



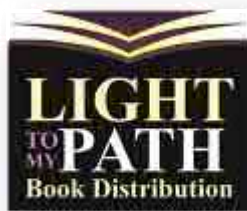
F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

What I Have Put In Your Power

The Calling and Equipping of Moses:
A Study of Exodus 4:21

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F. Wayne Mac Leod

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Table of Contents

Preface	1
1 Egypt: The Challenge of Facing our Fears.....	3
2 See That You Do: The Command to Follow Through	11
3 Miracles: The Empowering	19
4 Hardened Hearts: The Source of our Confidence	29
5 He Will Not Let the People Go: The Nature of Victory	37

Preface

[21] And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. (Exodus 4:21)

These are the words of the Lord God to Moses as he prepared to return to the land of Egypt to do what appeared to be an impossible task. The people of Israel had been in enslaved for four hundred years. Oppressed by their Egyptian masters for generations, they now cried out for deliverance. In answer to their prayer, God chose Moses to be their deliverer.

There was a deep conflict in the heart of Moses as he prepared to return to Egypt. He initially resisted God's call on his life and debated whether he was the right man for the job. Moses presented his excuses to God, but God would not release him from this responsibility.

As Moses wrestled with this fearful obligation, God gave him a series of miraculous signs to perform. When Moses threw his shepherd's staff on the ground, it became a serpent. Picking it up by the tail returned it to its original form (Exodus 4:1-5). When Moses put his hand in his coat, it became leprous. Putting it back again restored it to health (Exodus 4:6-8). God told Moses that when he arrived in Egypt, he was to take water from the Nile River. When he poured it on dry ground, it would turn to blood (Exodus

4:9). God also assured him that when he went to Pharaoh, He would give him the words to speak (Exodus 4:10-16). These signs were designed to assure Pharaoh and the children of Israel that God was with Moses and that he was His chosen instrument to deliver them from their bondage.

The words of Exodus 4:21 are God's challenge to Moses as he sets out for Egypt. They are words of direction, encouragement and revelation. They not only show Moses what God expected of him but also what the result of obedience would be –Pharaoh would not let the people go.

While spoken to Moses in a particular time and circumstance, the words of this verse have much to teach us today. In the next few chapters, I would like to examine what God was telling Moses that day and how these words speak to us today. I trust that the Lord will use this reflection on Exodus 4:21 to bring encouragement and challenge to each reader.

God bless,

F. Wayne MacLeod

1

Egypt:

The Challenge of Facing our Fears

[21] And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt ... (Exodus 4:21)

As a missionary, I have often heard people say that they feared committing themselves to the Lord and the cause of foreign missions because they believed He would send them where they would not want to go. I suppose every one of us has places we don't want to go or people we don't want to see. Sometimes these places and circumstances remind us of deep hurts we have experienced in the past.

As we begin our examination of Exodus 4:21 let's consider the words, *"And the LORD said to Moses, 'When you go back to Egypt.'"* To understand what Moses felt when he heard those words, we need to get a sense of what Egypt represented to him.

Egypt was a Land of Deep Racial Tension

Egypt was the land of Moses' birth. He was born in this land at a time of great confusion and chaos. At the time of Moses' birth, Pharaoh ordered that all male Israelite children be thrown into the river and drowned. Moses was one

of those male children. He was born at a time of deep racial tension. Egypt feared the growing Israelite population and was doing all they could to keep them under control. Murdering male infants and oppressing Hebrew slaves was the path they chose.

Egypt was a Land of Bondage and Oppression

This racial tension led to deep oppression and bondage for the Israelite nation. They were forced to serve the Egyptian cause. They were beaten and required to work long hours under challenging conditions. There did not seem to be any future for the Israelite slave. For the most part, they had resigned themselves to their oppressive lifestyle.

Egypt was a Land of Separation from God's Blessing

The Jews in Egypt had come from a line of people who experienced the blessing of God. Under Abraham, the Lord increased their number and made them a great people. Under Joseph, they enjoyed the deep favour of God and the admiration of the Egyptian nation. Now, however, all this was a fading memory. They cried out to the God of Abraham and Joseph, but they were still oppressed. God's blessing seemed far removed. His promises were distant memories. The Israelites in Egypt wondered where God was. Egypt was a land of separation from God and His blessings.

Egypt was a Land of Great Personal Defeat

For Moses, Egypt was a land of personal defeat. Having been raised as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses experienced the richness of Egypt. He knew, however, that he was not Egyptian. At the age of forty, Moses felt a burden to deliver his people from the oppression of Egypt.

When he spoke to the Israelites, however, they rejected him and his efforts to set them free. When he took a stand and killed an Egyptian who was beating an Israelite, Pharaoh determined to kill him. Moses was forced to leave Egypt, rejected by both the Israelites, the people of his birth, and the Egyptians, the people who raised him. When Moses left Egypt for the land of Midian, he left a defeated man.

Egypt was a Land of Great Risk

As I have already mentioned, when Moses killed an Egyptian, Pharaoh determined to kill him. The people of Egypt saw Moses as a traitor worthy of death. Returning to Egypt was not without its risks. It was possible that Moses could lose his life by returning to the land of his birth.

Egypt was a Land of Uncertainty

When God told Moses to return to Egypt, Moses did not feel that he was the man for the task. His uncertainty about being the right person for the job seems to revolve around three points.

First, Moses understood the condition of Israel's faith at that point. Listen to his words in Exodus 3:13:

[13] 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?"

