

Natalie W. Bell  
 Sept 3, 2023

***Excuses, Excuses***  
***Exodus 3:1-15***

*Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness and came to Mount Horeb,<sup>[a]</sup> the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup> There the **angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame** of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. <sup>3</sup> Then Moses said, “**I must turn aside and look** at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up.” <sup>4</sup> When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “**Here I am.**” <sup>5</sup> Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is **holy ground.**” <sup>6</sup> He said further, “**I am the God** of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was **afraid to look at God.***

*<sup>7</sup> Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, <sup>8</sup> and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>9</sup> The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. <sup>10</sup> Now go, **I am sending you** to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” <sup>11</sup> But Moses said to God, “**Who am I** that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” <sup>12</sup> He said, “I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”*

*<sup>13</sup> But Moses said to God, “**If I come** to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ **what shall I say to them?**” <sup>14</sup> God said to Moses, “I am who I am.”<sup>[b]</sup> He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I am has sent me to you. God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord,<sup>[c]</sup> the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’: This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.*

***Instead of just being in AWE*** of God and this burning bush,  
 and the call to remove his shoes on such holy ground....  
 Moses has a lot of ***excuses!***

God is calling him, and he says, *No, I don't think so.*

***Do you have a favorite excuse, when you don't want to do something?***

Here are some *top 5 excuses*:

1. I forgot.
2. No one told me to do it.
3. I don't know how to do it.
4. That's the way we've always done it.

And my all time favorite:

5. That's not my job.

Sometimes excuses are just plain *funny*.

Listen to some of these bizarre excuses for car accidents, given to insurance companies:

- The telephone pole was approaching. I was attempting to swerve out of its way when it struck my front end.
- I collided with a stationary truck coming the other way.
- Leaving home for work I drove out of my drive and straight into a bus; the bus was five minutes early.
- I was knocked out as a result of the collision and was taken to hospital where I sustained serious injuries.
- I don't know who was to blame for the accident; I wasn't looking.
- The guy was all over the road. I had to swerve a number of times before I hit him."

<https://www.insurancebusinessmag.com/us/news/breaking-news/far-out-friday-19-of-the-funniest-auto-insurance-claims-reports-36201.aspx>

***Moses*** had a lot of excuses for God.

In this passage we hear him say,

***Who am I to do this?***

Later, in chapter 4, he says:

***What could I possibly say to Pharaoh?*** —I have a speech impediment!

Then it's:

***What if he doesn't listen?***

And then finally, his most direct excuse:

***I'm not your man. Send someone else***

Basically Moses tells God that he is  
*inadequate, insufficient, weak, and lacking in faith!*

*Why does Moses act like this?*

Well, maybe it's that he's just human.  
He doesn't feel qualified, he's scared,  
But maybe he was also just afraid to leave his comfort zone.  
Moses had made a *life* for himself.  
Not what he expected, but something decent.

This is the man who as a Hebrew baby, was hidden in a basket in the Nile River,  
taken in by Pharaoh's daughter, and raised as royalty.  
But one day he *killed an Egyptian* who was abusing an Israelite.  
He ran away to Midian,  
And started a new life as a shepherd for his father-in-law Jethro.

He had *no intention of going back* to Egypt,  
or helping his people out of slavery.  
He had his *own family, his own life, his own work*.  
He had what we all have—*a comfort zone*.  
And, like us, he wanted to stay there.  
But *God had other plans*.

In fact, God has a rebuttal for every excuse Moses offers!  
Moses says *who am I to go*, and God says I am the one sending you and I will be  
with you.

Moses says *what will I say*,  
And God says you'll tell him that I sent you—the I AM—the God of Abraham,  
Isaac, and Jacob.

When Moses says *what if he refuses*,  
God shows him in chapter 4 how his own hand and staff can be transformed before  
his very eyes, and this power will influence Pharaoh.

When Moses says *he cannot speak well*,  
God says I will give you the words. I made your mouth for Pete's sake!

When Moses says *send someone else*, God gets mad.  
He agrees to let Aaron go with Moses to speak for him,

but he basically tells Moses, “*you’re going*”.

And we know the rest of the story—

Moses *does go, and he pleads for his people.*

He performs signs and wonders,

And he leads the people out of Egypt and through the Red Sea,  
and then through the wilderness for forty years.

He ends up an amazing leader!

He is the one who goes up Mt. Sinai and receives the 10 commandments.

He listens to and advises the people,

and puts up with them when they have their own excuses!

Moses *had talent he didn’t even know* was in him.

But, he starts with all kinds of excuses when God calls him.

I wonder, can *YOU relate?*

When was the last time *you were asked* to step outside your comfort zone,

When have you *felt inadequate?*

When have you had *excuses for God?*

Can you think of a time when you were asked to do something new...  
and you knew it was God asking?

Have you *ever told God—to send someone else?*

I think we *all have!*

Sometimes we just *ignore* the call, or pretend we don’t see the burning bush!

God says look, you are on holy ground, and we *turn the other way!*

Other times, just like Moses, *we have excuses!*

We say...

