

God can use you...despite your shortcomings

Once upon a time there was a little river that said, "I can become a big river." So it started making its way through the land. It came to a **huge rock** in its path but it stood firm

"I won't let some big dumb rock stop me." It said, pushing right around the rock. Then it came **across a mountain**. But again, it gathered itself up and pushed a canyon through that mountain. Then it came to a **forest**...but if stone couldn't stop it, what was some wood and dirt? It pushed its way through the forest, as well.

Then it came upon a **desert**. And pushing hard, it flowed into the desert and the hot, dry sand soaked it up until all that was left were a **few little puddles**.

If you were here a few weeks ago, you were here to share in a **re-examining of the story of David and Goliath** and saw how David's **trust in God, his willingness to use the tools God had given him and his willingness to do what was right when nobody else would** were key in his victory over a **seemingly insurmountable foe**.

I was priming the pump for this series, as it were. **One of the more neglected aspects of the Christian life is ministry**. I don't mean being ministered to—like you are now here in church—I mean **being ministers**.

Maybe you know this, maybe not, but the sort of unwritten motto that myself and the other staff here at Legacy go by is that we're not here just to do ministry but **we're here to train you to do ministry**.

John 15:15-17

15 I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. 16 You didn't choose me. I chose you. **I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other.**

Also:

1 Cor 12: 4-7

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.

The Bible is full of these types of commands...so what gives? **Why are we so bad at actually doing this for others?**

There's probably **something to be said** for **selfishness, laziness** and the simple truth that **some Christians refuse to let God change their hearts** to be loving and compassionate for others. But those things are pretty self-explanatory and I have a feeling that **if a person has ignored God's call to love others for this long, I'm not going to convince them in 20 minutes.**

But I think there may be another force at work here: **a feeling of inadequacy.**

There are a lot of different **reasons** for this: **fear; lack of self-confidence; lack of faith; past failures, etc.** But in the end I think it rings true that a lot of Christians—a lot of you—**stay away from doing ministry because you don't feel like you can do it.**

Well you're not alone. In fact the Bible is littered with people who thought they simply couldn't do the task God had set before them. So today we're going to look at one of them and hopefully address some of the fears that might be creeping up in your heart like they did in his.

If you have your Bibles, turn to Exodus chapter 3. We're going to look at the story of Moses. **Now at this point in his life,** Moses is an adult and has fled Egypt after murdering a guard because the guard was abusive towards a Hebrew slave.

While in the desert tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, he comes across a **bush that is on fire, but not being burnt up.** Moses assumes this is not normal and investigates. **Turns out he's right about the bush being odd. He soon finds that God was hanging out there.**

God then tells Moses he will go to the most powerful king of the day and tell him to let his thousands of Hebrew slaves go for a few days in order to let them worship. **Moses is understandably doubtful** that he has even the tiniest chance of succeeding and proceeds to **argue about it...which is always a good idea when it comes to God.** And this is where we pick up.

3:13 But Moses protested, “If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ they will ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what should I tell them?”

Here is the first of Moses’ objections. It’s a little unclear what his problem but look closer. What is he questioning? **He’s questioning God’s legitimacy**—which seems a little odd considering the burning bush and disembodied voice, but hey... the heart of the matter remains the same:

Moses doubted God

This is a tricky one because **you and I deal with this more often than we might think. We rationalize it away and think up really good reasons** why this or that is impossible, but in the end, **we’re letting other things overrule what God has said.**

God has said that we are **all gifted**, that we **have a purpose** and that he wants us to **go out and love the world**, representing him with our talents and gifts. **So why don’t we?**

For some of us, deep down, **we doubt that it’s true.** Maybe we’ve been **abandoned** by people or **felt abandoned by God** in the past. Maybe we just **don’t have enough faith** to risk failure, but **in our hearts we think that when the chips are down, God won’t come through.**

The cool thing about all the doubts Moses poses to God is that **God responds to each of them** rather than just moving on to someone else. **The deep truth here is that God chose Moses for this task**, and wasn’t going to choose someone else.

God has chosen YOU in a similar way to fulfill a task here and now. And when you doubt him, here are his words to Moses...and maybe to you.

God proved who he was—3:14-18a

God replied to Moses, “I Am Who I Am. Say this to the people of Israel: I Am has sent me to you.” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: Yahweh, 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 eternal name, my name to remember for all generations.

So God proves he the real deal and that he will hold true by **appealing to the fact that he is honoring a covenant made long ago**. How does that apply to us now when we doubt God?

John 14:12-14 “I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do **the same works I have done, and even greater works**, because I am going to be with the Father. You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father. Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it!

I wouldn't go so far as to call this a covenant, **but Jesus never said anything lightly**—at least not in what's recorded in the gospels.

You **will be able to perform the tasks God has for you**...and he will be there. But perhaps that's not your hang up...or not your only hang up. Don't worry, you're still in good company, let's look at Exodus again.

4:1 **But Moses protested again, “What if they won't believe me or listen to me? What if they say, ‘The Lord never appeared to you’?”**

So Moses is apparently assured that God is God, but now he has a new problem.

Moses doubted his audience

Moses says, **“Hey God...I trust you, but those people won't. They won't buy it. They'll think I'm crazy.”** So what does God do? He gives him 'proof.'

