

INTRODUCTION

Teaching people a new skill can be challenging. More than likely, it is easier to complete the task by yourself than to spend time to train another person to do it. A teacher needs patience to wait for the student to acquire the skill. He also needs wisdom to inspire the trainee. What if your student is a three-year-old kid? Many parents can identify with the following scenario. You are busy with some house work. Your little child comes to you with excitement, saying: “I want to help!” You know what kind of help she can contribute. Once I was folding laundry. My older son wanted to share my burden. He may be about three at that time. Alright. I showed him how to do it. He did a few shirts, then ran away with satisfaction that he did a good job. Of course, I had to redo everything. I grumbled in my heart: “I may as well do it myself than to teach you to do it.” Then tears rolled down my cheek. I realized that I was like a three-year-old kid in God’s eyes. I think that I can make an impact to the world. But all I do is in fact messing up some clean laundry. Therefore, here is a key question: why does God ask us to participate in His work when He can do it perfectly all by Himself? Even the angels can do a much better job than us humans! Let us find out the answer when we continue to study the life of Moses. Forty years had passed from chapter 2 to chapter 3 of the Exodus. Moses was tending sheep, starrng at the wilderness while wondering if that was what life was all about. Now he was eighty-year-old. In today’s world, some people at that age will be playing golf, having coffee with their friends or baby-sitting their grand-children. There is nothing wrong with all those activities. But in God’s plan, Moses was about to embark on a new journey. We shall see in Moses’ experience that when God sends us to do something He will give us the means to complete it.

EXPLANATION

1. God’s Invitation 神的邀請

God invited Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses was at Mount Horeb. Another name for the place is Mount Sinai. Later in chapter 20 God presented the Ten Commandments to Moses on the same mountain. Here God revealed Himself in a burning bush. In verse 2 we find the name “the angel of the Lord.” This title is used 67 times in the Old Testament. Bible scholars commonly agree that this angel could be Jesus Christ showing up in the Old Testament era. A hint can be found in verse 4 when the author used “God” to identify this messenger. The fire did not consumer the plants. Moses went over there to check out the miraculous scene. In **Verse 5** a voice emerged from the fire: “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” The presence of God sanctified the place. Therefore, He ordered Moses to take his shoes off to show respect. When Moses knew that it was God, he quickly hid his face out of fear. God told Moses that He saw the suffering of His people and He heard their mourning. He was about to deliver them. Let us look at **verse 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.” God would fulfill His promise to Abraham to settle the Israelites in the land of Canaan. The description of “a land flowing with

milk and honey” pictures God’s provision of abundant blessings. Leaving Egypt was a great news. Here comes God’s invitation to Moses in **verse 10**: “So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.” We can guess Moses’ reaction without reading the next verse. He replied: “You must be kidding! Who am I? How I can go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out?” After 40 years Moses finally got it! He could no longer rely on his little human wisdom and physical strength. Listen to God’s encouragement in **verse 12**: And 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.” Moses had to go to his people and meet with Pharaoh, but God would be with him. Moses did not need any other words of comfort. God said that after the Israelites left Egypt they would worship Him on the same mountain. Therefore, the goal was not just to free God’s people. But it was to free them so that they could worship God. In the Bible, God reminded other servants with the same message: “I will be with you.” Jesus gave His disciples the great commandment in **Matthew 28:19-20**: 19 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” The disciples would soon build the very first Christian church. They would encounter opposition from the Jews and the Romans. It was a monumental task. But God would be with them. God will be with whomever He invites to serve Him. Once a seminary student in my previous church shared that he felt the presence of the Holy Spirit as he was preparing a Sunday sermon. I echoed in my heart: “I felt that every single week!” It is true that the more experience I have the shorter the time I will need to prepare a sermon. But it is not unusual for me to come to a bottleneck situation where I feel like I run out of things to say. It happened just last week when I had a more hectic schedule. Without exception, the Holy Spirit comes to my rescue every time. Otherwise, I may not even show up on Sunday because my sermon is not done! The same self-recognition of insufficiency applies to other areas of my ministries too. I told you before that I am a shy guy. I often need a little push from God to speak in front of people, visit someone or even chat with new-comers. If I can do something despite my lack of ability and confidence, then it must be God who works in and through me. Brothers and sisters: we are never alone when we do God’s work. When God invites you to serve Him, He will be with you!

2. God’s Introduction 神的自稱

God invited Moses to complete a huge task. Next up, God introduced Himself to Moses. **Verse 13** reads: 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?” There were a few reasons why Moses asked for God’s name. First, God seemed to be silent in the previous 400 years since the Israelites became slaves. Some parents might tell their children about God. Perhaps about God’s creation or the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But after all those years the God their ancestors worshipped might become a foreign subject. Also, the Egyptians worshipped many gods. When Moses told his people that God sent him, a reasonable question to ask would be: “Which god?” In a culture where people worshipped different deities they called on the name of the god to whom they paid tribute and prayed. It is the same in the traditional Chinese culture. Some people put a little shrine by the door for the “entrance god” and a separate idol in the living room for the money god and so forth. They want to make sure which deity they are calling upon. People may not want to get another son when they are asking for

