



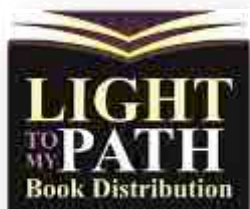
F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

WHAT IS
THAT IN
YOUR
HAND?

The Call of A Reluctant Servant

What is that in Your Hand?

Exodus 4:1-5: The Call of a Reluctant Servant



F. Wayne MacLeod

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What is that in Your Hand?

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PREFACE

This is a brief study of Exodus 4:1-5. This passage is a conversation between Moses and God, in which Moses honestly expressed his doubts and insecurities concerning the purpose of God for his life. God, however, had been preparing Moses all along for this special task and would use the simple tools He had already given him to accomplish the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the most powerful nation on the earth.

God has been preparing each of us for a special task. Every gift or experience He has given is useful for the accomplishing of this purpose. God has put us in circumstances and locations for a reason. He has given us experiences in life to teach us. Each person is uniquely equipped by God for their calling in life.

In Exodus 4:1-5 God used an ordinary man with a simple tool to accomplish something he could never have imagined. By surrendering everything to the Lord, Moses saw the impossible accomplished. His story is a challenge to each of us. These few verses contain vital spiritual lessons for ministry today. These simple truths, if applied to our lives, can have a dramatic impact on this world for the cause of our God.

Take time to meditate on the lessons God was teaching Moses. Ask God to help you to not only understand but to apply these lessons to your life and ministry today. My prayer is that the truths of these few verses will have a dramatic impact on the life of each reader and ultimately be the means by which someone will step out as Moses.

F. Wayne MacLeod

1

THE CRY OF GOD'S PEOPLE

As we embark on the study of Exodus 4:1-5 it is important that we understand the context. Let's take a moment to see what has been happening in the lives of God's people at this time.

ISRAEL'S OPPRESSION IN EGYPT

These were difficult days. The children of Israel were living in Egypt. They had settled there when Joseph was a ruler under Pharaoh. Under his leadership, they were treated well and the blessing of God was on them. A new king came to power, however, who did not have the same concern. He saw Israel as a threat and forced them into slavery. We catch a glimpse of the suffering God's people endured under this new Pharaoh's reign in Exodus 2:23:

During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God.

Notice the use of the word “groan” (NIV). This leads us to understand that their pain was very intense. They were weary and oppressed to the point that they groaned in agony over the burden they had to bear.

This oppression, however, did not keep God's people from receiving His blessing. He continued to reveal His presence by increasing their number. This only incited further anxiety on the part of Pharaoh. He increased their workload and demanded that the midwives kill all male babies born to Israelite women (Exodus 1:15). We can see the hatred that was developing in Egypt toward the Israelite people and the blessing of God on their lives.

When his plan to kill every male child through the midwives did not work, Pharaoh took a more aggressive step. He called on all his people to drown the new born male children of Israel in the Nile River.

It is hard to imagine a society with such an intense hatred toward another people group; where baby boys were killed simply because they were Jewish. Imagine the deep pain God's people were experiencing as their new born sons were taken from them and drowned in the river.

Israel had been reduced to slavery. Their children were being murdered before their eyes. It was not only legal for any Egyptian to kill these newborn male children, but it was also the wish of the government at that time. It is not hard to see that Satan was behind these horrible events. God's people groaned under their burden. They had nowhere to turn but to the Lord. They cried out, pleading with Him to release them from their burden.

MOSES' BACKGROUND

An Israelite baby boy by the name of Moses was born at that time. Through a series of miraculous events, this young child won the heart of Pharaoh's daughter. She adopted him as her own. Moses, though he was Jewish, grew up in the privilege and wealth of Egypt. He was aware, however, of his Israelite heritage.

One day Moses went out to see what was happening with the Jews. While he was watching, he noticed an Egyptian beating a Jewish slave. This angered him and he came to the defense of the Jew, killing the Egyptian. When news of what he had done reached the ears of Pharaoh, he was furious with Moses and tried to kill him. Moses was forced to leave Egypt to save his life.

This would have been a very difficult time for Moses. He fled to the land of Midian where he would live as a stranger, separated from his people and from those who had raised him. Moses married a Midianite woman and they had a son. Moses named this son Gershom because he said: "I have become an alien in a foreign land." This shows us that Moses was grieving in his heart over his exile.

Moses felt helpless to do anything for his own people. He felt alone in a foreign country. There was likely a sense of confusion and helplessness in his life at this time. Perhaps he felt somewhat abandoned by God. He had gone from being a prince in Egypt to being a shepherd in Midian, rejected by his people and alone in a distant country. There were likely many questions in Moses' heart at this time. He may have felt as if God had slammed a door in his face and left him standing all alone.

It was in this context that the Lord God appeared to Moses in a burning bush (Exodus 3:1-2). The voice of God came from the bush and spoke to Moses saying: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6). God went on to tell Moses that He had seen the affliction of His people and heard their cry for help (Exodus 3:7). That day, the Lord God told Moses that He was calling him to return to Egypt to deliver His people from the oppression they were facing. Exodus 4:1-5 comes in the context of great suffering, persecution and helplessness. God had heard the prayers of His people and determined to come to their aid.

There are three lessons we need to draw from this context. The first is that God does not guarantee us that we will not have problems in this life. Christians all over the world are suffering for their faith, even in our day. If there is anything to be learned from the context of Exodus 4:1-5, it is that we will sometimes be hated because we belong to God. Listen to what Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 24:9:

Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.

We are in the midst of an intense spiritual battle. Satan's rage is real. He lashes out at those who belong to Christ. We should not be surprised if we feel the sting of his arrows. As long as righteousness is living in the midst of sin, it will be despised. Pharaoh's anger against Israel gives us a brief glimpse of the nature of the battle before us in our day as well.

The second lesson we need to learn from this context is that God does see what is happening to His people and hears their prayers. Where could Israel turn in her time of

oppression? She had no one to stand with her. No other nation would come to her aid. She had been brought to a place where the only place to turn was to God. When everyone else had deserted her, God alone remained faithful.

What is true of Israel was also true of Moses. There in the desert, Moses had nowhere to go. He was likely lost in his disappointments and defeat. He felt alone and abandoned, but God reached out to him in that loneliness. There in that barren desert, God spoke to Moses, reminded him of his family, and gave him a purpose in life. Do you feel alone, disappointed and discouraged? God wants to reach out to you as well. No matter how difficult things appear to be, God is present. He sees our need and will respond in His time.

The final lesson I want to touch on here is this: God uses unlikely people to accomplish His purposes. Moses was now in his eighties. He was no longer in the prime of life. He lived as a simple shepherd. Admittedly, he had been raised as an Egyptian but he had been banished from his country. Returning to Egypt could cost him his life. He was born an Israelite but his own people did not accept him because he had been raised as an Egyptian. For the past forty years he had been living in Midian, but he knew this was not his home. He struggled to know who he really was or where he fit into the overall purpose of God. This is the man God chose to be an instrument in His hands to deliver His people from bondage and captivity. God uses unlikely people.

