

“God equips” – Exodus 4:1-17

Intro

We’re now four weeks in to a 12-week series on the first 15 chapters of the book of Exodus. And as I said last week, this Sunday is actually part II/act II of God’s calling of Moses to return to Egypt and lead His people out of slavery.

Now we’ve seen a lot already over the past three weeks; primarily, the faithfulness of God to His people; the greatness of who this God is; and/ the promise of God to be with His children in a way that both empowers and transforms us as we follow Him. And my prayer is/ that this is already growing and deepening your love of the gospel as you consider that it is this same God who has rescued us from our slavery to sin/ and who also goes with us today.

And as we dig into this second act of Moses’ call now this morning, and move from God’s revelation of Himself to Moses/ to God’s equipping of Moses, I want you to – first of all – imagine a scene with me.

Imagine your wife walks out of work one Friday afternoon, and there you are/ standing next to a taxi with a red rose in your hand and two plane tickets to Paris. And you’re like, “Hey baby girl – get in! We gotta be at the airport in 15 minutes!” Now, anyone’s gonna be shocked and excited in that moment, but also asking natural questions: “Who’s with our kids? I’ve got work tomorrow! I don’t have my passport with me.” Now, for some of you, this will be harder than others; but just imagine that to each question she asks, you’re like, “Got it covered! Kids are staying with your parents; I’ve already talked with your boss and you’ve got the next week off, and your passport is right here with mine.” Honestly, some of you in here should be taking notes right now. But then// imagine that her questioning moves from natural, to more awkward and plaintiff; that she starts saying she can’t go b/c she doesn’t have a bag packed and you don’t know what she needs to bring. But then imagine you are like, “Actually ... I’ve taken photos and detailed notes of what you’ve packed on every trip we’ve taken for the past year, and I’ve got everything you need; just get in the cab!” Again/ you should really be writing this down! Now at this point, even the ladies in here are thinking she’s gonna get in, but// just imagine/ she continues to resist; to argue even! And this big fight happens, right there beside the taxi; all to discover that – in the end – the real problem is that she just doesn’t want to go; that she’s afraid of flying right now b/c she’s heard about a lot of plane crashes with trans-Atlantic flights recently.

Well, maybe that sounds a bit too far-fetched for you, but in a very real sense, we’re gonna see almost the exact same scene playing out in our passage today/ as God calls Moses to return to Egypt to deliver His people out of bondage under this new Pharaoh. And - just like in our imagined scenario – we’re going to see Moses’ questioning move from the honest evaluation of himself that we saw last week, to – really – this sad display of excuse making as Moses seeks to hide the true intentions of his heart which are that he still doesn’t really trust God/ and that he doesn’t want to go.

But// before we look down on Moses for too long, we gotta say, there are many times in our own lives that we do the exact same thing: when God calls us to something that feels too big/scary for us and – although He has promised to take care of every detail – all we can see is the obstacle in front of us. And then, also just

like Moses – instead of just being straight with God; telling Him we still feel afraid and don't want to do it - we perform this silly song and dance where we try to come up with all these weak excuses as to why it is that we don't need to be obedient to what God is calling us to when – in the end – the truth is we just don't want to obey.

And – unbelievably – what we're gonna see today in Moses' calling is that – along with His promise to come with us// God also equips us for the tasks He calls us to do; and that He meets our every place of lack/ with His equipping. Now there's a lot of different ways someone can be equipped; and in our passage today, we'll see God equip particularly with both information/ as well as with skills; but the *point* is: our God always equips us with what we need to accomplish what He calls us to.

And in order to see how He does that, I want to unpack our passage this morning in three ways: I want to show you **Moses' "what if", Moses' "last resort",** and then finally **Moses' "blown cover" (x2).**

So, if you've closed your bibles, please turn with me to Exodus 4:1 and we'll dig into this second act of Moses' call together.

Ok, so let's begin by looking at:

1. Moses' "what if" - vs. 1-9

So, if you remember what we looked at last week: God has just come to Moses in the burning bush, and commissioned him to return to Egypt and lead His people out of slavery. Moses has looked inside himself and said he feels like there's no way he can do what God is asking, and – in response – God has revealed to Moses who He is; the "I AM"; this holy, faithful, eternally self-existing One and said, "You don't need to be afraid Moses// I will be with you!" And actually, we didn't cover it last week, but in the remaining verses of chapter three, God actually goes on to spell out *exactly* how everything is going to go once Moses returns, undoubtedly, to give Moses confidence that God has this whole rescue mission planned out and under His sovereign control.

