Jer. 18:8 NLT). Later God orders Jeremiah to preach in the Temple courtyard. "Perhaps they will listen and turn from their evil ways. Then I will change my mind about the disaster I am ready to pour out on them because of their sins" (26:3 NLT). Do we believe preaching can make a difference? Do we believe that if people repent, it might

prevent the disaster God planned?

Consider what happened to Nineveh when Jonah conducted his forty-day campaign. God had said He would destroy the city, but when the Assyrians repented, He changed His mind. Did God mean what He had said to Jonah about Nineveh? Yes, God meant it!

Observe one more example from the opposite perspective. Through the prophet Ezekiel, God revealed: “I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none. Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them. I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath” (Ezek. 22:30–31). Clearly God wanted someone to talk Him out of this judgment.

Sure, God is omniscient. He is also a person who wants to talk with us. When the stakes are high, we can make a difference. When we don’t get involved, people may perish.

What does this tell us? We are not helpless pawns, fatalists resigned to accept whatever God drops into our lives. He has given us the power to change a situation. **We can become God’s partners and collaborators in writing the story of planet Earth.** Why don’t we do it? Why don’t we enter into negotiations with God?

Listen to the heart of Jesus on the night before His execution: “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, *ask whatever you wish*, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7, italics added).

REFLECTION: ***Do you believe God can change His mind? Why or why not? What does this tell you about how to pray?***

Thirty-Eight: **NOW WHAT?**

Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand. —Exodus 32:15

What should Moses do? He had convinced God to back off from the disaster He was about to hurl at Israel. As Moses descended the mountain, he carried in his arms the law of God, engraved in stone by God's own hand. Joshua, who apparently had waited patiently for Moses—he didn't seem to fret about Moses' whereabouts like his fellow Hebrews—joined him at the base of the mountain and together they headed for camp. No doubt Moses was very weak after fasting forty days.

Remember, Moses had not yet actually viewed the crime scene that threw God into a fury. But as he and Joshua approached the camp, the noise grabbed their attention. Joshua, who was a warrior and didn't know yet the details of the encounter Moses had with God, interpreted it as noises of war. Moses understood that it was something far more sinister. Then he saw it: the golden calf, the dancing, the orgy.

Now Moses was angry. **The hot fury of God had infected his spirit and he couldn't stand still.** With a surge of adrenaline he threw down the stone tablets, smashing them at the base of the mountain. We've wondered about this action and we speculate that Moses did this intentionally. He knew those stones condemned the people, for they said: "You shall have no other gods before me" and "you shall not make for yourself a carved image. . . . You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God" (Exod. 20:3–5). So Moses, in an emotional furor, destroyed the only physical evidence of God's judgment. Two heavy volumes of rules and responsibilities in one determined throw were reduced to pebbles and dust.

It didn't matter—God had already spoken these words directly to the people. The Hebrews were accountable.

This is the start of an amazing series of actions by Moses that leads to one of the most heroic decisions ever made by a human being. After destroying the only written copy of God's law, Moses obliterates the idol. He burns it, grinds it to

powder, scatters it on water and makes the people drink it. Next he attacks his brother Aaron. “How could you let this happen?” he demands. Aaron, as we’ve already seen, attempts to deflect responsibility. He says in essence, “It’s not my fault—you know what these people are like—you simply can’t control them.”

How typical. Our tendency is to deflect blame. “God, you have to understand . . . I couldn’t help it . . . the people forced me to do this.”

Then Aaron tries to blame Moses. Of course he doesn’t directly accuse his brother but he sure implies that if only Moses had come back at a reasonable time, this would not have happened. How sad that Aaron thinks because Moses is spending time with God—at God’s invitation—that Moses is responsible for this sin of the people! No, it doesn’t make sense, but that is often how we think.

REFLECTION: ***It is frequently noted that anything that replaces God in our lives is an idol. Take a few minutes to consider whether God is truly the center of your life, or if there are one or more idols that you worship with your time and money.***

Thirty-Nine: **A RADICAL OFFER**

> *So Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. . . . But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not . . ."* —Exodus 32:31–32

The people were out of control. What would get their attention and awaken them to the horror of their behavior? Moses stood at the camp entrance and declared, "Who is on the LORD's side? Come to me" (Exod. 32:26). The Levites gathered around him and Moses deputized them to take action. The details are sketchy, but we know that about three thousand people were killed. That's a lot of people. Word quickly spread. The party was over. Celebration turned to grief. Moses had their attention.

His next words are amazing. "You have sinned a great sin," Moses declared. No argument there. "Now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin" (v. 30).

Pay attention to the words of Moses. Have any of us ever said to people in rebellion, "I will go up to the LORD"? We should study this example. **We take ourselves too seriously; we don't take our ministry seriously enough.** Moses understood the crisis and realized the only solution was atonement.

