

Exodus 2:11-15; 3:1-10 [NIV]

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. ¹² Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. ¹³ The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, "Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?"

¹⁴ The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known."

¹⁵ When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well.

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^{3:1} Now 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. ² There 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. ³ So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up."

⁴ When 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." ⁶ Then 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.

⁷ The 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. ⁸ 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. ⁹ And 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."

We're in the book of Exodus this morning – in the story of the life of Moses. Exodus, Chapter 2.

Here is a principle that I think we'd all do well to remember: "the quality of a thing typically has very little to do with the age of the thing."

There are people who believe that just because a thing is *old*, then it *must be good or valuable*.

There are also people who believe a thing must *automatically* be *valuable* and *good* if it's *new*.

Neither is true.

Some old things are good, but some are *not*.

Some *new* things are good and others are not.

And that goes for just about everything, really: houses, cars, furniture, clothes, books, songs, philosophies, ideas, methodologies...

Quality is not a function of age.

An example: Hezekiah Butterworth was an author who lived in the northeast in the late 1800s – and he's maybe best remembered by his short, but very popular work, "The Broken Pinion." It's a poetic account of his nursing back to health a bird with a broken wing, but then sadly realizing that it would never fly as well as it did before the fracture.

His point in the poem is to lament the notion of how once a person fails or falls to wrong, he or she will never again attain the heights they had previously reached.

About that old, well-known and well-loved poem, Chuck Swindoll writes, "It's one of those moving, bittersweet thoughts that causes people, when they hear it, to gravely nod their heads and purse their lips together and say, 'Hmmm.' The problem with it, though, is that Butterworth's notion is simply not true."

You do not widely find that principle in Scripture.

What you find instead, over and over again, are people who experience utter failure, then come to a turning point where they begin listening to God, and then they wind up rising, flying *far above* where they had previously been.

We saw this in Abraham last week. He was a guy who lied to protect himself, and he released his wife into a king's harem. And yet, after even that, he came to be known as the "friend of God."

Jacob cheated his own brother out of his birthright, but then was given the name Israel.

Rahab was a prostitute, yet her name appears in the Hebrews 11 "Hall of Faith."

There are Jonah and John Mark – both deserters, who wind up doing remarkable things.

And then there are Peter and Paul, and many, many others: all of them people who flew even higher after they had experienced a broken wing.

God very often brings a turning point in broken lives that winds up helping them fly higher than they ever did, or even could have, before the break.

That is a word of sure hope for all of us, and we see this on display in the life of Moses.

Moses, of course, was a Hebrew by birth, but was raised, schooled and trained as an Egyptian. He must have known, however, of his Israelite roots, which, I think, explains why he did what he did there in the last

half of Exodus 2: he came to the defense of that Hebrew slave.

You might call this Moses' first attempt at "saving his people." But, either intentionally or accidentally, Moses winds up abusing the abusing Egyptian more than the abusing Egyptian was abusing the Israelite.

So, attempt number one did not go well.

Then attempt number two comes shortly after when Moses tries to intervene in a conflict between, this time, two Israelites – two of his own people – who surprisingly turn on him, because somehow they knew what he'd done to the Egyptian.

It's not that Moses' sentiments and intentions were not good – they were. The problem was that he was not yet the "savior" he needed to be. He did not yet know what it really meant to help his people, so attempt number two does not go well either. And because of that, he was rejected by both his own people, the Israelites, and by Pharaoh, the king of his adopted people.

And that left Moses, the man of two countries, as a man without a country, and so he fled Egypt and wound up in Midian.

Now we don't know if Midian was Moses' intentional destination or whether he just started driving and ran out of gas there, but it did become the end of the escape route.

And remarkably, right away, Moses finds another opportunity to save someone: this time, it was the daughters of a local priest who were being pushed around by some thug shepherds.

These were obviously not related to those kind, godly shepherds who, centuries later, "watched their flocks by night" outside of Bethlehem and came to see Jesus.

But just the same, they provided Moses' third attempt at saving people, and this attempt was so successful that these people, who were not at all his people, wound up becoming his people. Moses' act of heroism endeared him to these locals, who then received him: they took him in, and eventually made him a part of the family through marriage.

And Moses accepts his new wilderness life, to the point of eventually naming his first-born son "Gershom," which means something along the lines of "a foreigner here."

Centuries later, Stephen (in the book of Acts) tells us that Moses lived in Midian for 40 years where he was working as a shepherd for the household of his father-in-law, Reuel – which means he lived roughly the same amount of time in the wilderness as he had lived in Egypt.