Exodus 4:1-5 is a conversation between God and Moses regarding this special call on Moses' life. It reveals the insecurity of Moses but also the wonderful power of God at work in Him. It is a challenge to each of us in our own insecurities and uncertainties. Moses is a picture of each of

us with our failures and shortcomings. He is also a picture of what God wants to do with even the simplest of believers. It is my prayer that this brief study will challenge us to take hold of God's call on our own lives and step out boldly to accomplish His purpose.

For Consideration:

- What is the context for Exodus 4:1-5? What were the people of God facing at this time in their history? What was Moses facing personally?
- What do we learn about the nature of the spiritual battle before us? What evidence is there of this battle today?
- Have you ever been brought to a place where you have no one to turn to but God? What was the result?
- What kind of people does God use to accomplish His purpose? What were some of the issues Moses was dealing with in his life when God called him? What are some of the issues you are dealing with personally?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that even when the spiritual battle rages around you, He has not forgotten you.
- Ask the Lord to give you strength to face the fierceness of the spiritual battle before you today.
- Do you know someone who has been suffering or persecuted for their faith? Take a moment to ask the Lord to comfort, strengthen and encourage them.

- Ask God to make you more willing to trust Him and step out in obedience to His call on your life. Thank Him that He is willing to use you despite your shortcomings and struggles.

2

WHAT IF THEY DON'T BELIEVE ME?

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

In the opening chapter, we examined the context of Exodus 4:1-5. Israel had been reduced to slavery and her children were being murdered at the command of an evil king. In her grief, Israel cried out to God and He heard her prayer. He called Moses to deliver her from this terrible oppression.

In Exodus 3:10, God spoke very clearly to Moses about His purpose for his life. He told him that He was sending him to deliver His people from Egypt.

"So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." (Exodus 3:10)

The words, "I am sending you" were very clear. God was giving Moses a very specific order. Moses knew that those words were directed at him. He may have felt unworthy of this task but there was no mistaking the call of God on his life. He could go with the absolute confidence that he was the one God had called for this particular task.

Beyond this, however, God also promised Moses that He would be with Him:

And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain." (Exodus 3:12)

Moses would not have to do this alone. He was going to return to Egypt with not only the call of God on his life but also the presence of God with him to accomplish the task. The God of Israel would empower and strengthen him to accomplish this task. Moses would lack nothing. The God who sent him would also equip him to do what he had been called to do. God did not guarantee that this call would be easy. He did, however, assure him of two things in Exodus 3.

First, God promised that the elders of the land would listen to him:

"The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.' (Exodus 3:18)

Moses likely remembered how the Israelites had rejected him when he came to the aid of the slave who was being beaten. He would naturally wonder if God's people would even listen to what he would say. God reassured him that he would have favor with the elders of Israel.

Secondly, God promised Moses that he would be successful in what he had been called to do. The Israelites would not only be freed from bondage but they would be enriched by the people who had enslaved them.

"And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians." (Exodus 3:21-22)

These were wonderful promises from God. The God who called Moses would give him victory over one of the most powerful nations on the earth. God's presence would go with him and enable him to accomplish all that He intended for him.

While the call and promises of God were very clear, Moses still struggled with what God was asking him to do. He was eighty years of age. Forty years prior to this he had a burden for his people in bondage. Acts 7:23-25 tells us that it was on his heart at that time, to deliver his people from their bondage but the Israelites rejected his aid:

"When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. He saw one of them being

mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.

The memory of this time was likely still very much on the mind of Moses. While Moses heard the promises of God in Exodus 3, he still has two very troubling questions for God in Exodus 4:1. Let's take a moment to examine these questions and what they have to tell us about Moses.

WHAT IF THEY DO NOT BELIEVE ME?

The first question Moses asks God is, "What if they do not believe me?" Remember that this question comes in the context of God's promises to Moses in chapter 3. Moses knew God was sending him and promised success. What is behind this question of Moses in Exodus 4:1? The question obviously reflects some of Moses' concerns as he steps out into this call of God on his life.

We have seen that Moses was rejected by the Israelites at the age of forty. Maybe this is on his mind as he returned to Egypt. He left Egypt as a murderer and wanted man. The people would not have forgotten this. The Egyptians did not trust Moses because he had turned against them in favour of the Israelites. The Israelites didn't trust him either because he had been raised as an Egyptian. Add to this the fact that he had been away for forty years. He no longer had any first-hand knowledge of what his people were facing. He had not been there with them in their suffering. To some, it may have seemed that he had abandoned his people in the time of their greatest need.

Moses likely struggled with these issues as he listened to God. He did not feel like he had any credibility in the eyes of Egypt or Israel. Why should they believe him or what he had to say?

Moses knew he was being called to Egypt. He knew that God promised to be with him. He knew that God promised to prosper his journey. His question was not so much about the call of God on his life as it was his own character and worthiness to be the instrument of this call. He reflected this attitude in Exodus 3:11 when he responded to God's call by saying:

But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

Moses felt unworthy of the task. He looked at his past history and could see so many reasons why God should call someone else. "Why should the people of Israel believe me?" he asked. He felt so unqualified to do this task that in Exodus 4:13 he begged God to send someone else:

But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."

Have you ever felt this way? Have you ever felt unqualified for the call God has put on your life? Does the enemy bring up your past failures when you want to move forward in the will of God? Many of the great men of God in Scripture have had pasts they were ashamed of. Paul persecuted the church, something he wrestled with to the day of his death. In fact, he considered himself to be the worst of all sinners (1 Timothy 1:15) and the least of all apostles because he persecuted the church:

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (1 Corinthians 15:9)

Peter denied the Lord three times. David committed adultery and murder. None of these men were proud of their past. All of them grieved over what they had done and felt unworthy of the call of God on their lives. These past failures are open doors for the enemy to discourage God's servants. You can almost hear Satan crying out to Paul: "What right do you have to preach the gospel after the way you persecuted the church?" How painful would it have been for Peter to remember how, in the days of the Lord's trial, he openly denied even knowing Him? Can you hear Satan saying to him: "Why should people believe you, the one who denied even knowing Jesus at His most difficult moment?"

There are not many of us who do not have something to be ashamed of in life. Be assured that the enemy will use this against us. The question of Moses was a legitimate one. The question, "What if they don't believe me?" reflects something of his sense of unworthiness and past failures. What is important for us to note here is that the Lord God knew all about Moses' past experience and failure. He knew all about Paul's persecution of the church and Peter's denials. He still called these men to service.

How wonderful it is to know that God forgives our sins. He picks us up when we fall. He does not give up on us. Peter would preach a sermon at Pentecost that brought thousands into the kingdom of God. Paul would become one of the greatest missionaries of all time. Moses would deliver his people from bondage and lead them to the gates of the Promised Land. None of these men were perfect. Humanly

speaking, they were not qualified for the job, but God doesn't see things the way we do.

We all ask the question, "What if they don't believe me?" at one point or other in our lives. It is a legitimate question. The only one completely worthy of our confidence is the Lord Jesus. He alone is perfect. The rest of us have issues in our lives that need to be healed or conquered. We make foolish decisions in life. We fall short of God's standard.

Understanding our failures can keep us humble. It also shows us our need of God and His grace on a moment by moment basis. When we feel like we deserve our position in the kingdom of God we are in a very dangerous place. Those who feel strong in themselves often do not trust in the Lord and His enabling. This is a sure path to defeat. God is not looking for perfect servants; He is looking for humble servants who will trust in Him.

