

EXODUS

WHAT'S KEEPING YOU?

One of the most defining moments of my life came in 2003 when I sensed God calling me into pastoral ministry. Looking back, I wish I could tell you that I immediately said, "Yes, Lord." The truth is, I had a long list of reasons why I wasn't the right person. I didn't think I had enough education. I wasn't old enough. I wasn't spiritual enough. I certainly wasn't wise enough. Every time I considered stepping into ministry, another excuse seemed to surface. I knew enough about myself to believe that ministry was a pathway to human failure. The weight of shepherding God's people felt far beyond anything I was capable of carrying.

What I've learned over the years is that our greatest obstacle to obedience is often not a lack of ability but an overwhelming awareness of our own inadequacy. We spend so much time focusing on what we aren't that we forget who God is. I wasn't wrong about my weaknesses, I simply underestimated God's strength. He never called me because I was enough. He called me because He is enough.

One of the greatest lessons God was teaching me during that season was that I couldn't do ministry for Him until I learned to do it with Him. My focus had become almost entirely about me: my education, my age, my experience, my wisdom, and all the reasons I believed I wasn't enough. Yet God was gently reminding me that His call had never depended on my qualifications. It depended on His presence. Ministry wasn't ultimately about what I could accomplish for Him, but about what He would accomplish in and through me as I learned to trust Him.

That realization completely changed the way I viewed ministry and honestly, the way I viewed life. Instead of constantly asking, "Am I enough?" I began asking, "Is God enough?" Instead of striving to become the man I thought God could use, I began learning to trust that He was shaping me into the man He wanted to use.

That is exactly where we find Moses in Exodus 4. For two chapters he has given God every reason why someone else should be chosen. He wasn't eloquent enough. He wasn't influential enough. He wasn't confident enough. He wasn't the right man for the job. Yet God answered every objection with the same promise: "I will be with you."

Moses has finally stopped making excuses and starts making the journey back to Egypt. But before God uses him publicly, He confronts an area of private obedience that Moses has neglected. It is a powerful reminder that God isn't looking for perfect people, He's looking for surrendered people. He delights in using ordinary men and women who stop focusing on their own inadequacies and begin trusting in His sufficiency.

As we continue our study of Exodus, our passage this week invites us to ask a simple but searching question: What's keeping me from fully obeying God? Is it fear? A sense of inadequacy? Comfort? A private area of disobedience? Whatever it is, this passage reminds us that God's calling has never depended on our sufficiency but on His presence. The God who called Moses despite all of his excuses is still in the business of using imperfect people for His perfect purposes and, ultimately, for His glory.¹

¹ Author's Note.

ICEBREAKER

If you could instantly become an expert at one skill you've always wished you had, what would you choose and why?

READ IT

Read Exodus 4:18–31

EXPLORE IT

1. According to Exodus 4:18–20, what steps did Moses take after God called him to return to Egypt?
2. What message did God tell Moses to deliver to Pharaoh in Exodus 4:21–23?
3. What happened to Moses on the journey in Exodus 4:24–26, and how did Zipporah respond?
4. How did Aaron, the elders of Israel, and the people respond to Moses in Exodus 4:27–31?

APPLY IT

The previous section (3:1-4:17) makes it possible for us to gain great insight into Moses' feelings about God's promises to his forefathers and about his own life. Moses had become thoroughly disillusioned. He regarded himself as a failure, the objects of his ministry (the Israelites) as hopeless, and God as unfaithful, uncaring, and even unable to deliver His people. He had learned his own inability to deliver Israel, but he did not yet believe in God's ability to do so. Even the miraculous revelation of God at the burning bush, and the miracles that God enabled Moses to perform, did not convince him of God's intention and power.²

- 5. How had Moses' forty years in Midian shaped the way he viewed himself, God's promises, and God's ability to work? How can seasons of disappointment shape our view of God today?**

So Moses went: When the fire faded from the burning bush and when the voice of God was silent across the desert, then it was upon Moses to obey, and to do what God told him to do. More than one person has had a spectacular burning bush type experience and then gone on to live as if nothing really happened. Did Moses have any idea what he was getting into when he agreed to take the LORD's call?...Did Moses have any idea what he was getting into?³

- 6. Moses couldn't see where one act of obedience would eventually lead. Why do you think God usually calls us to trust Him with the next step instead of revealing the whole journey?**

² Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Exodus*, 2025 ed. (Richardson, TX: Sonic Light, 2025).

³ David Guzik, "Exodus 4—Moses' Commission from God," *Enduring Word Bible Commentary*, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/exodus-4/>

Moses' first act of obedience was not dramatic but honorable. Before returning to Egypt, he respectfully sought Jethro's permission to leave, demonstrating that obedience to God does not excuse us from honoring the human relationships and responsibilities God has placed in our lives. Faithfulness often begins with integrity in ordinary commitments before it is seen in extraordinary acts of service.⁴

- 7. Why do you think Moses honored Jethro before confronting Pharaoh? What does that teach us about the relationship between humility and obedience?**

- 8. What ordinary responsibility is God asking you to faithfully steward today that may be preparing you for something greater tomorrow?**

⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 124–25.

