

When in Doubt, Pull God's Word Out #4

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

Exodus 4:1-17

INTRO: Have you ever asked God questions and felt you haven't received a good answer? I heard about a little boy once who said to his father, "How many people in the world, Dad?" He said, "I don't know Son." He said, "How many stars are in the sky?" He said, "I don't know, Son." "How many fish in the sea?" "Don't know, Son." "Dad, you don't mind me asking you all these questions, do you?" "No, Son. How are you going to learn if you don't ask questions?"

Maybe you've been that sort of parent. Or maybe you have asked Father God questions and you're not getting the answers you're looking for.

Story: I read about a man who fell off a cliff but managed to grab a tree limb on the way down. He held on for dear life. Then yelled, "Is anyone up there?"

Then he heard a thundering voice from heaven say, "I am here. I am the Lord. Do you believe me?" The man said, "Yes, Lord, I believe. But I can't hang on much longer."

"That's all right. If you really believe you have nothing to worry about. I will save you. Just let go of the branch." There was a moment of silence. Then the man looked up and said, "Is anyone else up there?"

There's not a believer here who hasn't questioned his or her faith at some point. And while Christians have always struggled with doubt, in the 21st century, it seems harder than ever to be sure of anything.

A few years ago, Drew Faust became president of Harvard University. In her inaugural speech, she called attention to the crest of the college, which bears the one-word motto of the school, **Veritas**, which is Latin for truth.

She pointed out that the motto originally affirmed the school's quest for eternal truths and undeniable realities. But then she went on to announce a new understanding of that quest: **"Truth is an aspiration," she said, "not a possession. We must commit ourselves to the uncomfortable view of doubt."**

When a highly regarded intellectual institution is telling us we can't really know anything, for certain, it feels as though the very ground beneath our feet is giving way, and there's no place to stand, **but we know there is a firm foundation we can stand on – the solid rock of God's unchanging word.**

That is why this summer we are embarking on an Epic Journey through the Book of Exodus. We've been saying every week that the journey of the Israelites is, in so many ways, like our own spiritual journey. And for the last couple of weeks, the story has focused on one Israelite - Moses.

Moses was born to Hebrew parents but was raised in the palace of Pharaoh. He murdered an Egyptian slave-master and had to run for his life, and he wound up as a fugitive in a place called Midian.

The story shifts to the desert of Midian, where Moses meets his wife, becomes a father, and it seems like he's going to live the rest of his mediocre life as a shepherd in Midian.

And then one day, after forty years, Moses encounters God in a burning bush, and God says, "I've seen the suffering of my people in Egypt, and I'm going to set them free!" And Moses says, 'Awesome! You have my full support!' And God says, "I'm sending you to do it."

Here's what happened next in Exodus 4, beginning with verse 1:

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

2Then the Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?"

"A staff," he replied.

3The Lord said, "Throw it on the ground."

Moses threw it on the ground, and it became a snake, and he ran from it. 4Then 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. 5"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."

6Then the Lord said, “Put your hand inside your cloak.” So, Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, the skin was leprous—it had become as white as snow.

7“Now put it back into your cloak,” he said. So, Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh.

8Then the Lord said, “If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first sign, they may believe the second. **9**But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile, and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground.”

10Moses said to the Lord, “Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.”

11The Lord said to him, “Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? **12**Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”

13But Moses said, “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.”

14Then the Lord’s anger burned against Moses and he said, “What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you. **15**You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. **16**He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. **17**But take this staff in your hand so you can perform the signs with it.” (NIV)

Let’s Pray

The way Moses responds to God is not really the way you would expect a hero of the Bible to act! Right? Moses shows that he's struggling with what I have struggled with and most of you have struggled with from time to time... **Doubt.**

One of the most debilitating parts of the Christian life can be summed up in that one word—**doubt.**

Doubt can destroy faith, trust, belief, and confidence when it is left unchecked and unresolved. So, let's walk through these verses, and talk about three different areas of doubt that Moses had, and that we sometimes have, and how God responded to each of those doubts.

Today's Message is: **When in Doubt, Pull God's Word Out.**

Three areas of doubt:

I. Doubting our Call.

In verse 1, God had clearly told Moses what He was calling him to do, and Moses says ***"What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you?'"***

Do you remember what happened forty years ago when Moses tried to help his people in Egypt? He killed an Egyptian who was beating up a Hebrew guy. He thought he was a hero, but his own people rejected his attempt to rescue.