money! Then fourthly, in the Bible time a person's name reveals his characters. The name Abraham means the father of many. God intended to bless Abraham with descendants of many generations. Isaac means laughter. When God told Sarah that she would bear a son, she giggled with disbelief. When Isaac was finally born Sarah went ahead and named her son "laughter." How did God introduce Himself to Moses? Look at **verse 14**: God 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.'" This name "I Am" can be understood as "I cause to be." God is the ultimate being who causes everything to come into existence, and He continues to let things happen according to His will. In the Chinese Union Version Bible, the name "I am" carries a double-meanings of "self-existence" and "forever exists." Our God is the Creator of all things. He does not rely on any outside factor to exist. We need air, water and food to survive, but God does not need those resources. We go to school to acquire knowledge, but God knows everything. After He created all things, God continues to sustain everything by His power. By using "I Am" and not "I was" or "I will be" it points out that in God there is no past or future. God is timeless and to Him everything is present. God's characters tie in to His work. The "I Am" did not only know the suffering of His people, He was about to save them. How do you address God? What comes to your mind when you think of Him? The general name "God" leads us to think of Him as a supernatural being. We humble before Him because He is full of power. Besides, we often call God our Heavenly Father when we pray. He loves us like a father treats his children. He is full of grace and mercy. Then when we say that God is our Lord we admit that He is our Master and we are His servants. We submit to His will and plans for us. There are some other titles for God in the Bible. For example, in the gospel of John, Jesus made a few "I Am" statements. Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd." We can picture a gentle shepherd who cares for his sheep and leads them to the right path. Jesus also said: "I am the light of the world." He shines light in the darkness and we are His children of light. Then Jesus said: "I am the living water." He will quench the spiritual thirst inside us. When we pray we should not treat God as a customer service agent who helps resolve our problems. Instead, we should think of Him as a rational and personal being who does not only supply for our needs, but He also desires to build an intimate relationship with us. The same God who delivered the Israelites out of Egypt also wanted His people to know Him and love Him.

3. God's Intervention 神的介入

God invited Moses to participate in His plan. He asked Moses to introduce Him as the "I Am" to His people. Thirdly, God was about to intervene into human history to release His people from the land of slavery. In **verse 18** God told Moses what to say to Pharaoh specifically: ... 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God.' Was God asking Moses to lie to Pharaoh? The Israelites were not going to walk a three-day trip to the wilderness to worship God. They would leave and never returned! In the Eastern culture people presented their requests indirectly rather than being straightforward. Sometimes we use the same technique in our everyday conversation. Instead of asking someone to lend you \$20, you say: "Hey, do you have any money in your wallet?" Therefore, the implicit message for Pharaoh was that the Israelites were leaving to serve another God. Why should Pharaoh honor such a bold request? The Bible tells us that there were 600,000 Jewish men. Pharaoh would never allow this large group of slaves to go freely. God foretold Moses how Pharaoh would respond and how God would intervene. **Verses 19-20** say: 19 "But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. 20 So I will

stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.” In the Chinese Union Version, verse 19 seems to indicate that even when God struck the king with His mighty hand he would not budge. The way NIV renders this verse is closer to the meaning of the Hebrew text. God would eventually unleash His power in Egypt. In the subsequent chapters we will see the ten plagues. The evidence was so clear that Pharaoh and his counsels could not deny that the Hebrew God was on the side of the Israelites. At that time Egypt was the international super power. It had a strong army and many chariots. Without weapon or military training, it was impossible for a group of slaves to fight against the Egyptians. But fear not! God would intervene and defeat their enemies. The spiritual principle is simple. Zero plus zero is still nothing. Moses together with 600,000 untrained Jewish men amounted to nothing. However, one Moses plus the infinite God equals to infinity. We see similar examples in the Bible. When David fought with Goliath, he understood that God was with him. He told the giant in [1 Samuel 17:45](#): ... “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.” God intervened; David and the Israelites won the battle. In 2 Kings chapters 18 and 19 Judah was surrounded by the Assyrian army. The commander made an outrageous speech to ridicule the name of God. King Hezekiah humbly plead before God for help. God condemned the Assyrian king through prophet Isaiah in [19:22](#) – “Who is it you have insulted and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes in pride? Against the Holy One of Israel!” When God’s glory is at stake He will intervene. What was the outcome? Hezekiah did not need to send one soldier to the battlefield. In one night, God completely eradicated the Assyrian troop of 185,000 men. What issues are you facing now? A God-size problem requires a God-size solution. The past few years I ran into huge challenges in my ministries. I saw the ugliness of sins that I had never encountered before. There were distrust and broken relationship. I cried out to the Lord for help. He intervened. Some people commented: “You have 10 years of pastoral experience and you speak 3 languages. You can easily find a place to serve.” But in my heart, I only wanted to go where God would lead me to. After my first visit to this church my wife questioned: “Are you sure you want to go to Memphis?” I did not know how to explain it. Perhaps it was your warm welcome, or something you put in the food. It was almost a love at first sight experience. I am grateful to the Lord for the privilege to serve among you. You may be facing other challenges. Don’t just pray for an answer. Pray also for God’s intervention and pray for spiritual discernment to experience God’s faithfulness. As you look back there is no other explanation but it is God’s hand working through your situation.

CONCLUSION

When God sends us to do something He will give us the means to complete it. Why did God call Moses? Why did God call us? He does not need us because more than likely we will mess up His plans. It is not for God’s sake but for our sake that He calls us. Serving the Lord is our privilege. God wants us to know Him more. He is delighted to see us grow. In the process, God allows us to witness His glory. What is God calling you to do now? It may not be as big as going out of Egypt. Perhaps God is asking you to take up a new ministry or share the gospel with someone. No matter what it is, commit yourself to Him, and patiently wait for the display of His mighty power. You get the credit for your hard work, but God gets all the glory.