The people of Egypt had many gods. This pagan religious culture had influenced Israel. When Moses told the people of Israel that God had sent him, Moses knew that they would ask him the name of that God. Israel did not know

their God. They heard stories about Him and His work in days gone by, but this was not their present experience. Their bondage and harsh life blinded them to the glorious God of Abraham and Joseph. Moses understood that he was going to his people in the name of an unknown God. Why would they listen to someone they did not know?

Second, Moses had a deep concern that the people of Israel would not listen to him. Consider what he told the Lord in Exodus 4:1:

[4:1] 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.'"

Moses had already spoken to the people of Israel. At the age of forty, his efforts to be their deliverer were rejected. The Israelites had no confidence in Moses. "They will not believe me or listen to my voice," he told God. Moses had a deep sense of failure even before he left for Egypt. His past failure continued to haunt him. Finally, Moses saw himself as being "slow of speech."

*[10] But Moses said to the LORD, "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."
(Exodus 4)*

Moses is described in Acts 7:22 as being mighty in words. This, however, was not how Moses felt. He had been in the land of Midian for forty years. While he had been trained in the Egyptian language and culture sixty or seventy years prior, he would not have had much opportunity to speak the language in Midian over that forty-year period. The thought of representing the nation and talking in a language he had not spoken for forty years was overwhelming now at the age of eighty.

Realize as well that for the past forty years, Moses lived the life of a shepherd. This would not have given him much opportunity to speak to government officials or to plead the case of the helpless before politicians. Moses felt inadequate and unprepared to represent His people before Pharaoh.

Egypt was a Land that Required More than Moses had to Offer

Egypt was a land that required more than Moses had to offer. He felt inadequate for the task God had given him. Going back to Egypt would have meant going to a country filled with confusion and racial tension. It required going to a place where he could lose his life. It would cause emotional pains over past failures and rejection to resurface. It demanded going to the people in the name of a God the people felt had rejected them. It meant stepping out into something that was far bigger than him and risking failure all over again.

Notice the words of God to Moses – “When you go back to Egypt...” The Lord was not giving him an option here. Moses was going back. It was the purpose of God that Moses face these fears and insecurities. The future of the nation of Israel depended on Moses facing his fears and insecurities.

What are you afraid of facing today? Are their hurts that have paralyzed you? Have past failures and rejections kept you from stepping out again? Do you feel that God could use other people but not you? If you are feeling these things, then you are in good company. Moses would have understood your fears and insecurities.

The question we need to ask ourselves here is this: What do we do with these fears and insecurities? If we allow them to keep us from doing what God is asking us to do, we fall short of His purpose for our lives. If, on the other hand, we allow these fears and insecurities to drive us to God, then we will see His power at work in a wonderful way.

God called Moses to face his fear of Egypt and what it represented to him. For forty years, Moses had not had to deal with Egypt and the failures he had experienced there. Moses would not pass from this life, however, without God challenging those fears and insecurities. God wanted to use Moses, but he had to face these hurts. Moses could no longer run away. God was calling him to confront these strongholds in his life and face them head on.

What fears does God need to address in your life? How have these fears kept you from walking in obedience and experiencing the fullness of God in your personal life and ministry? Not many of us will go through life unharmed. All of us will experience failure. We may even look back in shame at the things we have done. These things, however, do not need to paralyze us or keep us from God's purpose in our lives.

I don't think that Moses took the phrase, "When you go back to Egypt," lightly. I believe there was an uneasiness in his heart when God spoke those words. It would not be easy to return to Egypt, but Moses would need to obey this call. He would have to address his fear and insecurity if he was going to accomplish the purpose of God for his life. Returning to Egypt would be difficult, but by the grace of God, he would be victorious. The lives of over one million slaves would never again be the same because Moses

chose to follow God by trusting Him with his fears and insecurities.

For Consideration

Have you ever experienced failure or rejection in your life? What was your response?

Does failure, hurt or rejection need to paralyse us? Can we truly experience the fullness of God's purpose in our lives if these failures keep us from walking in obedience?

Have you ever experienced victory over rejection, fears or hurts in your life? Explain.

Are there any failures, rejection, or hurts that hold you back today? What are they? How have they been keeping you from growing spiritually in your life?

For Prayer

Ask the Lord to teach you through the hurts you have suffered. Ask Him to forgive you for allowing these pains to keep you from Him and His purpose for your life.

Take a moment to ask the Lord to reveal to you any failures, hurts or rejection that have stood in the way of your spiritual growth. Ask Him to give you victory over these issues in your life.

Thank the Lord that despite our insecurities and weakness, He can use us in ways we never thought possible. Open your heart to Him today. Surrender yourself, body, mind and soul to Him. Ask Him to use you as He sees fit.

2

See That You Do: The Command to Follow Through

[21] ... see that you do before Pharaoh (Exodus 4:21)

It is one thing to know what God is calling us to do and another to follow through and step into that calling. For Moses, the call to Egypt was a call to face his fears and insecurities. Humanly speaking, it would have been easy for Moses to offer his excuses to God and pass off his responsibilities to his brother who was more qualified. I have met individuals who made a commitment to the Lord at an event or specific time in their life and had every intention of following through on that commitment but put it off until the vision became a faded memory. Others have got caught up with the responsibilities of their lives and found they no longer had time to do what was in their heart to do. If there is one thing certain in life, it is that if we are not intentional about our purpose, it will be buried in the activities and obligations of life. It is for this reason that I want to take a moment to focus on these six simple words of God to Moses in Exodus 4:21: “see that you do before Pharaoh.”