I imagine Moses starting to picture in his mind how this might play out. He would go back to his people in Egypt, and say, **"God sent me to free you from slavery!"** And they'd say, "You've been gone for 40 years, and now you come back and tell us God's been talking to you? We don't think so." So, it makes sense that Moses would say, ***"What if they don't believe me or listen to me?"***

I think Moses was also doubting whether he really believed he was called. I mean, you must admit, what God was asking him to do seemed way beyond his pay grade. Have you ever felt like that? God is leaning on you to do something or give something or go somewhere. And you're thinking, "No. That's crazy." You doubt God's calling.

God responded to Moses by giving him three special signs that he could perform. Did you know that in the Bible, a miracle, or a "sign" is never intended to just impress people or wow people? It's never 'Watch this cool trick!' They're intended to signify or authenticate something or someone.

For example, John 20:30-31 says, ***"Jesus performed many other signs (miracles) in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."***

Seven of the miracles or signs which Jesus performed are recorded in the gospel according to John. He says these miracles are written that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that believing we might have life through his name.

And just so you know, the relevance of the number seven is – completeness.

So, the three signs in this passage were for the purpose of proving to Moses that God was really calling him and would be with him and empower him.

God tells Moses: "Throw down your staff." And it turned into a snake, which of course freaked Moses out. [\[Story of snake in our church\]](#)

God said, "Pick it up by the tail;" not usually good advice, but Moses did it, and the snake turned back into a stick.

Most Bible commentators say the reason for the snake is that Pharaoh would often wear a headdress that looked like a coiled cobra; so, this was a sign that God's authority was greater than Pharaoh's.

And then God had Moses stick his hand inside his cloak; it came out all infected with leprosy. Then he put it in his cloak again and took it out, and it was healed. Just like one of those commercials for SKYRIZI which is used to treat adults with: moderate to severe plaque psoriasis!

And then God said, ***"If they still don't believe you, take some water from the Nile; throw it on the ground and it'll turn into blood."***

I want to focus on what happened right after Moses expressed his doubt. He said, "What if they don't believe me or listen to me?" And God's immediate response was... **"What's that in your hand?"**

And since Moses was a shepherd, the thing in his hand was a shepherd's staff-basically a glorified stick with a hook that he would use to direct the sheep.

And I think it's very significant that God started with a very ordinary thing that Moses had in his hand. A patch of dirt becomes holy ground when God is there. A shepherd's staff becomes a holy instrument when God uses it. A boat becomes a floating pulpit when Jesus is preaching from it.

Maybe you have felt strongly that God has called you to do something. But you're wavering. You're having second thoughts. And God's word to you is, "What is that in your hand?" What is it that you already have, that with God's power could be a tool for righteousness?

Let me suggest three things you already have in your hand:

A. *Your POSITION.*

Is there something in your position that could be part of your calling?

EXAMPLE: [Bernie Manning, Bunky Reges, Al Bennett, David Bowden](#)

B. *Your POSSESSIONS?*

Is there a possession you own, that seems very ordinary, but God could make it a very strategic tool?

EXAMPLE: [Jimmy Dozier and Cowboys for Christ, plow days; Mr. Whitley, Kathy Sykes](#)

Don't you see that the God who gifted you is calling you to use your gift for something bigger?

C. *Your PASSION?*

Is there a passion you have, something you're uniquely gifted at, and God is tapping you on the shoulder, saying, "What's that in your hand?"

EXAMPLE: [Men - 1998 construct this building; Margaret Nelms, Ken K, James Henry, Joel](#)

II. Doubting our Capability.

In verse 10, ***"Moses said to the Lord, "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."***

It was well-known that prominent Egyptian leaders were well educated, eloquent, and persuasive. And Moses was educated in Egypt but had spent the past 40 years hanging out with shepherds...talking about grass and weather and sheep. He doubts he can pull this off. He doesn't feel qualified.

God answers with a bunch of questions: ***"11The Lord said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord?"***

God is basically saying to Moses, "It's not about you." These are **my** people, and this mission I'm sending you on is **my** mission. So, Moses, when you complain that you're not a good enough speaker, you're not getting it!

I'm not choosing you because you're eloquent! I'm going to use you in your imperfection and in your weakness...so that when this happens, nobody will say, **'Moses is great!'**...They'll say, **'How great is our God.'**

Paul the Apostle had a very similar struggle with inadequacy. He called it a **thorn in his flesh**. And nobody knows what it was!

But in 2 Corinthians 12, Paul says he pleaded with God to take this weakness away from him, but God's answer was, ***"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.*** (NIV)

Have you ever found yourself fixated on your weakness, and pleading with God to take it away? Paul says, "Maybe we need to stop thinking that God can only use us if we're strong or gifted or perfect, and realize He wants to use us exactly as we are."

We need to pray less that God will remove our thorns and pray more that God will call our number and put us in the game, as imperfect and unqualified as we may be.