You have to wonder just how Moses would make atonement. He understood that there was a price to be paid for this mass rebellion against the great Liberator of the people. Three thousand had paid with their lives, but what about the other two-plus million people? Could enough animals be sacrificed to cover their sin? Moses didn't think so. Did Moses begin to formulate his idea at that moment? Maybe, just maybe, he could offer a solution that would please God and save the people.

Moses returned to God with fear and trembling. Boldly he proposed a plea bargain. Moses to Yahweh: "Here's the deal. I admit the people have sinned—and you forgive them. But, if you don't, if you can't forgive them, then blot me out of the book you have written" (v. 32, paraphrase).

Stop here and listen carefully. Moses is doing something unbelievably heroic. He is offering *himself* as the sacrifice for his people.

REFLECTION: ***What is your reaction to the statement that we take ourselves too seriously and don't take our ministry seriously enough?***

Forty: **HISTORY'S BOLDEST PRAYER**

Then I lay prostrate before the Lord as before, forty days and forty nights.
—Deuteronomy 9:18

Moses was utterly exhausted. Anyone who has fasted just a few days, a week, knows the feeling. Forty days with no food—Moses was at the end of his physical resources. Then he had to deal with the Israelites' apostasy. We don't know how long it was before he went back to appeal to God. Probably not very long because of the urgency of the crisis.

We imagine Moses practically crawling back up the mountain. When he reaches the summit, he's too tired to even sit upright. He falls flat on his face. Rocks dig into his dry skin. Dust covers his hair and beard. Scorpions nibble on his toes. His lips are cracked from lack of moisture. Moses doesn't care. He has an appeal to make, a proposal that can't wait.

Listen to how Moses pleads with the Almighty Yahweh:

> So I lay prostrate before the LORD for these forty days and forty nights, because the LORD had said he would destroy you. And I prayed to the LORD, "O LORD GOD, do not destroy your people and your heritage, whom you have redeemed through your greatness, whom you have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Do not regard the stubbornness of this people, or their wickedness or their sin, lest the land from which you brought us say, 'Because the Lord was not able to bring them into the land that he promised them, and because he hated them, he has brought them out to put them to death in the wilderness.' For they are your people and your heritage, whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm." —Deuteronomy 9:25–29

Wow, that's a powerful argument. That's serious prayer! However, there are commentators who would say God never intended to carry out the destruction of the Hebrews. This was a test to see what Moses would do—similar to the way God tested Abraham when He ordered the patriarch to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God. You can make that argument, though it rips the heart out of this

scene. Moses is convinced that God will carry out a holocaust if he doesn't intercede for the people.

Moses had already received instructions concerning sacrifices. The details are spelled out in Leviticus. There were offerings and atonement for sins, individual and corporate. Moses knew that every transgression must be punished. He knew that if atonement is made, punishment for the sin is transferred to the sacrifice and the sinner freed from the consequence of that offense. He knew the rules though he probably didn't realize that all of these sacrifices were preparing people for the day when *the* great sacrifice would hang on the cross of Calvary.

Moses also realized that this sin of idolatry required something bigger than the sacrifice of bulls or goats or pigeons. But what could be that greater sacrifice? Not knowing of God's plan to send His Son, Moses can think of only one possibility. He's not sure, **but what if he offered himself? Maybe I can make atonement.** So Moses offered the boldest prayer in history. It's the most Christ-like prayer possible. Gone is the anger. Moses is now consumed by passion for lost souls and is willing to lay down his own life—not just his physical life, but eternal life as well—if only the people of Israel could be saved.

Only two prayers in the Bible can match this. One is the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane—"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:39). The other is when the Apostle Paul wished himself to be damned if it would mean the salvation of the Jews (see Rom. 9:3).

Talk about risk! Moses takes a gigantic leap of faith. In essence he offers himself as an atoning sacrifice for his people. He proposes to do what Jesus will in fact do fourteen hundred years later. He acts and speaks with such perfect insight into God's character and purpose that shortly before Calvary he will stand with Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration and talk with Jesus about what His atoning death in Jerusalem will accomplish. So clearly, by interceding for his nation instead of accepting God's plans as final, Moses changes history!

REFLECTION: ***What is your reaction to the offer Moses makes to God? Can you honestly say you are willing to be damned so that others might be saved?***

Forty-One: **WHY GOD LISTENS**

The Lord listened to me that time also. —Deuteronomy 9:19

God makes a counterproposal to Moses' offer of atonement for his people. He declares, "Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book" (Exod. 32:33). A plague was sent among them—we are spared the details. The Israelites paid a high price for their sin. Still, because of Moses' intervention, God did not totally destroy the people.

I (Andrew) have meditated long on the words in Hebrews 11 which say that Moses "considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt" (Heb. 11:26). Jesus insisted that Moses wrote about Him—"If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote about me" (John 5:46). I believe this scene is the climactic event when Moses, without realizing it, fully identified with Christ. Here is where Moses demonstrated true love. He was willing to lay down his own life to save his people—just as Jesus was willing to, and actually did, lay down His life to save the world.