The Hebrew word for “see” carries with it the idea of giving special attention to a matter. The word “see,” and its usage in this passage carries with it an obligation. Picture if you

will, the foremen and taskmasters who watched over the Israelite slaves in Egypt. The taskmasters had a quota of brick to produce, and they were to “see” that the slaves produced that quota. There would be repercussions if they did not meet that goal by the end of the day. The taskmasters treated their responsibility seriously and did all they could to meet their daily obligations. They pushed the people and beat the Israelite foremen when they felt they were not doing all they could to motivate the keep the workers on track. They were given the responsibility by Pharaoh to see that they met their daily quotas.

[13] The taskmasters were urgent, saying, “Complete your work, your daily task each day, as when there was straw.” [14] And the foremen of the people of Israel, whom Pharaoh’s taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, “Why have you not done all your task of making bricks today and yesterday, as in the past?” (Exodus 5)

By using the word “see,” God is telling Moses that he was to be taskmaster and foreman over his own body, mind and spirit, disciplining them to meet their obligations before God.

Notice the requirement that God was placing on Moses that day – “see that you do.” The second word I want to examine is the little word “do.” The word “do” carries with it a responsibility to act. It goes beyond good intentions. We have often heard the phrase: “It’s the thought that counts.” While there may be some truth to this in some circumstances, this was not the case for Moses in this verse. God was looking for much more than a willing heart. He was looking for action. A compassionate heart was not enough. God wanted Moses’ feet, hands and tongue as well. God expected Moses to do something. He expected

him to leave Midian and make the long trip to Egypt. He expected him to face his fears and approach Pharaoh. He expected him to take on the difficult task of speaking with the people and leading them out of Egypt.

God was asking Moses to be a taskmaster over his own body and push it to do what he had committed to do. This call demanded discipline and struggle. It required long nights and early mornings. It meant facing insults and misunderstandings. Listen to what the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:

[27] But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9)

The apostle Paul was beaten and stoned. He was cast into prison and rejected. He was, however, a hard taskmaster over his own body. He pushed it to do what he had committed before God to do. It was not the thought that counted here—it was doing what God had called him to do.

Listen to what the Psalmist said in Psalm 15:

[1] O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? [2] He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; [3] who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbour, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; [4] in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honours those who fear the LORD; who swears to his own hurt and does not change (Psalm 15)

Notice the phrase, "who swears to his own hurt and does not change." Life will not always be easy. Sometimes the

commitments we make will require great personal sacrifice. God expects, however, that we be true to our word and the vows we have made, even when it hurts us personally.

When God said, “see that you do,” he was telling Moses that he was to do everything in his power to accomplish what God had given him to do. He was to push himself, discipline himself and be willing to make the necessary sacrifices to finish the task God had given him. God was telling Moses that the life he had called him to was not one of good intentions and attitudes but of hard work and disciplined effort.

The phrase “see that you do,” tells us something else. Let’s focus for a moment on the word “you.” God was speaking to Moses. In this debate between God and Moses, Moses told God that he was not the man for the job. He suggested that he call his brother Aaron to do the work instead. When God said to Moses, “see that *you* do,” He was telling him that He expected him, not Aaron, to do the work.

It is easy for us to believe that, as long as the task is completed, it doesn’t matter who does it. As a missionary, I have heard people say, “if you can’t go to the mission field yourself, then you can give and pray for someone else.” As much as I have appreciated the support and prayers of God’s people, if God is calling you to go, then staying home to pray is not being obedient. Moses wanted to send someone else on his behalf, but God said, “no.” It is true that Aaron went with Moses, but it was the call of God on the life of Moses that he go to Egypt himself.

I have had times when I have felt the Lord speaking to me and telling me to do something, but my human logic began to persuade me otherwise. How easy it for us to overlook

the word "you" in the call of God. God is speaking to you personally. It is you he wants to use. You may struggle with this and wonder how He could ever use you, but that is what He wants to do. Many servants before you have missed the opportunity to prove the faithfulness of God but passing off their call to someone else. God is not looking for someone else –He is looking for you. Unless you see this, you will never experience the fullness of what He wants to do through you. God will always be distant and removed from you. Only by accepting that He is speaking to you personally can you know Him and His enabling.

There is one final detail I would like to examine in this phrase. Notice that God said, "see that you do before Pharaoh." God called Moses to go to Pharaoh. He was called to the leader of the nation. He was called to face the strongest world leader of the day. Moses was to go straight to the head of the country. The command of God was specific.

As Moses embarked on this journey, he focused on what God had given him to do. Nothing less than this would suffice. He was to go to Pharaoh. This world is filled with distractions. The enemy will do his best to keep us from doing what God has given us to do. He will even fill our schedules with good things to keep us from being obedient to the call.

The apostles of the early church faced this challenge in Acts 6:

[6:1] Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. [2] And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not

right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. [3] Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. (Acts 6)

The physical needs of the early church were significant. Widows needed daily food, but this need was being neglected. Serving these widows was a time-consuming task. The apostles could easily have become so involved in this that they had no time for preaching the Word of God. the early church appointed seven men and gave them the responsibility of caring for needy widows. The apostles were then able to continue with what God had called them to do.

God reminded Moses that he was to go to Pharaoh. This was the role God had for him to play. He was to see that this happened. He was to discipline his efforts and time so that the focus of his work was with Pharaoh. He was not to let other obligations distract him. The words, “see that you do before Pharaoh,” gave Moses his priority. This is where his efforts were to be focused. There were other responsibilities, but they were not to sidetrack Moses. His obligations were toward Pharaoh.

The word “see” made Moses accountable to God. The word “do” placed him under a sacrificial obligation. The word “you” showed him that no one else could do this task. The word “Pharaoh” gave Moses a ministry directive. Moses would go to Egypt with a clear sense of accountability, obligation, personal responsibility and ministry focus.