None of us is worthy of the call of God. When He calls, however, we dare not let our unworthiness stand in the way of obedience. The God who calls the unworthy expects them to obey that call. He will equip us for the task. He will go with us and grant us success. How thankful we need to be that God does not give up on us. As unworthy as Moses felt, God still had a purpose for him. In stepping out into that call, Moses would know the blessing and pardon of God in a way he could never have imagined.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about Moses' past experiences and failures? What are some of your past failures and experiences?
- What promises does God give to Moses in Exodus 3?
- What kind of people does God call into His service? Do they have to be perfect?
- Has Satan ever reminded you of your unworthiness? What encouragement do you find in this passage?
- How do your failures keep you humble and trusting more in God?
- Have you ever let your past experiences or failures keep you from following the call of God on your life?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for His patience. Thank Him that He does not give up on you, but is willing to forgive and use you in His service.
- Ask the Lord to give you victory over the temptations of the enemy that keep you bound to your failures and past hurt.
- Ask God to give you a greater sense of His guidance and enabling as you walk in obedience to His call.
- Thank the Lord that, while we are all unworthy, He still has a purpose for our lives.
- Ask God to show you His purpose and help you to walk faithfully in it.

3

THE LORD DID NOT APPEAR TO YOU

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

Moses has been questioning the Lord with regard to His calling. In the previous chapter, we examined the first of these questions: "What if they don't believe me?" In many ways, this question looks at the history and character of Moses. It is a reflection on his sense of unworthiness for the task to which he has been called. In this chapter, we will examine the second question of Moses: "What if they listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you?'"

The task to which God was calling Moses was an awesome one. Moses was going to stand against an entire nation. He was calling for the release of hundreds of thousands of slaves. Egypt had come to depend on the institution of slavery for free labor. There would be great political and economic implications for Egypt if they were

to release these slaves. To all human appearances this task was impossible for one person.

Beyond the obvious difficulty of releasing the Israelite slaves, there was the problem of what to do with them when they were released. As much as the Israelites hated Egypt, they had become dependent on this land for their livelihood. Egypt provided them with the food and homes they needed to survive. What would happen to Israel if these things were taken from them? Where would they find food? Where would they live? These were huge unanswered questions for Moses.

It was very obvious that this task was too big for a simple shepherd from Midian to handle. Moses needed the assurance that God was going to be with him if he was to take on this role. More than that, however, the people of Israel also needed assurance that this was the will of God and that Moses was the one God had chosen to be their leader in this endeavour.

Egypt was a strong nation with a powerful army. The Israelites could not stand up to them. As it was, they were being beaten and forced to work for Egypt. Any sign of rebellion would bring the strong hand of Egypt down on them. Egypt would not hesitate to take their lives or increase their misery. Israel feared Egypt. It would not be easy to convince the people that they needed to rebel against their masters and escape their cruel grip. As horrible as their circumstances were in Egypt, at least they had their lives and families. This was not guaranteed if they rebelled.

The people of Israel needed a powerful assurance that the Lord God was going to be with them. He alone could bring victory over their enemies, and provide for their future. He

alone could bring them to a land where they could finally live in peace and freedom.

As Moses considered the huge task before him, his question was a very important one. "What if they listen to me and say the Lord did not appear to me?" Moses realized that not only did he have his own past to deal with, but he also had to show his people that God was behind him in what he was going to do. The people needed to know that this was not Moses' idea, but God's. They needed to be assured that God had appeared to Moses, called him, and empowered him to do the impossible. Moses knew that he was not worthy of Israel's confidence. He also knew that the only way the people of God would listen to him or have any confidence in his calling from God was if they were assured that the Lord God had appeared to him.

Moses' confidence was not in himself but in the authority and power that God would give. He asked God how he could possibly give the people the assurance that he had been called and empowered to set them free. He feared that he would not demonstrate by his words and life that God had appeared to him.

Moses' question is an important one. Every person in ministry today should ask themselves this question: "What if people listen to me and say, 'The Lord has not appeared to him'?" Do you understand the task to which God has called you today? Do you realize the forces that stand against you? Do you understand the power of Satan? Do you see the hardness of the human heart? Do you understand the power of worldly temptations? I remember some time ago, when I was serving as a pastor on the island of Mauritius, crying out to God: "Lord, how can I deal with all the problems I am seeing in this church when it is a full-time job just dealing with myself and my own flesh?"

How can we stand before the people God has called us to serve, believing that we are sufficient in ourselves, to do what God has called us to do? Do we truly believe that our education is sufficient to lead the people of God out of bondage? Do we honestly feel that our skillful administration will set the people of God free from the power of Satan? Satan laughs at our education and skills. He has toppled many with even greater skills and education. We need more than education and experience to answer the call of God in our lives; we need His presence, His authority, and His power. Nothing less than this will bring the victory.

There is a vast difference between human skill and the power of the Spirit of God. When the Lord Jesus ministered on this earth, those who heard Him speak were amazed. He did not speak like other leaders. He spoke with authority:

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. (Matthew 7:28-29)

The Holy Spirit empowered the words Jesus spoke so that they were like arrows, piercing the hearts of those who listened, bringing deep conviction.

What was true of Jesus was also true of the apostles. After listening to Peter and John speak, the Jewish Sanhedrin noted the following:

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men,

they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13)

These “unschooled, ordinary men,” demonstrated, by their words and lives that they had “been with Jesus.” The power of Jesus was evident in them. People noticed that power. People were changed by that power.

Do people see that we have been with Jesus? Do they recognize that God has appeared to us and sent us? Is there evidence of His power and presence in our lives and ministry? All too often we are content to minister in human strength and wisdom. We trust our life experiences. We rely on our education. As Moses considered the great task before him, he sincerely believed that what he needed and what the people of God needed was a deep assurance that God had appeared to him as their leader. That is to say, that God had called him and equipped him for the task he was about to undertake.

God had revealed Himself to Moses in a burning bush in Exodus 3. Moses was to be like that bush. The bush was an ordinary and common plant in the desert. There was nothing extraordinary about it but God made His presence known in that bush. His powerful presence burned in its branches. All who looked at the bush saw the fire of God's presence. This is not a comfortable place to be. The fire of God is a fearful thing. Who among us dares to let the fire of God burn in their lives? Who among us will surrender to the consuming holiness of God and allow Him to purify and use us for His glory?

As Moses asked this question, he revealed some doubts about his ability to demonstrate the awesome presence of God in his life. He felt unworthy and incapable of being the instrument of God's power and presence. While Moses

may have been expressing some personal doubt by this question, he does show that his priorities were right. He knew that God was his power and strength. He knew he had to demonstrate that practically and personally to the people to whom he was called. His confidence was not in himself. He knew that without God's presence he could not be victorious.

As he stood before God, Moses was fully aware of his need for the presence of God to empower him and fill him if he was going to be successful in his ministry. Moses' question is an important one for each of us in ministry. Has God appeared to me? Do I know His presence? Am I surrendered to Him as an instrument of His power? No matter how much experience we have in ministry or how well educated we are, if we do not demonstrate that the Lord has appeared to us, we cannot succeed.