If we followers of Christ could approach this kind of prayer, the world would not be the same. When praying for the salvation of individuals, or for a nation, or for the world, a critical element in our communion with God is our willingness to offer up our very lives. Totally selfless prayer will change a world in need because then it will see the reality of Christ. How else will the lost understand what Christ is like?

There is a phrase used sometimes by intercessors: "to stand in the gap." A gap is a breach in the wall of protection and a strong enemy attacks at this weakest point. Standing in the gap is very dangerous. Actually, it's suicidal. This is what Moses did on behalf of his people, so that they might be saved. Moses stood in the breach and was willing to sacrifice his life. **Are we likewise willing to die to save lost family and friends?** This requires great courage and boldness. You must be abandoned to the will of God. I think this is an element of the presentation of the Gospel that we need to learn.

The example of Moses reveals that going to heaven is not the most important goal for a Christian. Because if it were, why were Moses and Paul willing to

give up their places in heaven to save their nation? So great was the passion burning in their hearts that they were willing to be literally executed if the sacrifice of their lives achieved the forgiveness of their people. Of course, it would not be enough. Only one *perfect* life could provide that salvation.

Don’t ignore Aaron in this scene. It seems as though he gets away scot-free. Not so! Moses says God was so angry with Aaron that He was ready to destroy him (Deut. 9:20). So Moses prayed for Aaron. In other words, you can intercede for one person as well as a people group.

How much do we really love the lost—family, friends, or nations? Enough to offer our own lives for their salvation? That’s how much Jesus loves us!

REFLECTION: ***Is there a person or group of people you know and care about who are lost? Looking at the example of Moses, how will you pray for them?***

Forty-Two: **A DEEPER RELATIONSHIP**

Now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you (Exod. 32:34). Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you (33:3).

The actions of Moses, especially his offer to become an atoning sacrifice for the Hebrews, propels him into a new depth of relationship with God. Over the next two chapters in Exodus, we see Moses pray ever bolder prayers and gain deeper insights into God that are unmatched even among such great Old Testament leaders as Abraham, David, Solomon, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. These amazing interactions between one bold human and Yahweh should take our breath away. They should also encourage us to approach God boldly in fresh ways.

Let's begin with God's Word to Moses after Moses makes his heroic appeal to save the nation. God responds with an assignment, essentially saying, "Moses, you go ahead and lead those people to the Promised Land. I can't go with you, but don't worry, I'll provide an angel to guide you."

At first that sounds reasonable. God is smarting from the snub of the golden calf. *That thing led the Hebrews to freedom? Outrageous!* God will punish the people with a plague of some sort but he honors Moses—He will save the nation. Really, however, He's not interested in being near these ungrateful, squabbling, small-minded, stiff-necked people. God's reason: He just might change His mind again and wipe them out (see Exod. 33:5).

Now things get very interesting in this tumultuous relationship. First, the people finally wake up. We're not sure how long this will last, but there is genuine remorse when Moses reports God's words to them. One evidence is that they removed all the jewelry and they didn't wear it again until they settled in Canaan.

So there was an awakening. Moses must have been pleased to see the change but he wasn't satisfied. The primary issue for him was God's presence. In essence Moses told God: "If you won't go with us, then we aren't moving. How will the nations around us know about Yahweh if He abandons us?" (see verses 15–16). It is the presence of Yahweh that distinguished Moses and the people from every other tribe or nation on earth.

Moses' boldness is impressive. We need more of that today. Too many want the blessings of God without His presence. They want miraculous deliverances; they want their daily manna (plus some meat); they want the Promised Land. And when God answers those prayers, they are satisfied. Not Moses. He wanted God's presence, not just his provision.

The tragedy is that there are probably many churches and ministries where God has departed and no one misses Him. That's why I (Andrew) object to calling any church the house of God, because if God lives in one house, who dwells in the other one hundred thousand houses of God? When the tabernacle was completed, the glory of the LORD filled it (40:35). When the Temple was built, the Shekinah, God's presence, descended and resided in the Holy of Holies. At some point that visible presence of God departed due to Israel's continued idol worship (see Ezek. 11:22–24). Nevertheless people continued visiting the temple and performing their ritual sacrifices. When Jesus arrived, it had been centuries since God had departed. Now He was present in the flesh—and they killed Him.

It is so easy to do "God's work" without God's presence. Moses would have none of this. **Being with Almighty Yahweh wasn't nice—it was necessary. It wasn't a good point—it was the whole point!**

For Moses, time with God was the most important aspect of his life. That's the only reason he could fulfill the Exodus Mandate.