What has God given you to do? Will you make it your commitment to “see” that you are walking in that purpose. Will you accept that this is your God-given obligation? Will you discipline yourself and make the sacrifices necessary to

"do" what He had given you to do. Will you resist any distraction and commit yourself to be faithful to what he has called "you" personally to do?

Like Moses, we need to hear the words of God, but we need to be faithful in following through with what He requires from us. You may feel inadequate like Moses, but the words, "see that you do" is still His command. This calling is not for anyone else –it is your call alone. Will you step out in obedience? Will you make it your priority not only to hear that call but also to see that you are faithful? We will only know His power and anointing as we step out in obedience. You are not worthy. You are not able to do this in your power, but the grace and enabling of God is available for everyone who will obey.

For Consideration:

Does the Christian life require discipline and sacrifice? Explain.

Are there sacrifices God wants you to make? What sacrifices are you willing to make to be faithful to the call of God on your life?

Have you been neglecting the responsibilities God has given you? Have you been waiting for someone else to do what God has called you to do?

Have you ever been side-tracked in your ministry? What is the call of God on your life? What things distract you from that calling?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to give you a more willing heart to devote yourself to His purpose for your life. Ask Him to forgive you for the times that the Christian life has been more about receiving than giving?

Ask God to make His purpose and calling sure in your heart. Ask Him to give you the faith to step out in disciplined obedience to this call. Ask Him to use you for His glory.

Ask God to show you the distractions in your life. Ask Him to give you His priorities? Ask for wisdom in how to deal with the constant distractions keeping you from His purpose.

3

Miracles: The Empowering

*[21] ... all the miracles that I have put in your power...
(Exodus 4)*

Those of us who have been in Christian service for any length of time understand that it is one thing to be where God wants us to be and quite another to be effective in that ministry. In the case of Moses, God was calling him to go to the most powerful leader on the earth and convince him to release over one million slaves.

Slavery was a vital part of the Egyptian economy. The Israelites built new cities for Pharaoh (Exodus 1:11). The nation prospered, in part, because of the cheap labour obtained from the institution of slavery. Pharaoh refused to let go of such an important source of productivity. Moses understood the difficulty there would be in convincing Pharaoh to release such a vital asset.

Beyond this, however, was the question of what to do with the slaves if Pharaoh did release them, where were they to live? How would Moses find food and shelter for them? Finding a home for a million men and their families was an overwhelming task. There would likely be battles to fight. These Israelite slaves were not trained as soldiers? What

hope would they have if they faced a well-equipped and disciplined army? Even if they did find a place to live, there was the task of organizing them as a nation. What would keep them together? Who would be their leader and how would their society be ordered? What laws would govern them? What would they do with those who broke those laws? What about their spiritual life? Who would lead them into the ways of God and the truth He had for them? Who would oversee this and where would they worship? At the age of eighty, I am sure Moses did not feel up to the task before him. It was a task that was well beyond his ability and skill. This is why it is important that we consider the next phrase in Exodus 4:21 – “all the miracles that I have put in your power.” Let’s break this phrase down and consider what God is saying to Moses and its application.

First, let’s consider the word “miracles.” A miracle, by its very nature, defies logic. It is a demonstration of a power that is larger than us. Miracles reveal the presence of God and are a sign of His power in our midst. Miracles cannot be explained logically. They are not the result of human effort or skill. Magic is performed by sleight of hand and deception. Miracles, however, are the direct result of the intervention of God in the affairs of this earth.

Notice what God is asking Moses to do in Exodus 4:21 – “see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles I have put in your power.” The call of Moses was not to do the miraculous. When God sent Moses to do an impossible task, he did not send him to do so in his strength. God knew that human ability and wisdom was insufficient for the job. Only a miracle of God could bring about the change God required. Moses was not to rely on his ability but in the miraculous power of God.

How often we depend on our human skill and wisdom? We trust our education and our natural abilities to do the work of ministry. We find ourselves disappointed when we do not see the results we expected. Listen to the words of the prophet Zechariah as recorded in Zechariah 4:

[6] Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. [7] Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'" (Zechariah 4)

The task to which the Lord God has called us is not accomplished by human might and power. The power of His Spirit must accomplish it. We must learn to expect the miraculous. God is in the business of miraculously empowering those He calls.

The prophet Jeremiah says this about those who trust in their wisdom and skill to do the work of the Lord:

[5] Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. [6] He is like a shrub in the desert and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. (Jeremiah 17)

Those who trust in the flesh and not in the Lord, will not prosper. Moses had to understand this concept as he prepared for Egypt. If he relied on his ability, he would fail. In the power of God, however, he would be victorious.

Notice a second detail in Exodus 4:21. Consider the phrase, “I have put in your power.” I want to focus here on the word “I.” This little word is of utmost importance. It reveals the source of power in the miracles. It is God who speaks here. God is telling Moses that He gave him these miracles to perform. While this should go without saying, it is surprising how often we forget this little word and the source of our power.

We have all met individuals who have come to believe that they are something special because they have this incredible power in them. There have been times when I have trusted in my spiritual gifts. What we need to realize, however, is that even our spiritual gifts need to be empowered by God. That is why we pray for His blessing. We cannot trust our spiritual gifts –we must trust God who enables those gifts. If you go into ministry relying on your spiritual gifts, you are relying on the wrong thing. I have been in meetings where the focus has been on the person up front. People come expecting that the evangelist or the preacher will change their lives. We dare not worship the messenger. They are mere instruments in the hand of God.