Now, when we begin chapter 4, God is still speaking to Moses out of the burning bush. And Moses' response to what God has just said/ is to try to gather a bit more information first. Look at vs. 1 with me. Moses says (**READ vs. 1**).

Now, this seems like a good question at first pass. I mean, it's not as if Moses can pull out his phone and show the people his instagram pics; being like, "Yeah, see – there's me and then there, right there, that's the burning bush. Now check out this video I took." So, it seems perfectly legit for Moses to ask, "What if they don't believe me? If they're like, 'Dude, you probably were just out in the sun a bit too long?'"

But here's the problem: have you ever had that moment in a class/lecture where you lost focus or weren't listening well enough, and then confidently asked a question that has literally *just* been asked by someone else and answered already? And there's that awkward silence in the room before the teacher – if they're gracious – direct you to ask the person sitting behind you who just asked that same question.

Well, same thing here. B/c if you look just above our passage in chapter **3:18**, God has literally just told Moses that the elders *will* listen to him when he goes back. Now sure, God says Pharaoh won't listen, but He explicitly tells him the Israelites will!

And maybe you wonder if Moses just isn't an attentive listener. But I think what's more likely is that Moses is simply remembering back to how things went the last time he tried to lead the Hebrews; how they basically scoffed at him and we're like, "Dude please! Who made you the boss? You gonna kill us now lie you did that Egyptian?" And my guess is he is anticipating this exact same type of reception when he returns with this tale about meeting YHWH in the desert.

And one of the really comforting things we see right away from this passage is the gracious, compassionate response of God towards the fearful responses of His children. God's not like, "Moses, what did I *just* say?!" No no, instead// God asks Moses a question of His own. Look at vs. 2. Here we read (**READ vs. 2**). And now in the following verses up through vs. 9, God gives Moses three signs that he is to perform in front of Pharaoh and the people so that they will believe him that he truly did meet with God.

In one sense, this is like God grabbing Moses' cell phone and taking a selfie with him and saying, "Here – you show people this and they'll know that you truly met me here in the desert."

So let's look quickly at what these three signs are. The first is in **vss. 2-6**. God tells Moses to throw his shepherd's staff on the ground, and it becomes a snake; but then - when Moses picks it up again - it turns back into a staff. After this, in **vss. 6-7** God tells Moses to put his hand into his cloak, and when Moses takes his hand out again, it is white as snow; a commonly understood symptom of leprosy. Then Moses puts his hand back into his cloak, and when he takes it out his hand is healed. Finally in **vss. 8-9** God tells Moses to take some of the water out of the Nile river and pour it on the dry ground, and when he does this, the water will turn to blood.

Now, two things to see from these signs:

1. The first sign would have probably been more than enough for Moses to make his point wouldn't it? And yet/ God seems to be anticipating Moses' continued fear/questioning and is just piling up the evidences for him to bring back with him. This demonstrates God's prodigal grace to Moses in just lavishing his gifts upon him in order to quiet his paralyzing fears/questions.
2. These signs that God gives Moses to do are not simply "party tricks" that Moses is to go back and perform to wow his friends and relatives. They have spiritual significance as well as providing foreshadowing as to what is coming. In his commentary on this passage, theologian Alec Motyer suggests that
 - a. By bringing a shepherd's staff into the presence of Pharaoh (remember, shepherds were despised and shunned by the Egyptians) God was demonstrating through Moses His power to use weak/despised things to overcome seemingly indomitable human power. For snakes were a sign of power and authority in Egypt; often worn on the crowns of the ruling Pharaoh. In taking up the snake and it turning back into a shepherd's staff, God was demonstrating to all His sovereign power over Egypt.
 - b. By causing and then healing disease in Moses' hand, God was demonstrating His power/authority over the human body *as well as* over the things like disease which can inhibit and even take our lives. God says, "I'm not weakened by the things that weaken you."
 - c. Finally, by turning the Nile river water into blood (a foreshadowing of the plagues to come) God was demonstrating His authority over the gods of Egypt as well as their richest source of life and fertility in the land.

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So now, what we see here is that God's gracious response to Moses' "what if" is to equip him with these signs of both His presence as well as His superior power and authority over anything/anyone Moses may encounter.