REFLECTION: ***How important is your private time with God? Do you have a daily rhythm of life that allows space for you to be with God? When you go to church, do you go to meet God, or does God go with you so that you can join with others who know God and spend time with Him?***

Forty-Three: **FACE-TO-FACE WITH THE ALMIGHTY**

> *The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.* —Exodus 33:11

Moses had a special place where he went to be with God. It was a tent he pitched well outside the camp. Moses called it the tent of meeting. There Moses and God discussed everything just as we might talk while drinking coffee together.

Everyone could see the tent and observe the pillar of cloud—God's physical manifestation or Shekinah—descend. Many in the camp watched. A few even started attending the tent meetings themselves to seek the LORD. One man lived there. Joshua, Moses' assistant, would not depart from the tent.

Today people, other than our fellow worshipers, may not even know we go to church. It used to be that church attenders were identified by the big black Bible they carried. Today we hide the Bible in our pocket or on a mobile device. Well, we don't necessarily have to publicize our church attendance. But should we hide it completely?

Prayer is a great "equalizer" that gives every one of us the same access to God. Regardless of our experiences, intelligence, bank balances, education, social status, or family circumstances, we all have the same right to visit with Him that every "spiritual giant" in history has had. **Like Moses we can experience this treasure of meeting face-to-face with God.** When we are that kind of friend to God, there is no limit to what our prayers can accomplish.

The apostles and prophets understood this. Every "hero of faith" has been a hero only to the extent that he or she has developed their friendship with God. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi:

> I count everything as loss because of *the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus* my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ . . . that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. —Philippians 3:8,10, italics added

What a statement! Paul was willing to give up everything he had, including his

life, so that he might *know Jesus*. That was priority number one. That's real friendship. That was the priority of Moses. It is also God's priority—He wants to be known! The result? Because Moses knew God, the people of Israel were saved. Their history was changed. The impact of that relationship with the Divine carries down to us today.

We can't stress enough that God doesn't reserve this kind of communication for the "super spiritual" or those with a special gift. He wants to break through to us in a way we can understand. He has done everything imaginable to make this possible.

Did you know that every religion except Christianity has gods that must be sought out by man? Our God is the only one who came searching for us. He initiated the relationship with Moses. Our God relentlessly seeks a deep relationship with us. We have only to respond to His invitation. That's what Moses did. At God's initiative Moses pursued a deeper knowledge of God. Just examine his prayers and you will see. Then follow his example.

REFLECTION: ***What excites you about having a closer relationship with God? What causes you to hesitate?***

Forty-Four: **A BOLD REQUEST**

If I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways. —Exod. 33:13
[The Lord] made known his ways to Moses. —Ps. 103:7

Is there a limit to how close you can get to Yahweh? You never know unless you try. Each prayer of Moses, each interaction with Yahweh, seems to move the prophet into a greater spiritual depth.

In one sense we can never reach the depths of understanding of the One who is infinite, who transcends creation and time, whose power brought the universe into existence, who already knows the beginning and the end of our story. In another sense Moses reveals that we can continually draw closer to God than we are. In fact He seems delighted when someone pushes to understand Him better. We can definitely get to know Him more intimately. The issue is whether we really want to.

Moses had seen God do amazing things. It started at the burning bush, moved into Egypt to the confrontations with Pharaoh and the ten plagues, then the miraculous opening of the sea, the utter destruction of Pharaoh's army, and the divine provision of food and water in the wilderness. Has anyone ever seen more miracles than Moses?

But Moses didn't want just the experience—the deliverance, the miracles. He wanted to understand God's thinking, His motivations, and His character. He wanted to know why God was involved with him and those stubborn people. His attitude was radical. **Moses was not satisfied with observing God's deeds. He needed to know God's ways.** He wanted answers to questions like, on what basis does God forgive? Why does God choose a person to be His servant? How can God make a new start with me? And more!

There is a big difference between knowing the deeds of God and knowing His ways. Psalm 103:7 says that God "made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel." The Hebrews were satisfied with a few miracles. Once their skin was saved, their bellies were full, and their security assured, they didn't desire God anymore. Moses, however, needed much more. He had to know the God behind the deeds.

Why was Moses so persistent? He revealed his reasoning: “Show me your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight” (Exod. 33:13). He’d had a taste. He’d smoothed the wrinkles in God’s face. He’d met with God face-to-face as a friend. That was great. He wanted even more! Moses wanted to see just how well he could get to know God.

That’s why Moses argued with God. He pushed back when God spoke. *God, you had to destroy the people according to Your Word. But I smashed those tablets that recorded Your Word. Will that save the people? Is that how it works Lord?*

God, you promised to lead the people into the Promised Land. Now you tell me you won’t go with us. If you don’t go with us, then I’m not leaving here.

On and on it went, and God loved it. This is the kind of friendship God desires. He wants not just Moses but all of Israel—indeed all of us today—to know Him, to love Him, to enter into an honest and deep relationship with Him. So when Moses won’t budge if God won’t go with Him and lead the people, God answers: “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight” (v. 17).