ILLUS: Lee Iacocca was an American automobile executive best known for the development of the Ford Mustang. He died in 2019 at the age of 94, but he once commented to a business associate, 'The trouble with you is that in college they taught you not to take any action until you had all the facts. You've got 95% of them, but it's going to take you another six months to get that last 5%. And by the time you do, they will be out of date.' At some point you've got to take that leap of faith.'

The point is: You don't have to know everything, and be everything, to step out in faith and do the something that God is calling you to.

God says to Moses, "Who made your mouth?" And then he says in verse **12**, ***"Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."*** (NIV)

Literally, in the Hebrew, it means **"I will be with your mouth."** [Probably a lot of us need God to be with our mouth more often. Amen!]

If you're feeling inadequate, and doubting your ability, maybe you've made it way too much about you, and have forgotten that God says, "I'm going with you."

III. Doubting our Commitment.

When you get to verse 13, Moses is all out of excuses. Every objection he's had, God has answered it. And Moses can't seem to think of any other objections. So, here's what he says in verse 13:

"But Moses said, "Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else."

Isn't that pathetic? He's like that old song from the 60's, "Please Mr. Custer, I don't wanna go!" Why not? "Cause I don't want to!"

His life was comfortable; he was old and tired; he knew his people were suffering back in Egypt, but the job was just too big for him; and he would prefer that God asked someone else.

And the response of God comes as a little surprise. Look at verse 14:

"Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses,"

It reminds me of the parable Jesus told, about the talents in Matthew 25: 24-30

"Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 And I was afraid and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.'

26 "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed. 27 So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and on my coming I would have received back my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him and give it to him who has ten talents.

29 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.

30 And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (NKJV)

The Lord is ticked off at this person who buries his talent...does nothing with it.

Why do you think God didn't get mad after any of the other objections Moses had...but now He's burning with anger? I think all those other objections were legitimate. Moses really needed some clarification.

But this time it was a matter of his heart. Even after all his questions were answered, Moses was choosing not to submit himself to the will of the Lord. In effect, he was saying, "I'll be my own lord. I'll be my own master. I'm just going to do my own thing."

This is so important! Remember last week, we talked about why God is represented by fire? Because fire is both beautiful and warm and inviting, AND its powerful and dangerous and scary...**and so is God.**

And when God calls you to do something, it's not a friendly suggestion like, "You might want to consider this." It's a call from Almighty God to step up.

If God has called you to do something...or give something...or go somewhere...and your response has been, "I don't think so." Let me just say, that God still loves you, but you have chosen to live outside of God's will.

A few chapters from now we'll see that Moses does in fact lead the Israelites out of Egypt, but they are afraid to enter the Promised Land, and guess what, they wander in the desert for 40 years until they die. They missed out on God's blessings because they were afraid to do what God said they COULD do.

So, the Lord's anger burned against Moses...BUT, he also extended one more thing to help Moses out. Look at the rest of verse 14: "**and he said, 'What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you.'**"

The response of God is this third question: "**What about your brother?**"

Think about this: could it be that you've resisted God's call because you think if you answered His call, you'd be all alone? You imagine a lonely life, where it's just you and God against the world.

And maybe God's word to you is, "What about your brothers? What about your sisters?" When you take that step of faith, you're not alone. You're opening yourself up to the brotherhood and sisterhood of others who are following God with you.

CONCLUSION:

If you seriously contemplate your faith and what it means to follow Jesus Christ -- the chances are that occasionally, you're going to come down with some questions, some issues, some uncertainties, some doubts.

Maybe you doubt that God has really forgiven you. Or you wonder whether the Bible really is, God's Word. Or you question why God lets people suffer. Or you've been praying for help with a struggle in your life, but so far there has been silence, and you're wondering whether God really cares.

You may think doubt is the opposite of faith, but it isn't. The opposite of faith is fear and unbelief.

- You can have a strong faith and still have some doubts.
- You can be heaven-bound and have uncertainty over theological issues.
- You can be a full-fledged Christian without having to feel like every single question of life has been absolutely settled.

Some people think that doubt is unforgivable, but it isn't. God doesn't condemn us when we question Him. You can see that in the 7th chapter of the Gospel of Luke. This recounts the time when John the Baptist was in prison, and he was having doubts about the identity of Jesus. Verse 19 says: ***"And summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying: "Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?"***

Think about that. This is the person who once pointed to Jesus and said: ***"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*** This is the person who baptized Jesus and saw the heavens open, and God proclaim: ***"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."***

John the Baptist is the person who once said: ***"I have seen and I have borne witness that this is the Son of God."*** And now he has doubts! He's not sure if Jesus really is the Messiah.