And it's not always exactly this overt, but - in our own lives – God also answers our own "what ifs" with His gracious presence and equipping as well. And we are so very good at the "what if" questions, aren't we? I mean, we are what-if-ologists most of us! And most often, our "what if" questions come – just like for

Moses – in response to something God has asked us to do/be obedient to. And we end up wasting so much time and emotional energy worrying about the 10,000 possible scenarios that *could* come up if we just did what God is asking us; each time, foolishly believing that we're gonna come up with a "what if" that's gonna catch God off guard/that He hadn't thought of. So, in our own lives, God is like, "Tell people about how much I did to love them." And we reply, "Don't think I'm ready for that; what if they ask me a question about You I can't immediately answer? What if they make fun of me?" Or God says, "Repent for the way you treated your friend." And we reply, "I dunno God; what if they won't forgive me? What if they try to hurt me back?" Or, "Forgive that person who hurt you like I've forgiven you." And we respond with fear and mistrust, "I can't do that; what if they don't admit what they did? What if they hurt me again?"

And in each of these cases, and so many like them, God's fundamental desire is just that we would trust Him enough to simply obey. To believe that He is good and that He is both with us, and more than capable to equip us for the task He is calling us to do. Make a commitment this morning; that - whatever it is that He's been calling you to - that you will turn off the "what-if" generator in your heart and just simply be obedient. He's not sending you out on your own; He'll be with you every step of the way, and I promise you, He's already thought of and handled every "what if" you could come up with.

Ok, so that's **Moses' "what if."** Next, I want us to look at:

2. **Moses' "last resort" - vs. 10-12**

Now, what Moses does here next would, honestly, be pretty funny if it weren't so pathetic (as well as disobedient and not trusting God). B/c now – instead of just saying, "Wow! Thank you God for equipping me like this! The people will absolutely believe me now." Instead of that, Moses becomes even more fearful as God easily deals with his doubts/questions. And now Moses plays, what I think he believes, is his trump card with God. Look at verse 10 with me. Moses says **(READ vs. 10)**.

So basically Moses is like, "Sorry God; can't do it. Love to help you out but ... I am not an eloquent speaker; never have been and I've noticed you haven't magically made me into one since we started chatting here either so ... yeah, can't do it."

Now, clearly, this seems pretty ridiculous to us. It sounds like Moses has watched one too many Egyptian soap operas in his life, where these clever plot twists get somebody out of a difficult situation. i.e. "I'm sorry Sally, I'd love to marry you but there's just one problem ... I'm your father!!!" Dun Dun Duuuuhhhhh!

Now, there are a few different theories about why Moses is saying this to God. Some have suggested that Moses had a speech impediment/stuttered like Colin Firth in "The King's Speech." Others have suggested that Moses had been away from Egypt so long that he was no longer confident speaking Egyptian. But the reality is, what Moses is doing here is tantamount to putting on one of those bogus foam neck-braces (which do nothing for anyone who has an actual neck/spine injury) and then limping up to God and being like, "Yeah ... really sorry God. Just with this neck thing; there's no way I can go right now." It truly is pitiful.

Because, Moses has been raised in the courts of Pharaoh himself and had access to the very best training and education that Egypt had to offer. Additionally, there is absolutely *nothing* in the bible – either before or after this episode – to suggest that Moses couldn't speak well or that he had some speech impediment; other than Moses' own complaining that is.

Which is why I think we see in vs. 11-12, God responding to Moses once again by equipping him for what He's calling him to do; *this time* with information. Look at what God says in vs. 11. He says **(READ vs. 11)**. So we see very clearly, God is also not agreeing with Moses in the least; He's simply reminding him, "Moses Moses Moses – dude – who do you think made man's mouth; or his tongue? Yeah, that was me bro. You seriously think I was either unaware of how well your mouth worked or that I couldn't easily do something about that if I needed to?" And we can see that God is getting frustrated with Moses b/c in vs. 12 God is like, "Now get going Moses!" And then, still, He graciously seeks to comfort Moses' remaining fears which is clearly the reason Moses is coming up with all these excuses. The NIV has vs. 12 translated as, "I will help you speak" but in the Hebrew, it's actually much closer to God's initial promise when He commissions Moses. God says, "I will be with your mouth and teach you what to say."

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Now, obviously, there's a whole bunch we could say at this point; and the more Moses talks, the more clear it becomes what's really going on here. But for our purposes this morning, I wanna just focus in on what God says to Moses in vs. 11. Look with me there again, particularly at the second half. God says, **(READ vs. 11)**. Did you catch that? God says that He is sovereign over all, *even* the things we see as impediments and disabilities in our lives.