REFLECTION: ***Just how badly do your want to know God? What are you willing to invest in time and energy to know God’s ways?***

Forty-Five: **AN EVEN MORE DARING REQUEST**

Moses said, "Please show me your glory." —Exodus 33:18

Moses had one more audacious request. It led to what may be the most significant verses in the Bible. But we get ahead of ourselves. Let's dwell for a moment on the next request Moses makes—*Lord, please show me Your glory*.

Have you ever made such a request? We sure don't hear that in most of the prayer meetings we attend. Knowing God seems to stop with accepting Jesus as Savior. Yet **in 80 to 90 percent of cases "receiving Christ" makes little or no difference in the way a person lives life.** These are hollow phrases: "Do you know Jesus?" "Oh yes, I know Jesus." This idea of salvation is cheap and it's the reason we make such a small impression on the world.

Think about the zeal of people who are gripped by an ideal. If a group of young people—any people, actually—take to the streets, you can almost guarantee their success, no matter how stupid their cause. The hippies had that zeal in the seventies and they ended a war and popularized a sexual revolution. More recently, millions of Egyptians in Cairo and other cities had the passion that toppled two regimes. As we write this, protestors are gaining worldwide attention in Turkey.

We were impressed with one particular Turkish protester. He was an artist and he went to a park in Istanbul and stood in front of a statue of Ataturk, the nation's founder. He said nothing. He didn't move. He just stared at the statue. For twelve hours! Others joined him—they got the message that Turkey had lost the passion of its founding father. Soon there was a huge crowd and the police arrived and drove them away. But they returned. They had caught the vision.

I (Andrew) recall a night when I was a young man and a group of us began to sing and preach about Jesus in our town square. Suddenly on the other side of the square a fireworks show began. We lost our entire audience. The people preferred a noisy and flashy show over a life-changing encounter with God. Perhaps that's the reason revival movements and healing and power services draw crowds. Unfortunately they rarely seem to produce real transformation.

The accusation to the church in Ephesus still holds (see Rev. 2:4). We have

lost our first love. So we don't pray, as Moses did: "God, teach us your ways. God, show us your glory." The two requests are connected. The second is deeper that the first. Moses had seen the "glory" of Egypt with its temples and gods. He had witnessed the miraculous powers of God—His deeds. He'd learned God's name and talked with Him. But he hadn't seen God in His awesome glory. If God had defeated Pharaoh, the "god" of Egypt—Moses knew all about the glory of Pharaoh's palace—then surely the glory of Yahweh was immensely greater. Could Moses see it? That was his request.

God's answer was no! Such a view would kill any human. But God did offer this: "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD" (Exod. 33:19). This is progress. It leads to a gigantic leap in the knowledge and understanding God.

Be careful what you ask for. This request by Moses is not something to make casually. It's dangerous! It's also thrilling.

REFLECTION: ***Are you satisfied with observing God's deeds? Or do you also desire to know His ways? Would you really care to see His glory? How far are you willing to go in getting to know God?***

Forty-Six: **AN UNSTOPPABLE DESIRE**

And [the Lord] said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.'" —Exodus 33:19

In order to know God's ways and see His glory, Moses was instructed to cut two tablets of stone on which God would write the Law. This must have taken some effort. It probably helped him work off his anger toward Aaron and the people. Then Moses had to climb back up Mount Sinai. He went alone. No one else—not even Joshua—was allowed on the mountain. Whatever Moses saw and heard was between him and God.

There must have been some trepidation as Moses climbed toward this rendezvous with divinity. There was a particular rock where he needed to stand and there God's glory would pass by. However, Moses would not see it. God would place him in a cleft of the rock and cover him with His hand until He had passed. Then He would remove His hand and Moses would see only God's back.

See how dangerous this was. How easily we sing, "He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock." Do we realize what we are singing? This isn't a nice, happy, lighthearted idea. This rock is an extremely dangerous place. It was so scary that God had to protect Moses. Yet Moses yearned for this even though God had said, "Man shall not see me and live" (Exod. 33:20).

We like our nice little Christian clichés. Moses is so far beyond repetitive praise songs and pious statements about God. He is determined to truly know who God is. The experience would transform him and terrify others because, when he returned to the camp, his face literally glowed from the exposure to God, and Aaron and the people were afraid to come near him (see 34:29–30).

Does anyone know when we have been in God's presence? Of course, we ought to pray privately in our prayer closet. We should never flaunt our spiritual practices. Nevertheless, our meetings with God should transform us. **People ought to notice that there is something different about us and the only explanation is that we have met with God.**

A cautionary note is necessary. When God promises to parade His goodness and unpack His name, He says, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious,

and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (33:19b). This is God's show. We cannot manipulate Him. Sure, we can talk to Him and even argue with Him, but we can make no demands of Him. However, if we will pursue Him, He will come near and reveal Himself to us. Others will be blessed by our encounter with Yahweh.

