

The Burning Bush Experience #3

Series: Epic Journey: From Where We Are to Where God Wants Us

Exodus 3:1-15

Introduction: Several years ago, an action crime-thriller movie hit the big screens. The movie was called **Taken**, with Liam Neeson who played retired CIA operative, Brian Mills. In the movie, his daughter is kidnapped when she is visiting in France, and he must travel from America to France. He has 96 hours to find her, or they told him after that you'll never find her.

I think people liked that movie because it shows the heart of a father to go to the ends of the earth to rescue one of his kids, in this case, his daughter. At the end, he's on the yacht and he finally gets to where the wretched man has his daughter with a knife to her throat. Liam Neeson just drops him. His daughter, who has been so traumatized, says, "Dad, you came for me." And he said, "I told you I would." That is a story of rescue.

The Book of Exodus is a book about God coming to rescue His people who had been enslaved in Egypt. God reveals Himself to His people and to the Egyptians as the One and only God.

Moses was born and is saved from death by a Pharaoh's daughter. She names him Moses because "I drew him out of the Nile." Moses grows up as a prince in Egypt. One day when he is about 40 years old, he sees an Egyptian treating a Hebrew harshly, and he killed the Egyptian, and buried him in the sand.

He had to leave Egypt. He goes to Midian, he marries a girl, he names his firstborn son Gershom, 'which means 'sojourner" or "alien" or "stranger." In naming his son, Gershom, Moses was declaring that he was a desolate stranger in the land of his son's birth. The name does not mean that Moses was complaining or bitter, rather it implies that Moses was never going to forget **that he was a stranger in a strange land.**

He's gone from being a prince of Egypt to a real nowhere man. Sitting in his nowhere land. Making all his nowhere plans for nobody.

D.L. Moody once noted that Moses spent forty years in Egypt thinking he was somebody; and forty years in Exile learning that he was a nobody.

Acts 7:30 tells us Moses spent forty years tending sheep. It's a symbolic number—think of the forty days of Noah's flood, the forty years in the wilderness, the forty days of Jesus' temptation, even the 40 lashes Jesus took.

Forty of something is a severe testing; it is about all you can stand. It feels like forever—endless and unbearable. Not to mention that you don't get any younger as those years pass by, and Moses was forty when he left Egypt.

By now he was a "senior citizen," or mighty close to being one. Time to make peace with the predictability of a mediocre life that was winding to an unspectacular end. Long past time for youthful dreams and ambitions.

He was a long way from home, anticipating nothing, oblivious to new possibilities, looking only for food for his father-in-law's flock. Not the sort of thing that inspires us with new methods for deepening our spiritual lives.

But here's what happened next, Exodus chapter three:

1Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. **2There** the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. **3So** Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

4When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am."

5"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." **6Then** he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

7The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. **8So** I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious

land, **a land** flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.

9And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. **10**So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

11But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

12And 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.”

13Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

14God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’”

15God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’”

“This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.” (NIV) **Let's Pray**

I think it's fair to say that up to this point, Moses knew about God. He spent his first three or four years in the home of his Hebrew parents. They would have told him stories about God and the history of Israel. But Moses had never encountered God.

You could say that this is one of the most well-known dramatic encounters with the Lord in all the bible. We normally call it the **“burning bush experience.”**

I want to first unpack what Moses learned about who God is, and what we also learn when we come to know God instead of just know about Him.

There are Five Important Discoveries in Exodus chapter 3.

1. God is a Holy God.

Moses is pasturing the flock at Horeb in the desert region of Sinai. You know, it's not a fun place. It's not a vacation spot. It's rocks and sand and he's trying to find pasture for the sheep.

Suddenly, you have these bushes, and acacia trees, and they dot the landscape in the Sinai Desert. Moses sees a bush on fire. Now it's probably not the first time he has seen a tree on fire, but there's something different about this.

This tree is on fire, but it's not burning up. And when he gets near, he hears the voice of God. And God tells Moses, "Take your shoes off, Moses, because the place on which you're standing is holy ground."