Paul and Barnabas were traveling in Lystra when they met a man crippled from birth. In the name of the Lord, Paul told him to rise to his feet. The man was healed that day. Listen to the response of the people present that day:

[11] And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” [12] Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. [13] And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. (Acts 14)

The crowd saw Paul and Barnabas as gods and began to worship them. All this was to the horror of the apostles, who immediately responded by tearing their garments and rushing out into the crowd:

[14] But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, [15] "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. (Acts 14)

The apostles made it clear that they were mere men. The power to perform this miracle was not from them but their God. We cannot take credit for the miracles that take place. The ability to do the impossible is not my power—it is the power of God in me. It was important that Moses remember the source of his power and authority.

If the source of our power is in God, then it is of utmost importance that we remain connected to Him. He who gives us this power can also take it from us. If He is our source, we must be in constant communion with Him and mindful of our inability without Him.

Notice also the phrase "in your power." God told Moses that He had placed these miracles in his power. Moses was not the source of the miracles, but he would be accountable to God for their use. The Hebrew word used here means "hand." In other words, God placed His miraculous power in the hands of Moses. Moses would be accountable for how he used this power that came from God. God gave him the authority to use this power for the purpose to which he had called him.

We need to understand that we are given the authority and responsibility to use the power given to us for the glory of God. When God's power is given to overcome a stronghold of sin in our life, we are to take advantage of this to walk in victory. I have met people who have struggled with sin in their lives for years. Some of them die without ever having victory over that sin. God has placed His power in our hands. This power is available to us so that we can walk in His will and according to His purpose. It is our responsibility to tap into that miraculous power to overcome the sin that holds us back.

God's power is in our hands not only to deal with the hindrances in our lives but also to expand His kingdom in the lives of others. The various gifts God gives are designed to bless the body of Christ or to reach those who do not know Him. They can impact our communities for Christ and restore those who have fallen away. There is tremendous power in the gifts God has given. These spiritual gifts and abilities have been put in our hands for the glory of our God in this earth.

The word "your" in this phrase personalizes the empowering. God gave Moses a set of gifts and called him to a specific work. Moses' calling is not my calling, but the Lord has given me what I need to accomplish His purpose. All the power I need is under my authority. It is not my power, but I am responsible for how I use it. With this authority and provision at our disposal, we can expect miraculous things to happen.

We will need great wisdom and discernment to use these miraculous tools God has given us. We will need to learn how to tap into this power and use it according to His purpose and will. We will need to learn to distinguish our

human fleshly efforts from the working of His power. One thing is certain; Moses could not have accomplished the work God called him to in his wisdom and strength. In the power of God, however, he did more than was humanly possible.

Before concluding our reflection on this phrase in Exodus 4:21, I want to examine one more detail. Notice the phrase, "all the miracles." This again shows us something important. God gave Moses one than one miracle to perform before Pharaoh. He expected that Moses use every tool at his disposal. No gift is given without purpose. Every gift is vital to the fulfilment of God's purpose. We are accountable to God for everything he has given.

Consider for a moment that I have sin in my life that needs to be conquered. Maybe as I minister using the spiritual gifts God has given me, I find myself becoming proud. Perhaps I forget the source of my power. As my pride grows, I find myself more and more unwilling to tap into the power of God to overcome this pride in me. What will be the result? This unwillingness to make use of the power to defeat sin in my life will ultimately affect my ministry. My pride will be my downfall, not because I was unable to overcome it, but because I was unwilling to allow the Spirit of God to deal with this sin in me.

God has imparted the power necessary for us to be fruitful. He has placed that power in our hands and sends us out in His name to expand and build up His kingdom. We lack nothing for the task, but we need great discernment and wisdom in how to manage the resources He has placed under our authority. No gift is without its function in our life. We must seek Him continually for wisdom and discernment to use all that He has given us.

My personality, the combination of my spiritual gifts and the circumstances God had given me mean that my ministry will be unlike anyone else's. Not all spiritual gifts are alike. A teacher may be gifted to speak to university students but completely unable to teach children or youth. God may put a burden on the heart of a teacher for a particular subject, and this becomes his or her lifelong devotion. A teacher may also be a gifted evangelist, and so his or her teaching has an evangelistic thrust. Some teachers are good writers but not good speakers and so the medium through which they exercise their gift is different. What is true of the gift of teaching is true with all other spiritual gifts as well. We cannot look at someone else and try to be like them in the use of their gifts because we are not like anyone else and the way our ministry will unfold will be completely different.

As Moses performed all the miracles of God, the purpose of God for His life would unfold. God told him to do all the miracles He had put in his power. He was not to neglect any of these powers because they all had a purpose. As each of these miracles was performed, the power of the enemy grew weaker. The mission of God would not be accomplished using only one of God's miracles. Moses was to tap into every power God had made available to Him. Only then would the enemy be defeated.

God places a great responsibility in our hands. The miraculous power He has given us will push back the power of evil and establish His kingdom. This power, however, requires great wisdom and discernment. We must be in constant communion with God if we are going to be effective in the use of these tools. We cannot be neglectful. All that God has given must be used. Nothing must sit on the shelf if we are to be effective. Moses was to do all the miracles God had put in his power to do.

For Consideration:

How difficult would it have been for Moses to accomplish the task God had given him if he was required to do this without the miracles of God at his disposal?

A miracle is an evidence of God's power. What miraculous powers had God given you? How do these powers confirm the presence of God in your life?

Consider the inner and outer working of God in and through our lives. Why is it essential that we not neglect any of God's gifts?

What is the difference between our human strength and the miraculous power of God at work in us?