*I can’t make that presentation!*

*I can’t care for this family member!*

*I can’t lead this group at church!*

*I can’t do what you’re asking God—so please, ask someone else.*

And I wonder just how much of this comes from our fear *of the unknown.*

Daniel Gilbert (a psychology professor at Harvard) has written about anxiety and depression in America.

He believes that it can be traced to *uncertainty, and an unknown future.*

He points to a Dutch experiment where some subjects were told they would be intensely shocked 20 times in a row. The researchers told a second group that they would receive three strong shocks and 17 mild ones, but they wouldn't know when the intense shocks would come.

The results? Subjects in the second group sweated more and experienced faster heart rates. ***Uncertainty caused their discomfort***: they didn't know when the shocks would come next.

Daniel Gilbert, "What You Don't Know Makes You Nervous," (9-21-09).

So what do we do with all our anxiety about the unknown?

One pastor says we should ***EMBRACE it***.

Mark Batterson, who wrote *All In*, says:

***Faith*** is embracing the uncertainties of life. ...

It is recognizing a divine appointment when you see one.

Embrace ***relational*** uncertainty. It's called romance.

Embrace ***spiritual*** uncertainty. It's called mystery.

Embrace ***occupational*** uncertainty. It's called destiny.

Embrace ***intellectual*** uncertainty. It's called revelation.

Mark Batterson, *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day* (Multnomah, 2006), pp. 88-89

Could there be some ***truth*** in that?

***What if God is asking us to embrace the uncertainty of life?***

Trappist Monk ***Thomas Merton wrote a famous prayer about this:***

*My Lord God, I have **no idea where** I am going. I **do not see** the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end.*

*Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.*

*But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.*

*And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.*

*I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.*

*And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the **right road**, though I may know nothing about it.*

*Therefore, **I will trust you** always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.*

*I will not fear, **for you are ever with me**,*

*and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.*

Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), p. 79;

*Embracing the uncertainty* in life takes courage.  
 Getting past *excuses* takes courage.  
 And sometimes we just start building that courage *little by little*.

Author Maya Angelou was once asked about the most important lesson she learned from her mother. *She said: courage. And she taught me by being courageous herself. I realized that one isn't born with courage. One develops it. And you develop it by doing small, courageous things, in the same way that one wouldn't set out to pick up 100 pound bag of rice. If that was one's aim, the person would be advised to pick up a five pound bag, and then a ten pound, and then a 20 pound, and so forth, until one builds up enough muscle to actually pick up 100 pounds. And that's the same way with courage. You develop courage by doing courageous things, small things.....*  
 HBR IdeaCast, "Maya Angelou on Courage and Creativity," Harvard Business Review (5-29-13)

Remember the *20 seconds of insane courage* I told you about, a few weeks ago? The 2011 film *We Bought a Zoo* was based on the true story of a British man named Benjamin Mee.  
 Mee admitted, *"There were lots of times when I thought, What have I done?"*  
 In the film version, Mee (played by Matt Damon), says,  
*"Sometimes all you need is twenty seconds of insane courage. Just literally twenty seconds of embarrassing bravery. And I promise you, something great will come of it."*

I think that Maya Angelou, and Benjamin Mee have a lot of *wisdom*.  
 And aren't we all asked to do things that require *courage*?  
 And, when we heed the call of God—  
 something *great does come from it!*

Look at what a leader Moses was for the people of God!  
 Who knew? A criminal—a shepherd—a man who stuttered.  
 And he became a great *leader*—who saved countless lives!

Truth is, it's not about trusting what *WE* can do,  
 it's about trusting what *GOD* will do.  
*Ephesians 3:20* says this "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us"  
*Romans 8:31* says "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

What is God asking *YOU to do* in your life right now?

Just think through everything *going on in your life*.

Has someone approached you with an opportunity or a request?

Have you felt a nudge in prayer or silence?

Do you know in your heart that you're called, but you have *lots of excuses*?

Then think about *Moses*.

Full of *self doubt, fear, and a sense of inadequacy*.

Others like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Gideon doubted their calls too!

But God deals patiently with all of us, *until we agree* to do what is asked.

When we do follow the call of God,

we are following our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

Who said, "*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and **take up their cross and follow me**. 25 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*"

Following Jesus is not easy—but it is the path *to life and meaning, and joy*.

I like what Presbyterian Pastor Frederick *Beuchner* had to say about this in his book *Peculiar Treasures*:

*Nobody ever claimed it was going to be easy, least of all Jesus, who continually said to **take up our crosses and follow him**, not just our picnic baskets and tickets to Disneyland. A lot of barnacles are going to have to be scraped off and a lot of horse manure shoveled out and a lot of rooms stripped bare and redecorated before the final product emerges bright as a new penny, to mix a metaphor or two.* "Yahweh," Frederick Buechner, *Peculiar Treasures*.

Friends, hear the *Good News* of the Gospel today

You and I are being called by God to different opportunities, different tasks.

It's usually something challenging.

And we may have *excuses* for why we *CAN'T* do it.

But *God* knows all the reasons we *CAN*.

And God knows that when we step out in courage, something *great* will come of it.

For those who *lose* their lives for Christ, will actually *find* them.

For the courage to follow God's call, all God's people say together, Amen.