For Consideration:

- What are the struggles and challenges of God's call on your life?
- How easy is it to trust in your education, experience or human skills? Have you ever found yourself relying on these things more than on God?
- How important is it that you know God's presence in your life and ministry?
- Do people see evidence of God's presence in your life and ministry? What are the proofs that God has appeared to you?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to see your need of His guidance and strength in the ministry to which He has called you.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times when you did not feel your need of Him.
- Ask the Lord to make His presence more visible in you and through you.
- Thank the Lord that He delights to use us to accomplish what is humanly impossible for the glory of His name

4

WHAT IF

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

There is one more aspect to Exodus 4:1 we need to examine before considering the rest of the passage. We have examined Moses' questions with regard to their application to him personally. It is now important that we see these questions from the perspective of the ministry to which Moses was called.

Anyone who has been in ministry for any length of time knows that things don't always go as we would like. Sometimes when we enter a ministry we have great ideas and expectations of what is going to happen. After several years of hard work without seeing the results we anticipated, we can begin to wonder if we missed the call of God.

Listen to what the Lord said to Isaiah the prophet when He called him to speak on His behalf to the nation of Israel:

He said, "Go and tell this people: " `Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but ever perceiving.' Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." Then I said, "For how long, O Lord?" And he answered: "Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged. (Isaiah 6:9-11)

Isaiah's call was a difficult one. The people to whom he would go would hear but not understand. Their hearts would be hardened. Their eyes would be closed. He was to preach to this kind of people until all their cities were ruined, their houses deserted and their fields ravaged.

Speaking about the ministry of the Lord Jesus, the prophet Isaiah would say:

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. (Isaiah 53:3-4)

Even Jesus was "despised and rejected" when He gave His life for mankind. As Jesus prepared His disciples for the ministry to which He was calling them, He warned them of the dangers ahead of them:

"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (Mark 13:12-13)

There would be no guarantee of acceptance. Some of Jesus' disciples would face severe persecution and rejection. Others would be betrayed by those closest to them. Still others would be put to death because of their relationship to Christ and the ministry to which they had been called. In preparation for this rejection, the Lord told His disciples what to do when they went to a town that refused their message:

If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them. (Luke 9:5)

When we understand the teaching of the Scriptures and the nature of the battle, it should not surprise us if we are not always accepted. There will be obstacles along the way. The question, "What if?" is a significant one. What if people don't listen? What if they fail to see that we are truly from God? What if they reject us and our message? What are we to do then?

Moses not only questions his personal ability (verse 1) but also the response of the people to his ministry. It is never easy to be rejected, especially when we feel very passionate about what we are presenting to people. This is especially true if we have a deep sense of the Lord's call on our lives. We all want to feel useful. We love to see results for our labor.

While this is admirable, the problem comes when we focus too much on results. The Lord taught me this lesson in a very simple way some time ago. I was sitting in a coffee shop working on a chapter in a Bible commentary I was writing. I spend about two hours working on this and was just completing the chapter when for some unknown reason my computer shut off. I turned it back on again and when I searched for my work it was lost. My first response was, "Lord, why did you allow this to happen? I just spent this past two hours working on this and now I'm going home with nothing to show for it? I've just wasted my entire morning."

As I sat there considering what had happened, the Lord spoke to my heart and said: "Wayne, have you done what I asked you to do?" I thought about this for a moment and responded: "You have asked me to work on this Bible commentary series, and that is what I have been doing." "Then you have been obedient," the Lord said, "You have done what I have expected of you."

In the moments that followed, my attitude went from one of frustration to one of peace and contentment. I realized that God had called me to be obedient. Results may or may not be the outcome of that obedience. What is important is that I do what He has called me to do. I must leave the results to Him. I returned home that day with nothing to show for my labor, but with a heart that was confident that I had been walking in obedience.

The question, "what if?" is a question we must all answer. What will we do if no one listens to what we say? What will we do if people hate us for the message we preach? What if our church never grows past the ten to twenty faithful members? What if my marriage never changes? What if, after working all morning, I return home with nothing to

show for my labor? What will we do when things don't turn out as expected? Everyone in ministry must answer this question.

What the Lord showed me in the coffee shop that day has helped me answer this question for myself. I need to be obedient and faithful to do what God has called me to do whether I see results or not. I must focus on obedience more than results. While God is pleased to use us to expand His kingdom, He is more interested in people learning to walk in faithful obedience.

Jeremiah is a wonderful example of faithfulness in a ministry. In Jeremiah 20 the prophet was feeling the struggle of a seemingly fruitless preaching ministry. Speaking to the Lord about this he said:

Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. (Jeremiah 20:8-9)

Here was a man whose sense of obedience to God was so powerful that even when he saw only insult and reproach for his messages, he could not stop preaching. He knew he needed to be obedient regardless of the result.

Will we be faithful no matter what? Will we be ready to risk rejection and reproach in our ministries? Will we be willing to sacrifice what appears to be fruitful ministry for deeper obedience to the Lord? We should never doubt that God has a purpose for our lives even in times when we don't

understand that purpose. It may take us through a seemingly unfruitful desert. It may lead us into the thick of the battle where all we can do is hold our position. Be assured, however, that God has a purpose. Learn to discern the call of God on your life and don't be distracted by prosperity or results. Leave the matter of bearing fruit to God, and concern yourself with obedience.

As Moses returned to Egypt, he wondered what the result of his preaching would be. He wondered if he would be accepted or rejected. All too many servants of God are more concerned about results than obedience to God's call. How we respond to the question, "What if?" will depend on our priorities. If our priority is results in ministry, we may question our call when we are not seeing results. If our priority is obedience to the call of God, we will stand firm and leave the results to Him.

For Consideration:

- Will people always accept our message? Give some examples from the Scripture.
- Are results always guaranteed in ministry (at least the kind of results we expect)?
- What is the difference between a "results" based ministry and a "calling" based ministry?
- What makes us so concerned about results in ministry? How important is it to seek obedience first and leave the results to God?
- Is it possible to hinder the work of God in an attempt to get the kind of results we want in ministry?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you an assurance of His call on your life. Ask Him to teach you to walk in obedience to that call.
- Thank the Lord that even when we are rejected by those we minister to or see little fruit for our labors we can have peace in our heart knowing that we have been faithful.
- Thank the Lord that when we choose to walk in obedience to His call and leading, then He produces the results He wants.

5

A S T A F F

Then the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" "A staff," he replied. (Exodus 4:2)

In the last three chapters, we examined Moses' fears and questions in regards to his calling to Egypt. These questions are normal for all who understand human nature and are serious about the call of God on their lives. As we move now to verse 2 the Lord God addresses Moses' concerns. His response is not what we would expect but has much to teach us about the working of God in the lives of those He calls.

In response to Moses' concerns, the Lord asks: "What is that in your hand?" As Moses stood before the Lord, he had a shepherd's staff in his hand. As a shepherd, it was used to care for his sheep. It was a piece of wood about 2 meters (6 feet) in length with a curved head. The staff was used to protect the sheep from enemies or guide them in the way they needed to go. With the curved head on the staff, a shepherd could hook onto a sheep and pull it away from danger. As Moses stood before the Lord, this was all he had available to him. It was just a piece of wood. As a shepherd, however, Moses knew that he wouldn't want to

be without it as he cared for his sheep. In Moses hands, that staff would protect the sheep from their enemies and keep them from danger. With it, he could lead his sheep in the way he wanted them to go and correct those who were being unruly.