Moses might have walked over that ground before, never thought twice about it, because there was no voice of God coming from a burning bush. The ground wasn't holy because there's something inherent in the ground. The ground was holy because God was there.

I was thinking about other places in the Bible where God appears to people-whether it's Isaiah, or Jeremiah, or Ezekiel, or even Paul in the New Testament-every one of them responds in basically the same way: they're overwhelmed with a sense of unworthiness and awe and fear, because they're in the presence of God. Moses took off his sandals, and he shielded his face, and he trembled in fear...because God is a consuming fire. Do you view God in that way? We will always be overcome with awe and wonder encountering God.

Isaiah chapter 6, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory."

Revelation chapter 4: 8 says, "And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within, and day and night they do not cease to say, 'HOLY, HOLY, HOLY IS THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME.'"

God is a holy God. The only person that could go into the Holy of Holies - where God's presence was, was the High Priest, and he came in once a year,

and he came with blood and fear because you can't just mosey on into the presence of God.

In First Samuel, the ark of the covenant gets taken by the Philistines. They don't want it because it causes them to have tumors and hemorrhoids. God was given them pain where the sun doesn't shine. They sent it back to Israel, to the little town of Beth Shemesh. When the people looked in, they were struck dead. They said, "Who is able to stand before this holy God?"

Why did the LORD want Moses to take his shoes off? I ran across two possible reasons for this. Number one: Slaves never wore shoes. Moses is coming before the LORD not as His equal.

Number two: In the ancient Near East, if you were to go into someone's home, your dusty sandals would be taken off, and your feet would be washed, and you'd go into the house. And Moses is coming into the presence of God.

2. God is the One True God.

In verse 6 He says, ***"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."*** ***At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God."***

Egypt was filled with gods. God is the God, the Creator God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, the son of miracle birth, the son of the promise. He's not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Esau. He's the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Jacob, the younger of the twins. He is the only God. **The Scripture says,** concerning the LORD, He says of Himself (Isaiah 46:9-10),

I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.' (NIV)

There's no one like God. God is holy. He's totally separate from everything else. **And there is no other God.**

Later when God brings the plagues, He brings them on the gods (little g) of Egypt, and He destroys Egypt, and He destroys Pharaoh.

God is a holy God. He is the one true God.

3. God is Compassionate.

He says in **verse 7, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering."**

God cares about His people, which means He cares about you and me.

The word compassion means "calm with and passion to suffer with." When you have compassion, you suffer with another person. Once God introduces Himself as holy and the only LORD GOD, He says, I'm compassionate and gracious; slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth." God is a compassionate God.

Have you ever thought why **God says, in verse 4, "Moses, Moses!"** Why does God repeat his name?

In the Book of First Samuel, God says, "**Samuel, Samuel!**" In the New Testament, Jesus says, **Martha Martha**, why are you worried and bothered about so many things?

The Lord said to Peter, "**Simon, Simon.**" The Lord said to Saul on the road to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

Why the double name? When God says Moses' name twice, He's saying, "**Moses, Moses**, I know you. I know who you are. I know everything about you.

You thought you were somebody for the first forty years of your life, and now you think that you're a nobody. Moses, I have compassion not just for My people in Egypt; **I have compassion for you.**"

God knows everything about you, and He cares for you, and He loves you.

The Bible says, "Cast all your cares upon Him" - why? - "because He cares for you." It matters to Him concerning you. "**I have surely seen the affliction of My people in Egypt. I have heard their cries.**" God is a compassionate God.

4. God is the Deliverer.

Verse 8 says, "So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious

land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.”

Now remember this about His deliverance: He delivers from the most difficult of circumstances. "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh," the Bible says, "Is anything too difficult for Me?" Is any situation too difficult for God? Of course not! Egypt is the world power in the 1400's B.C. when this story takes place. Nobody can hold a candle to Egypt. Nobody dares go up against it. There are a lot of Hebrews, because the LORD multiplied them, but they're no match for the mighty army and chariots of Egypt.