God had previously dealt with Moses' different areas of hesitation – now Moses carries with him the assurance of God's authority and power to grant him success in his mission. Ryken: Not only did Moses have his family at his side, but he also had his staff in his hand. Except that it was no longer his staff at all—it was “the staff of God,” the symbol of divine authority. Moses was going to deliver Israel by God's power. With God's staff he would perform miraculous signs to convince the Israelites that he was God's true prophet. Later God's staff would accomplish even greater wonders. It would bring disease and death upon the Egyptians, part the waves of the Red Sea, and draw lifegiving water from a rock.⁵

9. Throughout Scripture, God often uses ordinary people and ordinary things to accomplish extraordinary purposes. What do these passages say God can use and what do these examples teach us about the way God chooses to accomplish His work?

- 1 Samuel 17:40, 49–50

- 2 Kings 4:1–7

- John 6:9–13

- Numbers 22:28–30

- Matthew 21:1–11

- 1 Corinthians 1:18–25

⁵ Paul Apple, “Exodus 4:18–31,” in Expository Outlines of Exodus, <https://bibleoutlines.com/exodus/>

- 10. Instead of focusing on what you lack, what has God already placed in your hands that He may want to use for His glory this week?**

Exodus 4:21 raises one of the most challenging theological questions in all of Scripture. At first glance, it may seem as though God is forcing Pharaoh to reject Him or removing his ability to choose differently. Yet that is not what the Bible teaches. Throughout Exodus, we see both God's sovereignty and Pharaoh's responsibility working together. God is never portrayed as creating evil in Pharaoh's heart; rather, He gives Pharaoh over to the rebellion he has already embraced and uses even that rebellion to accomplish His redemptive purposes.

I love how Philip Ryken summarizes this difficult truth:

“Taken together, what these statements show is that Pharaoh’s heart was doubly hard. He hardened his own heart; nevertheless, God hardened his heart for him. Both of these statements are true, and there is no contradiction between them. Pharaoh’s will was also God’s will. God not only knew that Pharaoh would refuse to let his people go, but he actually ordained it. This is the paradox of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, which is not a puzzle to be solved but a mystery to be adored. As human beings made in the image of God, we make a real choice to accept or reject God, but even the choice we make is governed by God’s sovereign and eternal will.”⁶

- 11. How does God's sovereignty over Pharaoh's rebellion encourage you when you face people or circumstances that seem to stand in the way of God's purposes today?**

⁶ Ryken, *Exodus*.

One of the great themes of Scripture is that God's people are defined first by their relationship with Him, not by the circumstances they are experiencing. Israel may have been slaves in Egypt, but in God's eyes they were His beloved son. As Philip Ryken writes:

Israel's status as God's firstborn son explains why God had a quarrel with Pharaoh. To Pharaoh the Hebrews were lowly slaves, but to God they were beloved sons. Thus the problem with Pharaoh was not simply that he was a slaveholder (although that was bad enough), but that he was preventing God's children from serving their Father. Instead of being free to call God "Father," the Israelites were forced to call Pharaoh "Master." So in order to reassert his claim on Israel, God said to Pharaoh, "Let my son go that he may serve me" (4:23a). God demanded that Israel be released from Pharaoh's bondage so that his son would be free to serve him once again. More specifically, he wanted the worship of his firstborn son. This is the grand theme of the exodus: God saving his sons from slavery so that they could serve him.⁷

12. According to this passage, why did God want Israel to leave Egypt? What does this teach us about the purpose of our own salvation today?

13. Pharaoh wanted Israel to serve him, while God wanted His people to worship and serve Him. What "masters" compete for our worship and allegiance today?

⁷ Ryken, *Exodus*.

At this point in the story, everything seems to be moving in the right direction. Moses has finally obeyed God's call, received Jethro's blessing, taken "the staff of God" in his hand, and is on his way back to Egypt. Then, without warning, the story takes a dramatic turn. Before God confronts Pharaoh's rebellion, He first confronts Moses' own disobedience.

The issue wasn't Moses' ability or courage, it was an area of neglected covenant obedience in his own family. In an act of decisive obedience, Zipporah circumcises their son, bringing their household back into covenant faithfulness, and the Lord relents. While this passage raises difficult questions, its central message is clear: God takes obedience seriously. Before Moses could lead God's people publicly, he first had to obey God privately. This passage reminds us that God isn't looking for impressive people with polished resumes. He is looking for men and women whose private lives reflect the same faithfulness they profess publicly.⁸

- 14. Why do you think it's often easier to focus on serving God publicly than obeying Him privately? Are there areas of your life where your public profession of faith and your private walk with God need to become more aligned?**

After all the uncertainty, excuses, and obstacles, everything God promised Moses finally begins to unfold exactly as He said it would. Aaron meets Moses in the wilderness, the elders of Israel gather together, the miraculous signs are performed, and the people believe. Their response is immediate—they bow down and worship. Before a single plague has fallen, before Pharaoh has said yes, before the Red Sea has parted, and before their circumstances have changed, God's people worship because they believe God has seen their suffering and is acting on their behalf.

This beautiful ending reminds us that worship is not merely a response to God's blessings but to God's character and His promises. Israel worshiped because they believed God was faithful, even before they experienced their deliverance. Genuine faith learns to worship God not only for what He has done, but for who He is and what He has promised to do. As Matthew Henry writes, "If Israel welcomed the tidings of their deliverance, and worshipped the Lord, how should we welcome the glad tidings of redemption, embrace it in faith, and adore the Redeemer!"⁹

- 15. Why do you think the Israelites responded with worship before anything in their circumstances had actually changed? What does that reveal about genuine faith?**

⁸ Author's Note.

⁹ Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible, commentary on Exodus 4:24–31, Bible Hub, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/mhc/exodus/4.htm>