How easy is it to forget the source of our power?

Is there anything that God has given you that you have neglected (spiritual gifts, potential victories, opportunities for service)?

How important it is that we be connected to God and in communion with Him as we use the power He has put into our hands?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord that when He calls us to a task, He empowers us and gives us all that is necessary to accomplish that task.

Ask God to reveal to you His purpose for your life and ministry. Ask Him to enable you to use all the gifts He has given you. Ask Him to teach you how to use what He has given you.

Ask God to help you to see your need for wisdom and discernment in the use of the power He has put in your hands. Ask Him for the wisdom and discernment necessary to be faithful in making use of all He has given you.

4

Hardened Hearts: The Source of our Confidence

[21] ... But I will harden his heart (Exodus 4:21)

In the last chapter, we saw how God gave Moses a series of miracles to perform before Pharaoh. These miracles were demonstrations of God's power. In the presence of Pharaoh, Moses turned his staff into a serpent (Exodus 7:1-13), made his hand leprous and healed it (Exodus 4:6). These were not the only signs Moses performed. Consider the miracles of God through Moses in those days:

1. Turned the water of the Nile to blood (Exodus 7:14-25)
2. Brought an infestation of frogs to Egypt (Exodus 8:1-15)
3. Brought an infestation of gnats to Egypt (Exodus 8:16-19)
4. Brought an infestation of flies Egypt (Exodus 8:20-32)
5. Prayed and the livestock in Egypt died (Exodus 9:1-7)
6. Brought an outbreak of boils on the Egyptians (Exodus 9:8-12)
7. Brought a downpour of hail that destroyed Egyptian crops (Exodus 9:13-35)

8. Brought an infestation of locusts to Egypt (Exodus 10:1-20)
9. Brought darkness to the land of Egypt (Exodus 10:21-29)
10. Brought the death of the firstborn male of every Egyptian family (Exodus 12:29-30)
11. Parted the Red Sea and destroyed the entire army of Egypt (Exodus 14:21-25)

The signs God performed through Moses were powerful. They would impoverish and humble the mighty nation of Egypt. It would be easy to assume that, with this type of power at his disposal, no resistance would be possible. But then we read the next phrase in Exodus 4:21 – “but I will harden his heart.” God empowered Moses to deliver His people and then hardened the heart of Pharaoh so that He would not release them.

The phrase, “but I will harden his heart” is an important one. Consider this from the perspective of Moses. He was empowered by God to do an incredible work, but it was not this power that would bring Pharaoh to his knees. Pharaoh would resist every miracle Moses performed. His heart would remain hardened to the very end.

Moses went to Egypt with the power of God to perform great signs and wonders. He also went, however, with the understanding that these miracles would not change Pharaoh’s heart. Listen to what the Lord Jesus said to the cities of Corazon and Bethsaida in Matthew 11:

[22] But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. [23] And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in

you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. (Matthew 11)

Here were two cities that saw the power of God in the person of the Lord Jesus but resisted that power and stood condemned. The people of Jesus' day followed Him and saw the great miracles He performed, but those miracles changed the hearts of very few. In the end, those who saw His miracles called out for his crucifixion.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day accused him of casting out demons by the power of Satan:

[24] But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." (Matthew 12)

Jesus raised the dead and gave them life. He healed crippled, and they walked for the first time. He gave sight to the blind. Demons fled from those they possessed. Despite these manifestations of divine power, the heart of the Pharisees, like that of Pharaoh, remained hardened.

In Revelation 9 the apostle John speaks of a series of judgements to come in which humankind will be tormented by demonic beings from the bottomless pit. One third of humanity will be destroyed and perish in dreadful agony. The power of God in judgement will be unleashed in those days. The chapter ends, however, with these prophetic words:

[20] The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, [21] nor did they repent of their murders or

their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.
(Revelation 9)

Imagine a power that can destroy one-third of humanity. Even this power, however, will not change the hearts of those who see it. Miracles and demonstrations of God's power are not enough to break the sinful heart. As powerful as these signs are, the wicked heart of humankind is harder still.

How easy it is to trust in demonstrations of God's power. We believe that our spiritual gifts will be enough to break the power of evil. We step out with confidence in the tools God has given us. We have the truth and the power of God at our disposal and feel that nothing can resist us. Like Moses, we demonstrate our gifts and the wonders of God to those to whom God has called us. Then we stand back in absolute confusion when they are not impressed. We are bewildered when their hearts remain unchanged. Sometimes we are even disappointed with God. Like Jeremiah we complain:

*[7] O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived;
you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have
become a laughingstock all day; everyone mocks me.*
(Jeremiah 20)

There is a valuable lesson for us in these words of God to Moses. Pharaoh's heart would be hardened to the power of God. He would die with a rebellious spirit against God and His purpose for Israel. God gave Moses power but it would not change Pharaoh. Moses confidence was not to be in the signs and wonders but in God alone.

There is a very subtle but significant difference between having confidence in the power of the signs God gives and

trusting God. Though the miracles did not change the heart of Pharaoh, God would still have victory. Though Pharaoh resisted the signs God gave Moses to perform, God would set the people of Israel free.

You can trust your spiritual gifts and not God. What happens when you exercise your spiritual gift and nothing changes? Can you still trust God? Can you still believe when the signs He has given you to perform, do not accomplish what you thought they should? Isn't God bigger than your spiritual gifts? Will I trust the staff that turns into a snake? Will I put my confidence in the hand that is healed from leprosy? As important as my spiritual gifts may be, it is only God who can change the human heart.