You might be thinking in your situation, it's dreadful. It's beyond hope. **"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."**

God is the God over every situation. He can deliver in the worst of situations. And He delivers not just to get you out of Egypt, so to speak; He delivers to bring you into a spacious land. He delivers you out of bad things to bring you into good things.

When you have a land flowing with milk, that means your herds are going to be giving birth, and there's going to be lots of milk and lots of babies there, and it's going to be a wonderful place for fertility with your flocks and herds.

It's a land flowing not only with milk, but with honey. That means there's a bunch of busy bees there, and it's a sweet place, and productive place.

God is not the God of barely enough. He's the God of more than enough. **"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory."**

Deliverance comes in the worst of situations. Deliverance comes to bring a great blessing. And deliverance comes through chosen leaders. God chooses Moses. The guy that doesn't even have his own flocks and herds. The guy that thought his life was a failure. God chooses him.

Here's the wonderful thing about God: God likes to include us in His work, in His plan. God lets us minister with Him.

God is a delivering God. He is a holy God. He's the only God. He is a compassionate God. A delivering God.

5. **God is the** all-encompassing, unchanging God.

"So now," God says beginning in verse 10, *"go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."*

11But Moses said to God, *"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"*

12And 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." (NIV)*

The natural question that Moses' asked was: "Who am I to go to Pharaoh?" That is a normal question, but it's an irrelevant question. Did you notice that God doesn't really answer his question directly? God just says, **"I will be with you..."**

Object lesson: He's speaking to Moses from the burning bush. And there's a blazing fire, but the bush is not consumed. Now, what God was saying is, "Moses, you see what I'm doing in this bush? It's not the bush. This is not some special bush. What I'm doing in this bush I can do in any bush. It's not the bush; it's the God in the bush. **So, it doesn't matter who you are if I am with you.**"

Moses asks a blinding question because he's blinded by his own insecurities and insignificance."

But then he asks a second question, and it's a burning question. **Look at verse 13,** *"Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"* **14God said** to Moses, *"I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'"*

Now remember, to the Hebrews, your name and your nature are the same.

Esau was born first, and Jacob was holding onto his heel. And the name Jacob means, "heel grabber, trickster, supplanter, con man," and that's what Jacob

was. Later the LORD changed Jacob's name to Israel, which means "Prince of God," and it changed Jacob's whole life.

God says, in verse 14, "'I AM WHO I AM.' And He said, this is My name forever, and this is My memorial name to all generations."

God is saying: "He always was what He is. He always is what He was. He will always be who He was and who He is." He's the self-existent, unchangeable God.

The Bible says of Jesus, "In Him was life..." Jesus said, "I'm the way, the truth, and the life." He says in Malachi 3:6, "I am the LORD; I change not."

So, it means I'm self-existent, I'm unchangeable. But it's also an unfinished sentence. I AM what? I AM everything you need.

"I need a friend." Great, "I am a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

"I need healing." And God says, "Great, because one of My names is Jehovah, Rapha, the God who heals."

"I need peace." "Great, because one of My names is Jehovah Shalom, the God of peace."

"I need guidance." "Great, because one of My names is Jehovah Rohi, the Lord in my shepherd."

Bible scholars believe that the burning bush was the acacia bush. The acacia bush is a thorny bush. It's a bush filled with thorns. The root of that word bush means "to prick."

In the Garden of Eden, one of the results of sin was that the ground would produce thorns and thistles. When Jesus was tried, they wove a crown of thorns, and pressed it into His brow. It's the curse of sin being pressed upon the Lord. And He died for you, and He died for me, but He was not consumed.

They put Him in the tomb, and on the third day He rose again from the dead. He is the God who has conquered sin and death and hell and the grave. He is our great I AM, our holy God, our only God, our compassionate God, our delivering God, our self-existent, unchangeable, all-you need God. Jesus is the great I AM.