And the first thing we need to say is that – although, yes and amen, we live in a fallen world stained by sin/ and certainly there is mystery many times to these things – as Christians we need to ultimately believe that there are no/ such/ things/ as birth defects; no deviations from what is common in our physical makeup where God has said, “Ooops! Didn’t mean for this one to turn out *that way*.” When Davis writes in Ps. 139, praising God for how He knits us together in our mother’s wombs; how we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” he is *not only* talking about regular, completely healthy pregnancies.//// And yes, I know that’s a really scary thing for us to think about; and no, no, if you’ve dealt with the pain and endless questions about why God made you - or maybe your child - in a certain way, I don’t know the answer to why He did that. It may become apparent in this lifetime, but maybe it won’t. And in the end, all we can say for certain is that how we are born is not random chance or purposeless veering; that somehow – in His perfect providence and power - God has either caused, or allowed, each of us to be born exactly as we are with a specific purpose in mind. And while we are truly blessed if we get to see what the purpose is, nowhere are we promised that it will be given in this life.

And then beyond that, what we also see here is that what we many times call disability; what we call a “handicap” in *no way* limits God’s ability to use us. It does not somehow exempt us from the ability to be used by God. And many of us, myself included, have either been told by someone else or we have believed ourselves that it does exempt us. And – just like we saw last week – we have assessed our won abilities (or lack of them) and decided for God that He can not use us. And what we see here in our passage is that we don’t get to do that. God is saying to Moses, in effect, even if you *did* have that disability, it would still not give you a free pass out of what I’m calling you to do. Disabilities are not a hindrance to My plan, they’re a part of it.

Ok, so we've looked at **Moses' "what if"** along with **Moses' "last resort."** Very quickly now, I want us to look at:

3. Moses' "blown cover" – vs. 13-17

And it should come as no surprise to us really/ to now read this in vs. 13 – look with me there (**READ vs. 13**). Here, Moses' cover has very obviously been blown by God, and we see that – all along – Moses has simply been too afraid to do what God has called him to; that all these questions and conversation have really just been a smokescreen for Moses' unwillingness to obey God. Now, actually, most of our translations render Moses' response to God as we see it here in vs. 13 - asking God to please send someone else. But one commentator – very interestingly – has suggested that the sense of the Hebrew does not justify Moses stated refusal that we have here, but – actually – an annoyed, frustrated, begrudging submission. So that Moses' response to God here may be better translated as a junior-high tantrum of a spoiled kid saying, "UGH!!! FINE!!! Just TAKE the stupid family picture!!!" Like, "Do whatever you want God; see if I care!!!"

Which, BTW, should show us that obedience to God is firstly a matter of the heart. That we can actually even be doing the things God is telling us to do, and still be disobeying Him.

Either way you read it that verse, I think its pretty understandable why we see in vs. 14 that the anger of the LORD burned against Moses. God is like, "Uh uh!"

And yet here – amazingly - God's response to Moses is actually to (once again) provide for his lack and equip him; in *this* case, where Moses doesn't even truly *have* a lack – by sending his brother Aaron to deliver His message to Pharaoh for Moses.

Now, the question arises here: is God accommodating to Moses' perceived lack or did He plan to send Aaron for this interim stage all along. And the answer is, "Yes." God always has to accommodate for our weakness b/c we are *always* weak; but we gotta say as well, that Aaron is not God's plan B. God has a plan to use Aaron and – I think in this case – God's plan is to teach Moses something more about who he is/ and who God is/ and how those two things work together.

And I have absolutely no way to prove this and this is complete conjecture on my part, but I wonder if there was not some kind of issue between Moses and Aaron and God was using Moses' brother to goad him into being obedient to what He'd called him to do. Something like: maybe Moses and Aaron were both singers; and although they'd both tried out for American Idol, Moses didn't get the golden ticket but Aaron did.

So imagine; maybe Aaron actually *is* the better speaker – the text certainly allows for that. And after his repeated refusals, God pricks at Moses' pride by saying, in effect "Ok Moses. You're not getting the solo for this next concert; I'm giving it to your brother now. And you're gonna have to stand there and watch him sing your solo/deliver your lines."

And if you look at the rest of Exodus actually; Aaron speaks for Moses for a *little bit*, but *very* quickly – all of a sudden – we only hear about Moses speaking to Pharaoh and then the people through the rest of Exodus. So, if that *is* what God was up to, it is certainly effective in helping Moses to overcome his fears.

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And as we think about the whole deal, and Moses' blown cover, we need to say that, while – in our own lives - we may be able to fool everyone else around us, God is not fooled in the least by our excuses and rationales for disobedience. The truth is, God sees our “no” miles before we're even able to admit it to ourselves. And I don't know why we do it, but all of us have this crazy habit of thinking we can keep things from God; that if we just cloak our fears and doubts in enough spiritual pixie dust that God is somehow fooled; that He's like, “Is Wes still trusting Me? Oh good: he's reading his bible and going to church and helping old ladies across the street – he must be doing ok.” Really???