The power at my disposal does not remove my need to depend on God. Listen to the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 127:

[127:1] Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labour in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. (Psalm 127)

You may be filled with the power of God, but unless God chooses to bless your efforts, all those efforts will be vain. You may be a gifted preacher able to move large crowds of people, but unless God opens the hearts of those who listen, your words will fall on deaf ears. Confidence placed in the gifts God gives is misplaced. Our faith must be in God. The most gifted of us all is as dependent on God as the simplest believer.

In choosing pastors for our church, we look for those who have strong spiritual gifts, experience and education. We trust their expertise to bring wisdom in decisions. We rely on their training to teach us the truth. We place our

confidence in their spiritual gifts to mature us. As important as these qualities may be, God alone can bring the change and growth we need. We dare not make idols of these demonstrations of God's power and authority.

As Moses went back to Egypt, God gave him miraculous signs to perform before Pharaoh. He told him, however, that those signs would not change the heart of the king. Moses' confidence was not to be in these miraculous signs, but in the God who called him. Our God is worthy of confidence even when our spiritual gifts fail to produce the results we expect.

For Consideration:

How did Moses demonstrate the power of God in his life and ministry?

Did the demonstration of God's power in Moses' life change the heart of Pharaoh? How do you feel when your spiritual gifts do not accomplish what you anticipated?

How did the people of Jesus' day respond to His miracles?

What is the difference between trusting the signs and gifts of God and trusting God?

Is it possible to place our confidence in spiritual gifts and demonstrations of God's power and not in God?

Is it possible to want the power of God and not God Himself?

Is God bigger than our experience of His power? Explain.

For Prayer:

Take a moment to thank the Lord for the spiritual gifts and demonstrations of His power He has given to us as believers.

Ask the Lord to help you to trust Him even when your spiritual gifts seem to fail you. Thank Him that He is bigger than any demonstration of power you have experienced in your life.

Ask the Lord to help you to place your confidence in Him alone. Take a moment to confess that even though He has empowered you with His gifts, you still need Him and His blessing for any fruit in your ministry.

5

He Will Not Let the People God: The Nature of Victory

[21] ... so that he will not let the people go. (Exodus 4)

While God equipped Moses with power, it was not that power alone that would bring the victory. Before he embarked on the journey to Egypt, God told Moses that Pharaoh would not let the people of Israel go. Moses saw the reality of this statement as he performed one sign after another. These demonstrations of power did not change Pharaoh's mind. Even after the death of his firstborn son, and the escape of God's people from Egypt, Pharaoh pursued them with intent to bring them back as slaves. To the very end, Pharaoh set his heart against the purpose of God for the Israelites.

It is here that many problems develop in ministry. We have an awareness of the call and empowering of God in our lives and anticipate that nothing can stand against us. Consider Moses as an example. God called and gifted him to speak to Pharaoh about releasing the Israelites. I am sure he was aware of the difficulty of this task, but he went in the power and under the anointing of God. While Moses would not have understood how the victory would come, if

I were in his place, I would have anticipated that somehow Pharaoh would listen and finally relent when I showed Him the power of God at my disposal. That did not happen.

There were times when it seemed that Pharaoh would relent. Each time Moses called for a plague to fall on the nation, Pharaoh would summon him and offer a concession. When everything returned to normal again, Pharaoh would pull back his offer. Why would God empower Moses to speak when He knew that Pharaoh would not listen to what he said? Why would God give him signs to perform before Pharaoh when they would not change his heart?

Imagine the missionary evangelist working year after year to reach an unreached people group in a foreign land. He or she is called and equipped by God to do the work but see no visible fruit for their efforts. The hearts of those they serve remain hardened to the gospel. The temptation is to feel that we are not as close to the Lord as we need to be or that we are not tapping into the source of power that is available to us.

The problem with this conclusion is in the fact that Moses did precisely what God told him to do, but Pharaoh still resisted. Jesus demonstrated the power of God and walked in perfect harmony with the Father and the Spirit, but by the end of His ministry, only a handful of people believed in Him.

What is the nature of victory? We all have our idea of what success should look like. For Moses, it may have been that Pharaoh would have been so touched by what he spoke that all resistance to God fled and he willingly released the people. Maybe Pharaoh would have accepted the God of Israel as the one true God. Maybe Moses could see the

nation of Egypt turning to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. None of these things came to pass.

When all the signs and speaking did not soften the heart of Pharaoh, God stepped in and pulled the people of Israel from the rebellious hands of Pharaoh. He led the king and his army to the Red Sea and drowned every one of them. Moses and the people stood back and watched the deliverance of the Lord. That day Moses realized that this deliverance had nothing to do with how well he used the power God had given him. Nor did it have anything to do with how boldly and eloquently he spoke to Pharaoh. The deliverance of God's people was a direct result of the hand of God moving when all else failed. Moses and Aaron stood humbly at the shore of the Red Sea recognizing that God alone brought this victory. Empowered as they were, they could take no credit for themselves.

The miracle that took place that day was not that the hard heart of Pharaoh was broken through the preaching of Moses, but that despite his persistent refusal to let the people go, they were still set free. The victory was not in the relenting of Egypt, but in its destruction --not in the release of Israel alone, but in the complete breaking of the enemy that had held them in bondage for four hundred years.

The victory came in a way no one had anticipated. It was not the result of miracles performed by Moses or his powerful preaching. The Lord reached down from heaven and rescued His people. God gave Pharaoh every opportunity to repent and let His people go. Moses faithfully used his spiritual gifts. These gifts declared the power of God, warned Pharaoh of coming judgement and showed him what God expected of him, but they did not change the mind of the king.