A key thing here is that what God is accomplishing in and through our lives both does and doesn't depend on us. It depends on us in the limited sense that God uses every aspect of what he has made us to be, including our particular gifts, our courage and hope, our dreams and energy, our determination, our faith. Availability to God does not involve passivity. But it does involve a humble recognition that what counts most does not depend on us. "Apart from me you can do nothing," Jesus said in John 15:5.

Commentators on this passage, both Jewish and Christian, fancied that this is how God works in his servants, burning within them without burning them out.

He is a holy God. He is the only God, the compassionate, delivering God, who is unchangeable, self-existent, and everything you will ever need.

You say, 'Why does this matter to me?' Here's why: Most of us know about God. A lot of us have some level of faith in God. But for you to be used by God the way He wants to use you; you need to encounter God. Not just facts about God; not just Scripture about God; not just songs about God, but God himself.

Moses was schooled in all the learning of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22). He learned reading, writing, trigonometry, geometry, science, mathematics, astrology, music, art, military science, and the religions of his day.

Living in the Land of Midian and plodding through the backside of the desert Moses would become a much different man. God taught him patience, humility, empathy, and other things that you only learn in the desert.

In this burning bush experience, God had a life changing encounter with Moses that put all eighty years of his life in perspective and changed the course of history.

Here is what we need to see.

I. GOD HAS A PASSION FOR US (Ex. 3:4)

Moses' self-confidence has been shattered. His ambition has been abandoned. He had ceased dreaming. He had surrendered to the adverse circumstances around him.

40 years earlier, Moses had risked his life for his people. Then, he was rejected by his people. Fear gripped his life and he fled from the wrath of Pharaoh.

He became a shepherd of his father-in-law's sheep. Moses owned nothing. In the eyes of Moses' world, he was now a failure.

Suddenly, Moses saw a Bush that was burning in the desert. Moses went over to the bush. The first words, he heard from the bush were "Moses, Moses." God knew his name, address, location, and shattered dreams. God knows who you are, where you are, and what you are.

II. GOD HAS A NEW POSSESSION FOR US (Ex. 3:2)

Moses has been in the wilderness for 40 years and he has seen a zillion Acacia bushes. These bushes are scrawny, ugly, and thorny looking in the desert. They have distorted twisted limbs. There has not been one day that he has rushed home to wife, and said, " I have seen an Acacia bush."

The Acacia bushes were ordinary and common in the wilderness. They were insignificant. They were never the subject of conversation.

However, when the glory of God filled that Acacia bush, it was transformed into something extraordinary, that caught Moses' attention.

Our lives are insignificant in the world, until the glory of God fills us. The world looks at the Church without God's power. They say that it is nothing more than a thorn bush. We cannot build a building elaborate enough, have music beautiful enough, grounds landscaped enough or programs extensive enough to attract the world to it.

But when get filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit and the Church begins to burn, but is not consumed, people will take notice and come to God. The ordinary becomes the extraordinary when God is in the midst of it.

III. GOD HAS A NEW PERSPECTIVE FOR US (Ex. 3:3-5)

It has 40 years since Moses has been intellectually challenged. He walks up with all his Egyptian learning and tries to figure out the phenomena. Then, God speaks to Moses and commands him to take off his shoes because he was on holy ground. What do you say to a talking thorn bush that calls you by name?

Even though Moses could not explain what God was doing, it was there he received fresh revival and revelation from God.

IV. GOD HAS A PROMISE FOR US (Ex. 3:6)

God chose to identify with Moses, his father, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God could have identified Himself in so many ways. Yet, He chose to say that I covenant myself with people like you and me.

Abraham had his inconsistencies. Isaac had his inadequacies. Jacob had his improprieties.

God was saying to Moses, "In spite of their weaknesses and failures, I was still with them. The covenant that I made to them I now make with you."

V. GOD WANTS TO PARTNER WITH US (Ex. 3:7-10)

God says to Moses that I have heard the cry of people in Egypt. I am going to deliver them and bring them into a new land. This is going to be a divine deliverance by the hand of God. Moses says great, I tried to do this 40 years ago. I can't wait to see you defeat the Egyptians and bring out the Israelites."