But if we could just remember that God already knows what we truly feel in our hearts, it would give us so much more freedom in our prayers; so that we could just say, “God I know you're better and your plans are perfect, but I'm still feeling too afraid; would You help me?” Or, “God I know I need to forgive that person, but I'm still feeling really hurt and angry and I don't want to. Would you equip me to obey you here?” Or even, “God I don't understand why you didn't heal that loved one, or why you allowed me to be born with this disability, and I don't feel like you're good right now. Will you point me again to the cross where I can always see Your love for me?” Do you see how different that is?

When I ask my daughter to get her math homework done; I don't want her to sit there for the rest of the night saying, “No no; I'm fine; I totally understand this.” It's better for everyone involved if she just says, “Daddy, I don't understand how to do this, can you help me?”

And, in the same way, your relationship with God will only grow and be strengthened when you can honestly come to your Father in heaven with your lack and say, “I can't. Would you help me? Would you equip me for this? I can't do this on my own.” And in every case, God is more than willing – along with His presence – to equip each and every area of our lack to accomplish whatever it is that He has called us to do.

Conclusion

God has very clearly called Moses to this task of delivering His people out of Egypt. And I trust that what we've seen over these past two weeks is that when God calls someone to do something, He goes with them *and* He also equips them for that calling.

After the service last Sunday, I got to talk to a number of you. And one thing that a few people told me, was that when we took that time to consider who God is and who we are in light of that, and then committed ourselves to being obedient to what He was calling us to; a number of you said that you actually don't feel like you really know what it is that God is calling you to right now. That's a great comment and a great question in light of what we've been looking at. How many of you would say that – at least at this point in time – it doesn't really feel clear to you what God is calling you to do in this next stage of life?

And so I thought it might be helpful for all of us/ to close off these two weeks of looking at Moses' call from God, to consider our own calling and how we can go about discerning what that is.

I'm sure there are more, but I want to offer you two broad strategies to think about when you're trying to discern what God's call is for your life:

1. The first is simply being willing to accept the truth that you may – in fact – actually know very well what God has called you to and equipped you for, but – for whatever reason - you just don't want to do it// so you are either fooling yourself or hiding behind excuses. i.e. Jonah: God had explicitly called Jonah and equipped him to go to Nineveh and Jonah's reply was very clearly, "Nope. No thanks." And there was a whole cycle of resistance and repentance that Jonah had to go through. Apostle Paul: is another guy who I think we see resisting God's calling on his life but justifying it with external obedience. Myself: in my own life, I would say I knew God's call on me to pastoral ministry long before I was ever willing to admit it or submit to it.

If you're able to recognize that pattern in your own life, the strategy here is simply this; stop doing that. Admit to yourself that you don't know better than God/ and then just get going on what you know He's calling you to do.

2. You truly *don't* know what it is that God's calling you to, but you're struggling to figure it out b/c you are not making use of one of the most basic ways God has equipped all of us in His family/ which is/ with His other kids!
And the strategy here is: You don't need a pastor/counselor to do this – although they can certainly be helpful in working out the implications of your call; you just need someone who knows you well and who you trust enough to speak into your life and listen to them. That can be a spouse or a close friend; whoever it is that knows you well.

Sometimes the answer to the question, "What is God calling me to?" can be answered simply by first answering the question, "How has God made me?" Which is to ask, "How has He *already* equipped me?" I'm just saying, that could be a big clue

for you in discerning what it is that He has in mind for you; in asking, “What has God *already* been preparing me for?”

A love for God and His word were equipping me, ahead of time, for pastoral ministry; working out deep struggles in my marriage and my family were equipping me for pastoral ministry; jobs that I’ve held in the past were equipping me; serving for the last five years as a non-voting member of our pastoral team was equipping me specifically for pastoral ministry here at DHBC. So many things - truly - that I have recognized and that others have recognized for me, that have clearly revealed God’s calling on my life.

An internal sense of calling can only carry you so far. In the end, you’ll need some trusted, outside sources to solidify and clarify that calling for you. Who are those people for you? Think of them specifically right now. And then ask them this week, “Hey, what do you see in my life that makes you think God might be calling me to something specific?” Then listen/take notes/analyze/pray - do all those things. And then/ unlike Moses/ once you feel like you’ve got a clearer picture of what He’s calling you to do// just be obedient and follow.

Let’s pray.