So, just think of that. Think of the dramatic change in Moses' life. He went from being a young, strong, powerful, rich, adopted "son of the King of Egypt" to being some back-woods, back-water, wilderness watcher of sheep.

A man in line to marry one of the most exotic, Cleopatra-type women of Egypt now finds himself married to a simple shepherdess.

A man with ties to two great peoples, two cultures – one them the greatest of the then-world, he is now living as a stranger in a strange land.

In the quiet solitude of his work in the wilderness, I wonder if Moses ever thought about all this: how he got there and why his life worked out as it had.

Was he saved by his mother and by Pharaoh's daughter for this?

Moses' life's twists and turns were not what most would have chosen.

Surely, they were more than some could endure.

But, you see, it was the way – apparently the only way – God could refine Moses' character so that He could use him.

You wonder why God allows certain things in our lives?

To refine us. To develop us.

Forty years in the wilderness, being who you never thought you'd be and doing what you never thought you'd do...Moses probably made fun of shepherds back in Egypt. Now he was one.

And evidently, it was all necessary to turn a young Egyptian prince into the old Midianite shepherd that God could actually do something with. Because even though Moses already had received in Egypt lots of schooling and training, he still needed something else – something more. Moses needed God's school of humility in order to be useful to God.

In order to really succeed, Moses still needed meekness.

Not *weakness*.

Meekness. And for some people – for most of us, really – that characteristic is, unfortunately, only learned through hardship and failure and suffering and loss.

And yet, notice how, in God's school of meekness, Moses' personality is not destroyed.

The very trait of Moses that forced him to leave Egypt is the same one that endeared him to the Midianites and found him a home, a wife and a life there with them.

You see, God's school of meekness does not destroy personality.

On the contrary, God uses our personalities, but only after they're purified – after they're cleansed of that self-serving spirit and arrogance with which we are born.

That drive for justice within Moses had to be tempered with wisdom and patience in order to be effective for God's purposes.

That's "why the wilderness" for him.

That's "why the wilderness" for us at times too. The wilderness is what brings us to our turning point.

It was 40 years in coming for Moses, and when it arrived, it was certainly the last thing he expected to happen on that day – which is so like God, when you think about it.

So often, God shows up, not when we expect Him or while we're waiting for Him, but instead He appears in the middle of a normal day – and often a "less-than-normal" day, perhaps a frustrating day. This was probably the case here, since Moses seems to have had to

take his flocks well beyond the normal grazing lands – to the “far side,” verse 1 says, of the wilderness.

God arrives, not even in just the wilderness, but in the wildest part of the wilderness.

Physically speaking, it was a bush that caught Moses’ attention. A bush far off the beaten path. A bush that was burning, but not burning up.

That’s what drew Moses in—as it would have drawn nearly any of us in.

But what *kept* Moses in were God’s words from the bush.

God’s never about just impressing people with pyrotechnics.

Wherever God brings something remarkable, God also always brings a word. And it was what He was saying that *kept* Moses engaged, because it was all about the need for Israel to be redeemed, for justice to be done, for relief for their suffering. And, you see, all that resonated so very strongly with Moses.

His sense of justice – of feeling the hurt of other people and wanting to see the right prevail – was all inside of Moses – still! I think that’s why God’s words intrigued him.

Verse 7 there, *“The Lord said, ‘I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers.’”*

This word for “crying” here is the strongest Hebrew word possible for this idea. It is closer to our English word “scream” than anything else. That’s how intense it was.

God says, *“I have heard them ‘screaming’ out...and I’m concerned about their suffering. So, I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land and into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey...”*

And Moses is saying, “Yes, yes!” He’s cheering all this on, because God, now, is going to do what Moses himself tried to do all those years ago. And Moses is thrilled at the prospect of *watching* God do all this for Israel.

But then God says, *“Oh no, Moses. I’m not telling you this so you can watch from the wilderness. I’m telling you this because you’re the one who is going to go to Pharaoh and bring my people out of Egypt.”*

“You’re the one to do it.”

Let me say – because of my role here, persons will, from time to time, come to me and say, “You know, I’ve been thinking that the *church* really *ought to do* – this or that or the other.” You can fill in the blank with 100 different things.

The church ought to be more involved in helping the poor.

The church ought to do more evangelism.

The church ought to have more outreach to children.

The church ought to be more cross-culturally engaged.

And on and on...

And when I totally agree with their sentiment, the person who brought the idea is typically very happy – until I then say, “So, tell me – how, specifically, do you want to be involved in leading that?”

Well, as soon as I go there, more often than not, the conversation starts moving backward, and all these excuses start coming – just as they began to come from Moses here.