God says, "You have it all wrong Moses. You are not going to sit up on the mountain top while I do all the work. You are going to be my spokesman and my servant. You are to be involved in the work of God."

VI. GOD HAS THE POWER WE NEED (Ex. 3:11-14)

God calls us to tasks that we cannot do. He calls us to heal the sick. We cannot do that. He calls us to cast out devils. We cannot do that. We cannot do God's work in our own power. We must have the authority of Christ and the power of God in our lives.

Before I close, let me give you two Key Takeaways:

1. When God gets your attention, Pay Attention.

You are God's answer to someone's prayer.

You think "I'm a nobody." God says, "I'll go with you."

You think, "I don't know what to say." God says, "I'll tell you."

You think, "What if they don't believe me?" God says "It's not your job."

2. Where there's an encounter like this, there's also an enlistment to follow the call of God.

It was true with Abraham, with Isaiah; with Moses... and it's true with us.

Conclusion:

The main way God speaks to us today is through His Word, and through the leading of the Holy Spirit. There are **"burning bush experiences"** with the Lord that are not just limited to biblical characters of old, it is possible for any of us.

A burning bush experience will have the following characteristics:

- **It will be unexpected.** Even if we're praying to hear from God, He usually answers in a way that catches us by surprise.
- **It will be unique to us.** God's personal messages are different for everyone.
- **It will challenge us to trust and obey Him at a deeper level.** We're called to obey or not. And obedience is not easy.
- **It will have a powerful and lifelong effect.** God often communicates this way about significant situations.

A "burning bush" experience might be preceded by:

Circumstances not working out, and God may be asking us to stop and listen.

A crisis or critical situation where we seek God's direction.

God may cause us to feel uneasy without apparent reason, to get our attention.

Before Moses saw the burning bush, he may not have been praying for a sign from God. But prayer is one thing that will keep us close to the Lord and ready to hear from Him. We have His Spirit within us who leads us in God's way.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." (NKJV)

Let me close with a story. Malcolm Gladwell is an author who's written books like Outliers and The Tipping Point and Blink. Raised in a Christian family but grew up and walked away from the faith.

He was doing research for a book, and he heard about a Canadian woman named Wilma Derksen whose daughter had been kidnapped on the way to school, and a week later her raped and murdered body had been found. Right after the funeral a reporter asked the parents, 'How do you feel about whoever did this?' Cliff, the father, said, "We would like to know who the person or persons are so we could share a love that seems to be missing in their lives." Wilma, the mother, talked about the process of forgiveness.

When Malcolm Gladwell heard that story, it was a burning bush moment for him. It defied his categories of how the world works. And he wanted to know where the power to forgive came from. He arranged an interview with Wilma in her backyard in Winnipeg. She told him about her Mennonite faith-which had taught her to take the teaching of Jesus seriously. He said she wasn't flashy; but there was an incredibly power to her, and Gladwell realized that he was standing on holy ground.

Here is what Malcolm Gladwell wrote about this experience: **What I know now is that I was one of those people who did not appreciate the weapons of the spirit. I have always been someone attracted to the quantifiable and the physical. I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power.**

I put that sentence in the past tense because something happened to me when I sat in Wilma Derksen's garden. It is one thing to read in a history book about people empowered by their faith. But it is quite another to meet an otherwise very ordinary person, in the backyard of a very ordinary house, who has managed to do something utterly extraordinary.

Their daughter was murdered. And the first thing the Dirksen's did was to stand up at the press conference and talk about the path to forgiveness.

Maybe we have difficulty seeing the weapons of the spirit because we don't know where to look, or because we are distracted by the louder claims of material advantage. But I've seen them now, and I will never be the same.

Keep your eyes open to the burning bushes around you? When God gets your attention, pay attention. Let your encounter with God lead to your enlistment for His call on your life to be an answer to someone's prayer.