It would have been easy for Moses to feel that he had failed. How could he claim victory when Pharaoh resisted every effort he had made to free the slaves? God knew even before He sent Moses what Pharaoh's response would be. Success would not be obtained by Moses convincing Pharaoh to let the people go. Moses had a role to play, but victory would not be what he anticipated.

The ways of God are very different from our ways. The victory God gave that day was bigger than anything Israel could have imagined. Egypt would no longer be a threat to Israel. Its army and its land were destroyed.

As Moses and Aaron stood on the other side of the Red Sea what was going through their mind? Did they think about all that they had accomplished? Were they patting themselves on the back for a job well done? Somehow, I believe that they stood on the shoreline baffled by what had just happened. I think that as they saw the waters of the Red Sea close in over the army of Egypt, they were aware of their inadequacy and the smallness of their role. I believe their hearts rose up in thanksgiving to God who did what they could not do with all their speaking and miracles. They stood awestruck at the God they served. He was bigger than all the mighty signs they had performed.

How often we have failed to appreciate the victory God has given because it did not come as we anticipated. What would have happened if Moses had given up because when he spoke, Pharaoh did not respond favourably? Imagine Moses losing hope because when he performed his mighty signs, Pharaoh's heart remained untouched. Picture Moses on the other side of the Red Sea feeling let down because the miracle that brought total victory was not one he could take credit for. All eyes were on God and not on him.

Standing on the other side of the Red Sea Moses joined the people in singing:

[15:1] "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. [2] The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him... [4] "Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea. [5] The floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone. [6] Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy. [7] In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries; you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble. [8] At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up; the floods stood up in a heap; the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea. [9] The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them.' [10] You blew with your wind; the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters. [11] "Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? [12] You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them. (Exodus 15)

All glory went to God for this deliverance. He threw the horse and rider into the sea and covered them with His floods. He overthrew the enemy by the blast of his nostrils. He stretched out His hand, and the earth swallowed Egypt. No one could have predicted this outcome. What Moses and Aaron laboured so hard to achieve, God accomplished by a single "blast of his nostrils." Why did He even choose to use Moses and Aaron? God used Moses and Aaron for a number of purposes.

First, God used them in this mission of deliverance to teach them some vital lessons in obedience, perseverance and trust. Over the coming years, Moses and Aaron would lead the people of God through the wilderness. There would be many hard times ahead for them. They would need to persevere through the rejection and complaining of God's people. God showed His servants that if they persevered and walked in faithful obedience, He would bring them victory. This was a lesson they needed to learn for what was ahead.

Second, God used Moses and Aaron to demonstrate His power. As they returned time after time to Pharaoh, the most powerful nation on the earth was reduced to nothing. The miracles of God working through Moses and Aaron brought judgement upon Egypt. Their economy was devastated. Their confidence in their military might was dashed. Through Moses and Aaron, God declared Himself to be greater than all the leaders and pagan gods of Egypt.

Third, God also revealed Himself to His people as the Deliverer. As the people of Israel watched the miracles of God take place through Moses and Aaron, they came to see once again that the stories they had heard about Him were true. God was proving Himself to His people. He demonstrated His power, and compassion to Israel so they would know Him and His purpose for their lives.

Finally, God declared His glory through the work of Moses and Aaron. He showed Israel, Egypt and ultimately the whole earth that He was an Almighty God. He taught Israel that He was a God of mercy and compassion who would not abandon His people forever. Through Moses and Aaron, God revealed to the world that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is a God to be respected and feared.

The task of Moses and Aaron was to point Egypt, Israel and the nations to God. They were to speak about Him, speak in His name, and demonstrate His miraculous power. As a pastor, my greatest responsibility is to keep people's eyes on the Lord. I cannot solve their problems. I cannot heal their pain. I cannot change their circumstances, but I can point them to someone who can. This is what Moses and Aaron are doing here. They are by their actions and words pointing the Israelite slaves and their Egyptian masters to God. They declare Him to be a God of compassion and mercy for Israel but a God of righteous judgement and fury to Egypt.

The victory was not in Moses and Aaron but God. The Lord God wanted to deliver His people. He would receive all the glory for this. Moses and Aaron were called to reveal the source of the victory.

For Consideration:

Why do you suppose God would empower Moses but not use that empowering to convince Pharaoh to let the slaves free?

Does the lack of visible fruit mean that we are unfaithful or not trusting God?

Do you think that Moses was surprised by God and the victory He brought?

What role did Moses play in the victory God gave? What role did God play?

Have you ever found yourself expecting victory in one way but God brought it in a completely different way?

What lessons did God teach Moses, Israel and Egypt in this deliverance from Egypt?

Do you have the faith to point people to God and trust Him for the victory or do you believe that deliverance must come through you?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord that He is greater than the most challenging situation we face.

Ask the Lord to help you to see the victories that He gives. Ask Him to forgive you for times you have fought against His purpose because it did not look like you anticipated.

Ask the Lord to remove from you any sense of needing to be the one to bring victory. Ask Him to help you to accept His role for you even though you may never see the fruit of your labours.

Ask God to help you to point people to Him as the solution to their struggle.

About the Author

Light To My Path Book Distribution (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement.

F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them freely or at cost price to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

These books are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books have now been translated into a number of languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

The ministry of LTMP is a faith-based ministry and we trust the Lord for the resources necessary to distribute the books for the encouragement and strengthening of believers around the world. Would you pray that the Lord would open doors for the translation and further distribution of these books? For more information about Light To My Path Book Distribution visit our website at <http://www.lighttomypath.ca>