How does Jesus react? Does He criticize him or shame him? Well, look at His response in verse 22: ***"And Jesus answered and said to them: 'Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the Gospel preached to them.'"***

In other words, instead of discrediting John, Jesus says to tell him about all the evidence that they have seen that confirms that Jesus is, indeed, the Messiah.

And how does Jesus feel about John now that he has some doubts? Does He think less of him? Well, in verse 28 Jesus says: ***"I say to you, among those born of women, there is no one greater than John!"***

THINK ABOUT THAT -- JESUS GAVE JOHN THE HIGHEST COMPLIMENT AT THE SAME TIME THAT JOHN WAS HAVING SOME DOUBTS!

That's why I want you to remember: When in Doubt, Pull God's Word Out.

God would rather have you be honest with Him about your doubts than to profess a phony faith?

Using a medical analogy, it's like getting an immunization. To help your body fight off a future disease, doctors inject you with a small amount of that very same disease, and your body builds up antibodies that will battle that disease if it ever threatens you. Your body is stronger for the experience.

When we're infected with doubts, and seek answers and deal constructively with the doubt, we emerge stronger because our faith has been confirmed, and that gives us new confidence in dealing with doubt in the future.

Jesus doesn't toss you out if you doubt.

You can doubt and follow Jesus at the same time.

You don't have to understand everything to believe something.

But Jesus also knows that your doubts can take you out.

In Matthew 14 when Jesus is walking on the water and Peter figures he can do the same thing, he calls for the Lord to call him out to walk on water too.

Verse 30 says; “But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” [This is a great prayer by the way] Verse 31 goes on to say, “Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

Now keep this picture in your mind because this is a great image for anyone who has ever had a doubt about their faith. When Peter had doubts, Jesus reached out, and said “why did you doubt.” Peter doubted when he took his eyes off Jesus and thought it might not work out.

When we look at all that God calls us to do, and all that we are supposed to be in Christ and at the same time look around at the real world, we sometimes think; “I’m not sure this will work out.”

Jesus is still dealing with belief and doubt in the disciples and he’s giving them a private lesson in Matthew 21; in verse 21 “ ***Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done.” (NIV)***

What God originates, God will orchestrate, if you do not doubt.

The Pilgrim’s Progress by John Bunyan is a classic allegory about the Christian life, depicting the journey of the Christian from the cross where the burden of sin is lifted all the way to heaven, the Celestial city, depicting all difficulties and obstacles that Christian encounters along the way.

Christian goes to Vanity Fair, and it talks about the battle of worldliness. He goes through the Slough of Despond and talks about the depression and despondency that sometimes comes to Christians.

Christian and his companion, Hopeful, are spending the night, unaware of the fact that they are sleeping on the property of Giant Despair and his wife, Distrust. Giant Despair finds them on his property, and arrests them and carries them into a dank, nasty, stinking dungeon in Doubting Castle.

He first begins to scold them like they are dogs. Then he beats them with heavy clubs, and he tells them that they will never get out of Doubting Castle. But one night at midnight Christian declares, “What a fool I have been to stay in this stinking Castle when I have in my pocket a key that will unlock every door in Doubting Castle. Do you know what the key was? **Promise!**

So, when in doubt, pull God's word out. Get hold of the promises of God and when you do it unlocks the door of doubt.

One last thought:

We've been talking about God's call to serve, but there's a prior call that must happen before any kind of serving. And it's the call to enter a relationship with Jesus. The call to salvation. And that call is always initiated by God. In John chapter 6, Jesus says, "No one comes to me unless the Father draws him."

It is our nature to look for reasons. It is God's nature to offer relationships. We think the answer to our doubts is explanations. God says the answer to your doubts is Me. It is God's higher value to teach you how to trust Him during your season of doubts than provide you an explanation and proof as to why you shouldn't have doubts.

We want an explanation. We want to be able to connect all the dots. We're like Thomas in the New Testament, who said, "I'm not going to believe unless I can put my hands in the nail prints in His hands and his side."

Having doubts doesn't make you less spiritual. It doesn't make you less of a Christian at all. In fact, seasons of doubt can lead to some of the greatest spiritual growth in your life. God calls us to be...before He calls us to do.

Just remember that after the resurrection, these doubters became the shouters of everything that they had seen and heard with Jesus. These doubters became so emboldened that they turned the world upside down.

So, here's the most important question I can ask you TODAY: **Is God calling you to himself?** Maybe you're responding like Moses; "I'm not good enough, I'm not qualified." And God's answer is: "I know you're not good enough. That's why Jesus went to the cross.

And I know you're not qualified, that's why I sent the Holy Spirit to empower you and enable you to be my witnesses.