David, himself a shepherd, understood the importance of the shepherd's staff when he wrote in Psalm 23:4:

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

In this psalm, David pictures himself as a sheep. Notice how he does not fear even when he is walking through the "valley of the shadow of death." The reason the sheep does not fear is because of the shepherd's staff. If any enemy lunged out at the sheep in that dark valley, the shepherd's staff would chase off that enemy. If the sheep risked falling down a steep embankment, the staff would redirect them. If they fell into a hole and could not get out, the staff would reach down to it and with its curved head bring it up out of danger. The shepherd's staff was a deep comfort for the sheep.

As Moses stood before God questioning how he was going to do the work the Lord was calling him to do, God drew his attention to his staff. This staff would become a very important tool in the hands of Moses in the coming years. We will examine this in more detail in the next chapter. What is important for us to notice now is that God chose to use what Moses already had in his possession to accomplish His purpose.

One of the things that strikes me as I watch what is taking place in our day is how often we are looking for something new and exciting to be the answer to the struggles of our church. There is no end to new ideas about how to grow a church or experience more of the Lord. How often have we found ourselves falling into this trap? When God answered Moses questions that day, He didn't offer him anything new. He pointed his attention to what he already had. In his hands was a simple shepherd's staff. This was going to be the answer to Moses' concerns about how to do the work God was asking him to do.

The wonderful thing about the Lord God is that He knew us even before we were born. Throughout all our lives His hand has been on us. He has been preparing us for the work He has for us from the time we were in our mother's womb (see Jeremiah 1:5). The circumstances we have had to face in life, as difficult as they have been, were preparing us for this moment. God does not wait until we are ready to obey before He gives us what we need, He has been working on us from the beginning, shaping us into the people He needs and equipping us for His purpose. This means that even before we are aware of our call in life, God has been shaping and training us.

As Moses questioned God about the work He was sending him to do, God simply pointed to what He had already given him. Moses didn't need to look any farther than this. He had all he needed. God had made sure of that. God's hand had been on Moses as a baby protecting him from the cruelty of the Egyptian Pharaoh. His hand had trained him for the last forty years as a shepherd, giving him the skills necessary to live in the desert and care for His people.

By always looking for something new, we fail to see the sovereign hand of God already on our lives. By looking for something new, we fail to see the answer God has already given. Could it be that we already have all that is necessary? Will we miss the answer because we are looking for something other than what God has already given?

In my experience I have come to understand that some of the most incredible ministries are the result of God's people accepting His purpose for their lives and using the experiences and gifts He has already given them. In our search for something bigger and better we often miss the power of the simple.

The question God asks Moses that day is a very important one. "What do you have in your hand?" What has God been doing in your life? What has He been teaching you? What opportunities has He been giving you? Where has He seen fit to put you? All these things come from the hand of a sovereign God. None of these things happened by chance. Everything has a purpose. The question we must ask ourselves is whether we will take what the Lord has already given us and use it for His glory.

For Consideration:

- What was the shepherd's staff used for in the days of Moses? How would this have been a comfort to the sheep?
- How does God prepare us for His call on our lives? How has He particularly prepared you for your calling in life?

- Is it possible to miss the purpose of God for our lives by always looking for something “new and exciting?”

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to accept what He has been doing in your life. Ask Him to help you to use what He has been doing in you for His glory.
- Thank the Lord that His hand has been on you from birth. Thank Him that He has been preparing you all along for a wonderful purpose in His kingdom. Ask Him for grace to be faithful to that purpose.

6

THROW IT ON THE GROUND

The LORD said, "Throw it on the ground." (Exodus 4:3)

The Lord has been speaking to Moses about his shepherd's staff. In the previous chapter we looked at how God prepares us for the ministry He has laid out for us. He equips us from our birth through the circumstances He brings into our lives and the gifts He develops in us over time. He uses what appears to be very ordinary to expand His kingdom.

When Moses told the Lord what he had in his hand, the Lord asked him to do something very strange with it. Moses was told to take his shepherd's staff and throw it on the ground. When he did this, it turned into a snake. We will examine this further in another chapter. For the moment our concern is the command of God to throw the staff to the ground.

There were two important lessons that God wanted to teach Moses that day. The first was the importance of surrender. The second was to show Moses what He could do

with what had been surrendered to Him. In this chapter we will examine the first of these two lessons.

God was asking Moses to take the only tool he had and surrender it to Him by throwing it on the ground. This was a very important lesson for Moses to learn at the outset of his ministry. For the last forty years that shepherd's staff had been Moses' primary tool. He now had forty years of experience using it. It was very comfortable in his hands. Over the years that staff had protected a number of sheep. He had used it to fight off wild animals seeking to harm the sheep. It may have pulled a number of sheep out of deep pits and rescued them from danger. Moses knew how to use that staff. He likely depended on it and would never leave home without it.

God wanted to be in control of Moses' staff. In the hands of the Lord, it would be used in ways Moses had never imagined. As long as it was in Moses' hands and he was in control of it, it would continue to be used as it had always been used. God had a very different purpose now. If Moses wanted to see God use this tool, he first needed to surrender it to the Lord.

Surrendering his staff to the Lord required renouncing his control over it. The staff would no longer be Moses' staff; it now would belong completely to God. It is quite interesting to note that Exodus refers to Moses' staff after this event as the "staff of God."

Why was it important that Moses surrender his staff to the Lord? It was important because God had a very different plan for that staff. Moses' experience with his shepherd's staff would have gotten in the way. In the hands of the Lord, and under His direction, that simple piece of wood would be the channel of great miracles and deliverance for

the people of God. In Moses' hands and under his control, it was a simple shepherd's staff.

God was teaching Moses a very important lesson. It is one that we must all learn if we are going to be effective in ministry. What are the tools we have in our hands today? To each of us God has given experiences in life and spiritual gifts. Our spiritual gifts and experiences must be surrendered to the Lord if they are going to be useful for the expansion of His kingdom. He must be in absolute control of them. It is quite possible for us to use our spiritual gifts in ways the Lord never intended. Spiritual gifts and personal experience are not substitutes for total dependence on the Lord and His leading. How easy it is for us to trust in our gifts. Unless those gifts are surrendered to the Lord, however, they will not be effective.

Each of us stands before the Lord with gifts and talents. God is now asking us to throw these gifts to the ground. He is calling us today to surrender them to Him and give Him complete control over how they are to be used. We must use these gifts now as He leads and directs. We must allow Him full control of when, how, and even if these gifts are used.

We miss the purpose of God if we believe that because God has given us experience and gifts we are in control of them. Imagine Moses using his shepherd's staff without the leading and empowerment of God. His experience would have shown him that he could use it to fend off enemies, but how could that staff fend off the whole Egyptian army? Experience showed him that the staff could lead the sheep in the right path, but what would be the response of human beings if Moses used his shepherd's staff on their back to correct them? As long as Moses was in control of that staff and used it as he saw fit, it would be of absolutely

no use for the kingdom of God. If Moses was to be effective in his ministry he needed to surrender to God and how He wanted to use the gifts He had given him. Moses learned this lesson the hard way.