That's what happened to Moses. He received the greatest of revelations, and we have benefited because of his radical passion to know God.

REFLECTION: ***What actions have you taken to know God? What have you discovered as a result? Are you aware if others have noticed God's transforming work in your life? What is the evidence?***

Forty-Seven: **THE MOST IMPORTANT VERSES IN THE BIBLE**

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord . . ." — Exodus 34:6

Moses couldn't see God but he could hear Him. The words were burned into his memory. They were so powerful, so revealing, indeed revolutionary. I would submit that these words Moses heard may be the most important verses in the Bible.

Of course, all Scripture is inspired. Every verse is significant and every book of the Bible can teach, rebuke, encourage, inspire, correct, and comfort us. However, we all have our favorite verses. Many claim John 3:16 as the most important verse—"God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son . . ." This verse is important, but God's revelation to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7 defines the love of God that is displayed in John 3:16.

It's interesting that God said, in answer to Moses' prayer, that He would proclaim His name. At the burning bush God revealed His name as Yahweh, translated as LORD in our Bibles. It means literally, "I am." But "I am" what? Exodus 34:6–7 reveals what "I am" means. Read carefully:

> The LORD [Yahweh, I AM] passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD [Yahweh, Yahweh; I AM, I AM], a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin..."

How does one respond to such revelation? There is only one appropriate response and Moses shows it. Immediately he bows his head to the ground and worships.

Up to this point humanity knew very little about God. Understanding of God hadn't advanced much since the time of Abraham. The Hebrews knew He existed and over recent months they had observed His power. Now these verses opened wide the door of heaven. They encompass all of who God is. From this point forward everything we learn about God will flow out of this insight and cover every human circumstance and need.

We must not overlook the end of verse 7: ". . . but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." Certainly we must not ignore the cost of sin. God reveals clearly that He cannot simply forget the deeds of the guilty. There are consequences. But that's not the final word!

Almost everyone understands that sin must be punished. Yet in the same breath God states that He forgives wickedness, rebellion, and sin. How can both be true? Listen to David as he states that God "does not deal with *us* according to our sins, nor repay *us* according to our iniquities" (Ps. 103:10, italics added). We emphasize the word *us* because, **God has not punished us for our sin but He has punished Somebody!**

God does not disregard sin—far from it. Jesus was delivered up for our sins (see Rom. 4:25). We were not delivered up—Jesus was. While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His son (5:10). First we were enemies. Now we are reconciled.

God's revelation is pivotal. Moses is the ideal recipient because he caught the Spirit of Christ when he offered himself as atonement for Israel. That's why we believe Exodus 34:6–7 explains John 3:16. How does God abound in steadfast love? By dealing with our sin problem and offering up His only Son as the perfect atoning sacrifice so we would not perish. That's the reason He can forgive iniquity and transgression and sin.

These verses had a major impact on all the prophets of Israel. In fact, soon after Israel departed Mount Sinai, Moses used God's definition of Himself when he interceded for the people. This time the situation was the report of the twelve spies who checked out Canaan. The people accepted the majority report (ten against going into the Promised Land; only two for going in) and decided to return to Egypt rather than conquer Canaan. Again God railed against the people. He would "strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them" (Num. 14:12) and He would make Moses the father of a new nation.

Sounds very familiar! Once again Moses protested, this time pleading, "Please let the power of the LORD be great as you have promised, saying, 'The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression. . . .' Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the

greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now" (vv. 17–19).

Once again God answered Moses' prayer but swore that those who despised the land would never enter it. They would die in the wilderness. Still, a greater disaster was averted because Moses prayed according to the character that God revealed while Moses was hiding in the cleft of the rock.

REFLECTION: ***How can Exodus 34:6–7 influence your prayer life from this point forward?***

Forty-Eight: **BEARING WITNESS**

> *The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin."* —Exodus 34:6–7

These declarations of God's character permeate the Old Testament. Jonah didn't want to preach to Nineveh because "I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Jonah 4:2).

The prophet Joel urged his people to "Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love" (Joel 2:13). After buying a field at God's command, Jeremiah prayed and included these words: "You show steadfast love to thousands, but you repay the guilt of fathers to their children" (Jer. 32:18).

The psalmists used these words in their prayers: "You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Turn to me and be gracious to me" (Ps. 86:15–16). David in one of his poems declared: "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities" (103:8–10).

So as we read Scripture, there's nothing new about God that emerges after Exodus 34:6–7. The Old Testament repeatedly declares this truth. The New Testament enlarges on it. We understand more about the attributes of God by seeing them displayed in the life of Jesus. We realize that there is an ongoing revelation of the compassion and grace and mercy and lovingkindness of God and we will never fully comprehend the depth of that love.