God: “Israel needs deliverance!”

Moses: “Absolutely!”

God: “I’m glad you agree, because I want you to head that up!”

Moses: “Oh! But uh – OK – um – wait – I can’t do that – because, um...”

Vic Hamilton says there were five excuses Moses gave as to why he couldn’t – all of which, by the way, are still widely used today:

1) Inadequacy: “I’m not really important enough to do this.”

2) Ignorance: “The people to whom you’re sending me won’t recognize you as God.”

3) Unbelief: “No one will believe what I say.”

4) Inability: “That’s not really my gift.”

5) Insubordination: “I just won’t – you’ll have to send someone else.”¹

Those were all tried by Moses, and God speaks to them all. Notice the immense patience God exercises as He does. The length of the dialog between them about this “opportunity” is as long as all that precedes it in the book.

God is obviously very *patiently* and *caringly* and *thoroughly* answering all Moses’ objections.

Why does He do that? Why is that important?

John Oswalt says it’s all to show Moses (and us) how dramatically different the character of this God is compared to all the gods (small “g”) of Moses’ day.

You see, our God is not a tyrant who shouts, “Just do it or die!”

Our God is not a dictator who says, “You don’t need to know anything – just do what I tell you.”

Neither does our God simply possess His people to their diminishment or even their eradication. God does not just take over who we are.”²

No, amazingly, our God invites His people into a dialogue with Him – a conversation, a partnership.

He invites anyone who will to, *“Taste and see that He is good.”*³

He says to us, as He said to Malachi the prophet, *“Go ahead, put me to the test.”*⁴

And if we will taste and test and engage, then God will welcome us into a joint venture with Him in order to accomplish His purpose.

¹ Hamilton, Victor. *Handbook on the Pentateuch*. Baker, 143

² Oswalt, John. *Cornerstone Commentary*. “Exodus.” Tyndale, 307

³ Psalm 34:8

⁴ Malachi 3:10

Now, we know, of course, who the stronger partner of the venture is. But still, the fact is absolutely remarkable: God works *with us*.

Often, He uses the natural abilities and gifts that His people possess – since He gave them to us in the first place.

Yet at other times, He gives His people, or maybe uncovers within them, *special abilities*, all to fulfill His purposes – all for the sake of His glory in the world.

You actually see God doing both of those things in Moses: God used Moses' temperament and also gave him special abilities for the task.

But for any of it to happen, Moses had to say "yes" to the opportunity there at the bush, which was, without a doubt, the key turning point of his life.

And see, it arrived after a long series, a long season, of disappointments.

After many failures and rejections.

After he assumed his life course was set.

On a crummy day on the backside of nowhere.

At a completely unexpected moment.

It spoke to some of his deepest convictions, and yet it seemed to be far outside his natural abilities.

But somehow it promised to use all he had experienced for God's glory.

No human could have pieced that puzzle together!

I mean, what better training and preparation could there have been for leading a stubborn, clueless nation through the wilderness for 40 years than practicing for 40 years on sheep?

You see, after years of frustration, disappointment and obscurity:

there comes an encounter,
that became a conversation,
that became a proposal,
that became a turning point,
that would change the world.

What would Moses do?

Well, we know what Moses did.

The better question is, what will *we* do when God's burning bush appears to us?

Have you seen one?

Maybe in days past.

Maybe one day soon.

Maybe one is burning before your eyes right now.

But you've had failures in the past, so you're trying the routes of Inadequacy, Ignorance, Unbelief, Inability and maybe even the Insubordination route, because your life isn't what you thought it would be.

But maybe your life is exactly what God needed it to be, for what He has for you to do today.

Is God setting a turning point before you?

If He is, will you say "yes" to his partnership?

Just as with Moses, He will go with you.

His Spirit will guide and empower you.

He'll help you fly.

Closing Prayer:

Jesus, you have so much that you want to do in our world in these days. I have to believe that there are many here in this room today who are experiencing burning bush moments. You're trying to get our attention; you're laying before us an opportunity; you're presenting us with potential turning points so that we might fly with you, even as broken as we are.

Lord, turn our attention from the crumminess of the wilderness to the burning bush of opportunity you have for us – and help us take the turn we need to take with you.

Closing Song: *Jesus Calls Us*

Benediction:

God took Peter, James and John and turned those fishermen into fishers of men.

Time and again He turned shepherds of sheep like David, Amos and Moses into shepherds of peoples – shepherds of nations!

All because they recognized the turning point God set before them.

Let's watch for the bush God is burning for us – and see it for the turning point that it is.