As the people of God travelled through the wilderness, there was not enough water for them to drink. The Lord told Moses to go to a specific rock in Horeb and strike it with his staff. When he did, water came out of the rock for all the people to drink (see Exodus 17:6). Later on in Kadesh, the people again complained about a lack of water. This time the Lord asked Moses to take his staff with him and *speak* to a particular rock and water would come out for the people. Moses disobeyed the Lord and used his staff to strike the rock instead of speaking to it:

"Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink." So Moses took the staff from the LORD's presence, just as he commanded him. He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them." (Numbers 20:8-12)

The result of this wrongful use of the staff brought the anger of the Lord on Moses and Aaron and resulted in the

Lord refusing to allow them the privilege of leading the people into the Promised Land.

The question we need to ask ourselves here is this: Have we surrendered our gifts and experiences to the Lord? Have we cast our staff on the ground in full surrender to God and His leading? Will you say to the Lord today: "Lord, all You have given me belongs to You. I surrender the experiences You have brought me through into Your hands. I offer You the gifts You have given me. They do not belong to me and today I choose to use them only as You lead and guide."

If we are going to accomplish the purpose of God for our lives, the first thing we need to do is to throw all our experience and gifts on the ground in surrender to the Lord and His purpose. Whatever you want to accomplish with those gifts must be sacrificed to the Lord today. All your ambitions and personal goals must be thrown down before the Lord. He must be Lord of your spiritual gifts, education and experience. Only then can we know the fullness of His purpose in our lives.

For Consideration:

- Why did God ask Moses to throw his staff to the ground?
- How had Moses used his shepherd's staff for the past forty years? How would this change now that he had surrendered the staff to the Lord?
- Is it possible to trust our spiritual gifts and experiences more than the Lord? Why is it important that

we learn to discern God's will in the use of our spiritual gifts?

- How can our spiritual gifts and experiences hinder the work of the Lord?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the gifts and experiences He has given you. Take a moment to surrender their use to the Lord. Commit yourself to seeking His will in how He would want them to be used.
- Thank the Lord for how He can take what appears to be simple gifts and use them for His glory and the expansion of His kingdom.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to trust in Him more than in what He has given.

IT BECAME A SNAKE

The LORD said, "Throw it on the ground." Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. (Exodus 4:3)

As we continue in verse 3 we see the result of Moses' obedience to the Lord. When he threw his staff on the ground it turned into a snake. With over forty years of experience using a staff, never had Moses seen anything like this. In his wildest imagination, Moses could never have imagined that such a thing was possible. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord reminded His people that His thoughts were higher than their thoughts and His ways were different from their ways.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Imagine what Moses would have done with his staff if he was in control of it. Knowing that this was the instrument

God would use to deliver His people from Egypt, what uses would Moses have found for this staff if it was up to him to decide? One thing is certain, he would never have thought about turning it into a snake.

In a very similar way, God's purposes for our gifts and experiences are not the same as ours. In our wildest dreams we could never imagine how God could use us. What seems to be so insignificant can become a powerful tool in the hands of the Lord. Moses' experience with the staff was going to be stretched. As he looked at that snake on the ground, Moses could never have imagined just how powerful that staff would be in the hands of God. Let's take a moment to consider what God would empower Moses to do with his staff. Consider the following chart:

Verses	How Staff was Used by God
Exodus 7:9-13	Moses threw down his staff and it became a snake which ate all the Egyptian magicians snakes
Exodus 7:17-18	The staff struck the Nile river and killed all the fish
Exodus 7:20	The staff turned the water of the Nile into blood
Exodus 8:5-7	The staff brought frogs out of the rivers onto the land
Exodus 8:16-17	The staff struck the dust and brought a plague of gnats onto Egypt
Exodus 9:22-24	The staff raised up to the sky brought thunder, lightning and hail from heaven
Exodus 10:13-15	The staff caused a strong wind to blow locusts into Egypt devouring their crops

Exodus 14:16	The staff divided the sea so that the Israelites could cross on dry land, escaping from the Egyptian army
Exodus 17:5-6	The staff struck a rock at Horeb and provided water for the entire nation
Exodus 17:8-13	The staff, when raised above Moses' head, gave Joshua and the Israelites victory over the Amalekites

This chart teaches us something very important. It shows us that human wisdom is insufficient in the use of our spiritual gifts and experiences. Moses' knowledge of how to use a staff was unquestionable. For forty years this had been his tool. It was comfortable in his hand and he knew exactly how to use it when needed. However, God's ways were very different. He had a completely new use for Moses' staff. In a similar way, God wants to train us in the use of our spiritual gifts and experiences. We do not understand the ways of the Lord. He wants to use our gifts in ways we could never imagine. If we want to see our gifts being used to their fullest potential we need to know His leading and walk in obedience to Him.

The simple gifts God has given are powerful tools in His hand. A piece of wood in Moses' hand brought an end to slavery, defeated the strongest army in the world and moved the forces of nature to act on behalf of God's people. You may not feel like you have much in your hand, but when you surrender it into the hands of the Lord and walk in obedience, that small gift can change the world.

How foolish it is to elevate a man or woman who has a particular gifts or experiences. Exodus shows us that Moses was a simple, fearful and sometimes impatient man. He had his faults like every one of us. His shepherd's staff

was an ordinary piece of wood. There were many like this. As Moses looked down at that snake on the ground, he realized that there was a power far greater than himself at work through his staff. That power was the power of God.

Speaking in John 12:24 the Lord Jesus said:

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

We can put our seeds on a shelf where they will be safe, but until we are ready to bury them in the ground and let them die, they will never be of any use to us. From the life of that dead seed springs a new plant which produces many more seeds just like it. The sacrifice of our gifts to the Lord will bear great fruit. He empowers what we give to Him and will use it in ways we could never imagine.

The staff thrown on the ground was given life by God. The snake that slithered there before Moses was very much alive. God gave life to Moses' staff when he surrendered it to Him and obeyed. He will do the same for us when we surrender what He has given us to Him.

For Consideration:

- What is the difference between how we would naturally use the gifts and experiences God gives us and how God wants us to use them? Why is it important that we learn to walk in obedience to God and His leading?
- How did God use Moses' staff? How was this different from how Moses would have used it?
- God gave life to Moses' staff when he surrendered it to Him. What does it mean to surrender our gifts and experiences to the Lord? Have you given the Lord control over how, when, where and if He uses your gifts and experiences?
- Why is it foolish to glorify people or their gifts? What is the true source of power?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He can use you as an instrument for His glory.
- Take a moment to surrender your gifts and experiences to the Lord. Tell the Lord that you want Him to lead you and show you how He wants you to use what He has given you.
- Ask the Lord to protect you from pride. Ask Him to show you that He alone deserves the glory for the way your gifts have been used. Ask Him to forgive you for times when you have taken the glory from Him and kept it for yourself.

8

MOSES IS AFRAID

The LORD said, "Throw it on the ground." Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. Then the LORD said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand.

In the previous chapter we saw that God asked Moses to throw his staff on the ground. When he did, the staff turned into a snake. Notice the response of Moses toward the snake. The last part of verse 3 tells us that Moses ran from it.