A few years ago I (Andrew) exchanged some correspondence with an Islamic newspaper editor and politician I had met in Pakistan. Our first letters happened to cross in the mail. I don't remember how I addressed him: "Dear Sir" or "Dear Friend" or perhaps by his surname. His letter opened, "In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful." This is the first line in every surah (or chapter) of Quran. Every speech I've heard by a Muslim begins with this confession.

I was convicted by those words. This man used his letter as an opportunity to witness for his faith and his God. How could I likewise declare my allegiance? Could my writing also be a witness to the God of the Bible? That's when I thought of Exodus 34:6–7. I began my next letter to this leader with these words: "In the name of the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." I've used those words when addressing Islamic leaders ever since.

The declaration God makes to Moses should challenge all of us. This is the God we worship. This is the God who was revealed in the person of Jesus. The Son of God showed us what it means to be merciful and gracious. Jesus was slow to anger. He demonstrated steadfast love to the point of death on the cross, so we could then know forgiveness of all iniquity, transgression, and sin.

That is the God we are called to bear witness to in this world.

REFLECTION: ***How will knowing the God revealed in Exodus 34:6–7 affect your witness to others?***

Forty-Nine: **A DISAPPOINTING END**

The Lord said to [Moses], "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to your offspring.'" —Deuteronomy 34:4

Many people feel Moses got a raw deal at the end of his life. He was not allowed to enter the Promised Land but died viewing it from Mount Nebo on the east side of the Jordan River. All because of a "little misunderstanding."

Back when the Hebrews were camped in the wilderness, south of Canaan, they had no water. They'd faced this situation before, hadn't they? No water? No problem. God always came through! But the people seemed to suffer from some form of dementia. They vented their frustration on Moses. Oh, it was nasty, the accusations and insults (see Num. 20:2–5).

How much must this poor leader endure? We imagine him declaring to his brother Aaron, "I don't have to put up with this nonsense." How could we blame him if he used even stronger language? But Moses and Aaron did the right thing —they went to the tent of meeting and met with God. The glory of the Lord appeared to them. Yes, God understood. The two didn't have to say a word.

The instructions from God were as follows: "Take the staff, and assemble the congregation . . . and *tell* the rock before their eyes to yield its water" (v. 8, italic added).

So Moses grabbed the staff and called a congregational meeting before the rock. So far so good. However, Moses had not fully dealt with his anger. You would think after so many years he might have learned to manage his hot-blooded emotions. These people brought out the worst in him. It might have helped if he had first talked things over with Aaron. Instead, he unleashed a tirade. Listen to him as he addressed the crowd: "Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" Uh oh. Look out Moses!

Years earlier Moses faced a similar crisis in Rephidim. There was no water. The people blamed Moses. God guided Moses, telling him to *strike* a rock with his staff. Moses followed the instructions precisely (see Exod. 17:1–7). Well, same situation. Shouldn't it work again?' No, **God doesn't give us formulas. Otherwise we would trust the formula rather than God.**

This time Moses was told to hold the staff—a symbol of the authority given to him by God—and *speak* to the rock. But when you are angry, emotion clouds your thinking. You recognize it when Moses says he and Aaron will produce water from the rock. *No, Moses, God performs the miracles—not you, not Aaron.* Always! Moses struck the rock twice with his staff, just as he had at Rephidim, and water gushed out in abundance.

Such a little thing, striking the rock instead of speaking to it, produced a huge consequence. Moses was told he would not lead the nation into the Promised Land. Why such punishment? Because this was *not* a little thing. God explained: "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel" (Num. 20:12). Moses, a giant of faith, did not believe in God? After nearly forty years of face-to-face encounters!

Moses was the one who stood in front of two million–plus people and declared God's Word. His job was to say and do only what he was told to do by Yahweh. He knew that this was God's show, not the Moses show. Yes, Moses slipped. No question he was provoked. But he knew God far better than anyone else and the one to whom much is given much is required.

So Moses' life ended on top of Mount Nebo. God showed him the land that he had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then Moses died, and God buried him. There was no funeral service. No one knew where he was buried, so there was no gravestone, no memorial to him.

How sad, you say. Wait, the story isn't over! This was not the tragic ending that it appears.

REFLECTION: ***When do you find that your emotions (such as anger) affect your thinking so that it becomes difficult to follow God's commands?***

Fifty: **MOSES ENTERS THE PROMISED LAND**

> *Behold, two men were talking with [Jesus], Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.* —Luke 9:30–31

Moses wanted to see God's glory. He received a glimpse after God passed him while he hid in the cleft of the rock. But God did fully answer that prayer, just not in the way Moses expected. He had to wait for more than a thousand years but, my, did he see it! During the event we call the Transfiguration, Moses came face-to-face with I Am.