There may be any number of reasons why Moses ran from that snake. He may have been afraid of it. He had certainly not expected to see such a thing happen when his staff hit the ground. The picture we see here is of Moses running away from what God was doing with his staff. Let's consider this for a moment.

When we surrender our gifts and spiritual experiences to the Lord we do not know how He is going to use them. His

ways are very different from ours. When we let Him control our gifts and how He wants to use them we are entering unfamiliar territory. Moses had used his staff for forty years, but he had never seen what he saw that day. It frightened him. He was taken out of his comfort zone into something totally new.

The power of God is not something to be taken lightly. The saints of the Bible who saw that power at work experienced the fear Moses experienced that day. Listen to the response of Isaiah the prophet when he saw the glory of God in his day:

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." (Isaiah 6:4-5)

When the apostle John saw the Lord in the book of Revelation he fell at his feet "as though dead":

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. (Revelation 1:17-18)

Experiencing the presence and the power of God was not something these men took lightly. As Moses looked down at that snake on the ground he was aware of the power of God. This was a power that was too much for him. How could he stand in the presence of such a God? How could

he be the instrument of such power? Being an instrument in the hands of God is an awesome responsibility. Those who know the power of God must also respect that power.

Moses ran from the demonstration of God's power. We can do this today as well. There are many things that can cause us fear in the ministry to which God calls us. Over the years the Lord has given me different opportunities to speak at retreats and conferences. On many occasions, I would come to the middle of a conference and feel overwhelmed with the obligation placed on me. I remember a time, speaking at a youth retreat when, with tears streaming down my face, I cried out to the Lord saying: "Lord, I have nothing more to give." I felt unworthy of the responsibility. I felt that I could never accomplish what God was asking of me. I was afraid that I could not measure up to His requirements or that I would not be a worthy instrument of His power for those youth. Maybe Moses felt this unworthiness that day. How many people refuse to step into a ministry because they are afraid they are not worthy or capable of being what God asks them to be?

There are many other fears. God may ask us to deal with sins in our lives we would rather forget. I remember a time when I was in my teens. I was painting a house for a lady in the church. Part of the job required scraping old paint off with a knife. As I was doing this the knife she gave me broke in my hands. I was too embarrassed to tell her that her knife broke so I just put it in my pocket and took it home with me. Sometime later, I was attending a chapel service at a Bible School where the preacher was speaking about making right the things we had done wrong. The Holy Spirit brought to mind this incident. The power of that conviction was so strong that I could no longer sit in the service. I left immediately, went to a store, purchased a new knife like the one I had broken and wrote a letter to the lady, and

sent the new knife to her in the mail. God will confront our sins. As He draws near to use us sins will be exposed.

We like to be in control of our circumstances. We have been trained in Bible Schools and Seminaries in how to preach and administer the work of the Lord. We enjoy the security of the regular salary and routine. Surrendering to the leading of the Lord, however, means surrendering this control to Him. What will the day bring? Will He interrupt my routine and schedule? Will He stretch me in ways I'm not sure I want to be stretched? Will He send me where I'm not sure I want to go? The power Moses faced that day was bigger than him. Was He willing to surrender to that power and authority? Many of us are afraid to surrender control of our lives to such a power.

Others are afraid of extremes. They fear that God may ask them to do something that is out of their theological comfort zone or something that may make them look like a fool before others. They are concerned for their reputation and how people perceive them. Jesus constantly clashed with the established religion of His day. In the end, the religious leaders crucified Him. John the Baptist was beheaded because he dared to stand up against the moral decay in the political leadership of his day. As we stand before the power of the Lord, we must ask ourselves if we are ready to risk our reputations to be instruments of that power.

Notice what the Lord told Moses to do in verse 4:

Then the LORD said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail."

God asked Moses to address his fears. He asked him to reach out to that snake and grab it. What is important for

us here is that God calls us to face our fears. Moses could never advance in his ministry as long as he did not deal with that snake.

What is true for Moses is true for us as well. Paul reminds us in Romans 8:15 that we have not received a spirit that makes us a slave to fear:

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father. (Romans 8:15)

Notice that God gives to us a Spirit of sonship. Our relationship with God is one of a son or daughter. As a Father, He cares for us. He always has our best interests at heart. We who have such a relationship with Him need not fear. He will give us grace for all He has in mind for us. We can trust Him fully. He loves us as His children. As parents, one of the things we have to do is to teach our children how to face their fears. We know that as long as these fears are in their lives they will be paralysed by them. This is how it is with the Lord God as well. As a loving heavenly Father, He speaks to Moses and with a gentle firmness in His voice he says: "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." We have nothing to fear, for God will not leave us. He will protect and keep us in His care. He has our best interest at heart. Will we reach out to our fears and grab them by the tail? Moses obeyed the Lord that day, and the snake turned back into a staff when he picked it up.

While Moses needed to surrender His staff to the Lord, God gave it back to Him. He did so, however, with the understanding that it would no longer be used in the same way. It would now be under God's control and empowered by Him.

As you stand before the presence of the power of God today listening to His call on your life, what are your fears? Will you let those fears paralyse you and keep you from doing what God has called you to do? Will you hear the word of the Lord today: "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail"? Will you like Moses grab that snake by the tail and conquer your fear? Will you trust the Lord with the call He has put on your life and step out boldly in His power for His glory?

For Consideration:

- What was the response of Moses to the snake on the ground?
- Why do you suppose Moses was afraid of the snake?
- Is it normal to experience a measure of fear in the presence of the power of God?
- What kind of fears do you have regarding your calling? Do any of those fears keep you from being more effective in what God has asked you to do? What are they?
- What do you think God would have you to do with your particular fears?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that while He is a powerful God, He is also loving and caring.
- Ask the Lord to show you if there are any fears in your life that keep you from surrendering completely to Him.

- Ask the Lord to show you how He would have you deal with the fears that keep you from a deeper and more fruitful walk with Him.
- Ask for strength to reach out your hand and grab your fears by the tail.

9

SO THAT THEY MAY BELIEVE

“This,” said the LORD, “is so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you.” (Exodus 4:5)

As we conclude this study of Exodus 4:1-5 let's take a moment to summarize what we have seen so far. The Lord God had called Moses to return to Egypt to deliver the Israelites from bondage. Moses was somewhat uncertain about whether he was the man to do this. In verse 1 he questioned the Lord about this call on his life. He wanted to know what to do if the people didn't believe him or if they listened to him and said the Lord hadn't appeared to him.

The Lord answered Moses' questions by telling him to take his staff and throw it on the ground. When he did, it turned into a snake. When he picked it up again, it returned to its normal state. This was nothing short of a miracle.

After showing Moses this sign, the Lord told him in verse 5 that this sign was given so that the people may believe.

God gave to Moses a sign to enable the people of his day to believe that he was the one chosen to be their deliverer.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments the Lord empowered His servants in special ways. In Judges 6 we read of how the angel of the Lord gave Gideon a sign when he was called to battle the Midianites and the Amalekites. Gideon, like Moses was uncertain of whether he was the man to lead an army against this powerful alliance. God showed him that he was by using a wool fleece (see Judges 6:33-40). He caused dew to be on the fleece while the ground around it was dry. When Gideon wasn't sure this was enough, He caused the ground to be wet with dew and the fleece completely dry. This was to show Gideon that he was indeed the man He had chosen.