It occurred on a mountain inside the Promised Land. (The location was probably Mount Tabor near the Sea of Galilee.) Jesus took his three closest disciples with Him and, as He prayed, His appearance was transformed in front of them. The disciples saw Jesus as a glorious, divine monarch, his face as bright as the sun and his clothes a dazzling white. With Jesus were two men. One was Moses. So you see, Moses finally set foot in the Promised Land, and in exceptional company, with Jesus and Elijah!

Notice that Moses has a place of great influence. He is part of a heavenly council. This is an absolute highlight in Moses' service. Not in his life—in his *service*. I'm moved by the topic of their conversation. The three talked about Jesus' exodus (the word translated "departure"), which would occur in Jerusalem. Finally Moses understood why God could not accept his offer of atonement for the Hebrews. That act would be performed by Jesus. Now he knew the meaning of all those sacrifices in the tabernacle and later the Temple. They were all hints of the final, ultimate sacrifice on Golgotha.

Jesus needed a couple of friends to be with him as he neared the climax of his life and ministry. Who better for Jesus to talk to as He headed to Calvary? Who else could comprehend what was about to take place? Peter, James, and John were friends but they couldn't yet grasp the deep implications of their Teacher's death. Moses did. He was one of Jesus' closest friends. They'd forged that relationship over forty years. Now it was clear how all God was saying and doing through the Exodus from Egypt and the preparation to enter the Promised Land, all of that was pointing to *this* moment.

Very few have seen the glory of King Jesus. The brilliance of Jesus on the Transfiguration mountain was not because something was added to him, but rather because the covering he lived under on earth was removed. This was the real Jesus, the one who set aside His glory in heaven and humbled himself and became a man. This is the glory God could not show Moses in Exodus 34. It was the glory of the cross. Here was the full expression of the mercy and grace and steadfast love and forgiveness of God.

It all finally made sense to Moses. **The Exodus Mandate encompassed far more than the Hebrew nation. It included the whole world!**

REFLECTION: ***In light of the life and work of Moses, is there anything new or fresh you see now in the life of Jesus?***

Epilogue: **TIME TO CHOOSE**

There has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. —Deuteronomy 34:10

Moses is unique in Scripture. He's the greatest of spiritual giants. His influence permeates all sixty-six books of the Bible. Jesus cited him as the one who wrote all about Him. What made Moses so powerful, so influential?

- It began with a choice—he chose to identify with the people of God.
- It grew when he accepted God's invitation to undertake the impossible mandate to lead a nation out of slavery.
- Everything he did was by faith. All the miracles were God's doing. Moses was simply the human instrument God used to initiate them.
- Moses was not satisfied just to see the deeds of God—he had to know God's ways and see His glory.
- His relationship with God grew into an intense friendship.
- He was humble, the model of humility, because he surrendered himself totally to God and so God used him mightily (see Num. 12:3).

As a result, Moses was as God to Pharaoh. He was the hero of a nation saved by his bold prayers. He was a model of faith, able to do impossible deeds. He so identified with God's heart that he became a picture of the suffering Christ.

All this was accomplished by a man who for much of his life knew less than you about God. He didn't have the Scriptures—he eventually wrote the first five books of the Bible. He didn't know yet about Christ. We have so many advantages over Moses, which is why Moses should be an inspiration in our faith journey.

The life of Moses exposes the fact that accepting Christ as your Savior is not the end. It's the beginning of a faith adventure. Like Moses, all of us have been given a mandate. Jesus has told His disciples to go make disciples in all nations (Matt. 28:19). You are called to be a disciple and make disciples. Discipleship is a call, an invitation to follow Jesus and get to know Him as friend. It's a challenge to obey all that Jesus commands because He loves us. It's a motivation to let God use us to fulfill His mandate—what we call the Great Commission to

bring the Good News of the Kingdom of God to a desperate, mixed-up world. Impossible, you say? Jesus begs to differ because He includes in His mandate two phrases: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” and “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (vv. 18,20).

Moses shows us that there is no limit to how deep we can go in our relationship with God. And there is no limit to how God can use us if we obey His instructions. So, what are we waiting for? Let’s begin the adventure!

REFLECTION: ***What is God’s mandate to you? What is the next step you must take in obedience?***

ENDNOTES

1 Brother Andrew, *The Ethics of Smuggling* (Tyndale, 1974). This book is out of print. It was revised and published under the title *Is Life So Dear? When Being Wrong Is Right (*Thomas Nelson, 1985).

2 F. B. Meyer, *Moses: Servant of God* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1953), 21.

3 See James Martone, "Egypt's Christians, Fearing Instability, Seek Security Elsewhere" *World Watch Monitor*, April 9, 2013, at www.worldwatchmonitor.org.

4 See Brother Andrew and Al Janssen, *Light Force* (U.S.: Fleming H. Revel, 2004; U.K.: Hodder and Stoughton, 2004).

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