The Lord sent Isaiah the prophet to King Hezekiah one day to tell him that he was going to die (2 Kings 20:1). When the king heard this he cried out to the Lord. The Lord heard that prayer and sent Isaiah back to him to tell him that God would give him fifteen more years (2 Kings 20:6). Hezekiah wanted to be sure of what Isaiah had told him and so he asked the Lord for a sign. In response the Lord made a shadow go backwards (see 2 Kings 20:9-11). When the king saw this, he knew the Lord had confirmed the promise He had made through Isaiah.

The king's officials hated Daniel in his day because of his commitment to the Lord God of Israel and how the Lord was prospering him. They determined in their hearts to get rid of him. The king issued a decree that any citizen who worshipped anyone but the king for a period of thirty days would be thrown into the lions' den (see Daniel 6:12). They did this knowing that Daniel would not submit to such a command. When they found Daniel praying to the Lord God, they brought the matter to the king and he was forced

to throw Daniel into the lions' den. The Lord shut the mouths of those lions, however, so that they did not harm Daniel. When the king looked the next day and found him unharmed, he was convinced that the God of Daniel was the true God.

In the New Testament we see the incredible miracles that Jesus performed. While many of these miracles were for the benefit of those who were sick and afflicted, they served another purpose as well. The miracles of Jesus were given so that people might believe in Him. Listen to what the Lord said to the religious leaders of his day in John 10:37-38:

Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father."

According to Jesus, the miracles He performed were proof that the Father was in Him. There was no other explanation for the power that was being revealed that day.

Speaking to His disciples in Mark 16:15-18, the Lord Jesus told them that as they went out in His name there would be great signs of His power revealed in them:

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands;

and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

These signs were evidence of God's calling and empowering. They were also a means of revealing the truth of what these apostles were proclaiming. Who among us can read the accounts of what happened in the days of the prophets and apostles without understanding that there was something miraculous happening in their day? The presence of God was being confirmed in ways that could leave no doubt that He was present in what they were doing and saying.

It should be understood that these signs were given because of the hardness of human hearts. God knew that unless the people of Moses' day saw some sort of sign, they would not accept Moses or his ministry. What was true in the days of Moses was also true in the New Testament. Listen to what the Lord Jesus told the people who gathered around him in John 4:48:

"Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe."

You can sense the frustration in these words of Jesus. The people would not believe the words of God unless Jesus proved these words to them by some miraculous sign.

Even miraculous signs, however, were not always enough. We read in John 12:37:

Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.

The human heart is so hardened to the things of God that it needs a miracle to believe what God says. Even a miracle, however, is not enough for many. Notice what the Lord told Moses in Exodus 4:5: "This", said the Lord, "is so that they may believe..." Note the words "may believe." The use of these words shows that not all of the people would believe. Many hearts would still remain hardened to the truth and the call of God on Moses' life. Many would perish even though God had given them powerful signs.

What can we learn from this verse? We see the hardness of the human heart. God is calling us to minister to a people who struggle to believe. Many don't want to believe. Still others hate those who believe. This is a difficult task. As Moses returned to minister to the people of God in Egypt, he would feel the weight of this disbelief. His own people would turn against him. They would grumble and complain. They would quarrel among themselves. The temptation to return to Egypt was always very real for them. What would make these people believe?

One thing is for sure, the God who called Moses would also equip him to do the work. He would empower him specifically and use him to bring faith into the hearts of this rebellious and hardened people. Our God will work in us and give us all we need for the task to which He has called us. His miraculous power will be evident in our ministries. Indeed, it must be evident if we are to accomplish the task. The salvation of a soul or victory over a stronghold of the flesh in our lives is nothing short of a miracle. We are called to fight a force that is more powerful than ourselves. Only the power of God can bring the victory this world needs. No one is truly convinced to become a Christian on the basis of human reasoning and logic. This requires a miraculous touch of God's Spirit in a life.

Does God still give us signs today? Admittedly this is a question that has divided Christians for centuries. It is certainly not my intention to get into this debate in the closing chapter of this study. The question we need to ask here is not so much a theological as a very practical one. Do we need the power of God to do the work He has called us to do? To this question there can be only one answer. Without the power of God demonstrated in our lives, we would be powerless to face the enemy before us. We would be incapable of accomplishing the task at hand.

What will that power look like? To this question I return to the question God gave Moses: "What is that in your hand?" God will empower what He has given you to do the task at hand. In the case of Moses it was his staff. What will God empower in your life? What spiritual gifts has He given you? What opportunities has He placed in your path? How has He shaped your personality?

For most of my life I have struggled with depression, an anxiety disorder and an obsessive compulsive personality disorder. For many years the enemy used these as a weapon against me. There were many times I was so depressed I cried out to God to take my life. I just didn't feel like I wanted to go on any further. At other times, I would feel anxious or become so fixated on something that I could hardly see anything else. Like Paul, I prayed for the Lord to remove these things but I found that instead of removing them the Lord showed me how He could use them for His glory. I have often been able to minister to people struggling with depression. Sometimes I can sense when a person struggles with similar issues just by how they express themselves. The Lord has been teaching me to harness my anxiety and obsessions. Publishers never had to put deadlines on me as I was driven by nature to accom-

plish the tasks even before they were needed. My tendency to be fixated on something I put my mind to has allowed me to focus in my writing ministry in ways that many of my friends could not. Over the years I have come to see that what appears to many to be a weakness, has been a tool the Lord my God has used to accomplish His greater purposes. The sword the enemy used against me has now been given back to me to use against him. For this I offer praise to the Lord. My weaknesses are what God has chosen to use. I trust that my struggles will be a sign to all that God has appeared to me and given me victory.

God will empower what He has given us to accomplish the task at hand. The evidence of His presence and power will be different for all of us. God is not limited to using certain gifts. If we covet the gifts of others we will blind ourselves to the way He wants to use us. God empowered the simple staff of Moses. This simple object would become an instrument of power.

The task before us is a massive one but the God who calls us is bigger. His power will enable us. We will not be left to human wisdom and strength to accomplish the task. He who calls us will empower what He has chosen to place in our hands. May we not hesitate to use what He has given, but be willing and surrendered instruments in His hands.

For Consideration:

- Why did God give “signs” in the Scripture? What was their purpose?

- Does the empowering of our gifts guarantee results? Will people always believe us or the God who sent us?
- Why is it necessary for us to be empowered by God for the work of ministry? Can we truly be effective in human strength alone?
- What has God put in your hands? How has He been using what He has chosen to give you to accomplish His purposes and reveal His presence to others?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He does not leave us to accomplish His work in human strength and wisdom. Thank Him that He empowers and equips those He calls.
- Ask the Lord to show you what He has put in your hand. Ask Him to continue to empower what He has given for His glory in your life. Ask Him to show you how you can use what He has put in your hand.
- Ask God to help you to accept His purpose for your life. Ask Him to forgive you for times you wanted what He gave someone else.
- Thank the Lord that He can empower our weaknesses and use them for the glory of His kingdom. Commit those weaknesses to Him and ask Him to either take them away or use them to expand His kingdom.

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Light To My Path (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 Mac Leod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

To date tens of thousands of 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.

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