God gave Moses tools to break through doubt—4:2-9

Then the Lord asked him, **“What is that in your hand?”**

“A shepherd's staff,” Moses replied.

“Throw it down on the ground,” the Lord told him. So Moses threw down the staff, and it turned into a snake! Moses jumped back.

Then the Lord told him, **“Reach out and grab its tail.”** So Moses reached out and grabbed it, and it turned back into a shepherd's staff in his hand.

“Perform this sign,” the Lord told him. **“Then they will believe that the Lord, the God of their ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—really has appeared to you.”**

Then the Lord said to Moses, **“Now put your hand inside your cloak.”** So Moses put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out again, his hand was white as snow with a severe skin disease. **“Now put your hand back into your cloak,”** the Lord said. So Moses put his hand back in, and when he took it out again, it was as healthy as the rest of his body.

The Lord said to Moses, “If they do not believe you and are not convinced by the first miraculous sign, they will be convinced by the second sign. 9 And if they don’t believe you or listen to you even after these two signs, then take some water from the Nile River and pour it out on the dry ground. When you do, the water from the Nile will turn to blood on the ground.”

God gives Moses **the tools** to prove that he’s sent by who he says he’s sent by. Later in Exodus, Moses travels to the elders of Israel and they believe because of these signs.

I know what you’re thinking: **“That’s great, Pete...but I can’t hardly get the right sugar to water ratio correct in my Kool-Aid, so how am I going to turn a staff into a snake or water into blood?”**

Well, **we live in different times and that calls for a different sign,**

John 13:34-35 **So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”**

How easy is that? **No staff to snake magic. No need to contract leprosy for a few seconds. Just love each other.** If you don’t think people will believe that God is God; if you’re stumbling over the fear of rejection, then **God has a simple way to convince them: love.**

This is one of the reasons I think the world has such a hard time recognizing that us Christians are actually followers of Jesus. The majority of non-Christians in today’s world think Jesus was amazing...and think Christians are complete idiots—**because we don’t show love. We don’t minister to them enough. And when we do, it’s usually in all the wrong ways.**

Just like Moses, we fear our words will go unheeded. **But it’s not our job to convince them to believe**—the Bible never says “make people follow God.” **It’s only our job to introduce them to God, and then let him “wow” them. And the best way to do that is to love them.**

But maybe you say, **“I got it...trust God, love people...I’m going to fail at this. I’m terrible at this stuff. I don’t know where to begin or what to do.”** Once again, Moses beat you to the punch.

4:10 But Moses pleaded with the LORD, “O Lord, I’m not very good with words. I never have been, and I’m not now, even though you have spoken to me. I get tongue-tied, and my words get tangled.”

Moses doubted himself

If I were to guess, I **would guess that this is the most common** reason people ignore the call to ministry and loving others. It’s not about God or others, it’s about themselves. **They think they can’t cut it. But God didn’t create us to fail.**

God reassured Moses that his gifts were right for this situation—4:11-12

Then the Lord asked Moses, “Who makes a person’s mouth? Who decides whether people speak or do not speak, hear or do not hear, see or do not see? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go! I will be with you as you speak, and I will instruct you in what to say.”

We’ve been **conditioned to think that we have nothing to offer anyone—** because we’re not **pretty, skinny, rich or famous**. So rather than face more rejection, we just don’t try.

“We have lost the simple but difficult gift of being present to each other, because we’ve been led to believe that our presence must be useful.” --Henri Nouwen

Now by “useful” he only means that **we have to have something besides ourselves to offer**. But much of the time, **the only thing people are looking for is someone willing to offer themselves**.

Hurting people **don’t need** beauty or money or power...they just need someone to be present in their life. **Someone present enough to show them they have value**.

Do you see the irony? When we minister to others in this way, **we empty ourselves—but not in the sense where we hate or castigate ourselves**. Instead we practice the true **essence of humility: we pay attention to others in such a deep way that they begin to see what value they have**.

And as we do this **we begin to see that we don’t need special talents** or money or **piles of Bible knowledge** to minister to others. **All we need is to give of ourselves**.

We CAN minister like Jesus. We DO have value in the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is built on relationships, and when a relationship is healthy, both sides of it benefit, grow and become better.

So if you don't think you're good enough to minister to others. **Remember that God doesn't create us to fail...and don't worry about giving people something amazing. Just give them what you have, and you'll both find something amazing in that.**

Now after all of that, maybe you can't explain it or see why...**but you're still not going anywhere near this ministry stuff because you just...can't...do it.** Moses feels your pain.

4:13 **But Moses again pleaded, "Lord, please! Send anyone else."**

Here we come to the root of Moses' protests. No excuses. No logical objections. Just plain fear. **Moses was scared**

And why not? He was **wanted for murder** in Egypt and was going to **give up his livelihood** and leave a place he had begun to call **home**. All on the off chance that a **bunch of slaves** would believe his story **about flaming shrubbery** and follow him to **protest against their masters** so they could go out into the **middle of nowhere** and have a worship service.

Not exactly the sort of thing **that inspires courage**. But what he didn't realize was that he was dealing with a God who does not give us a spirit of fear. **He was also dealing with a God who would come and experience fear first-hand when he came to earth as Jesus.**

God had an answer.

God gave him help and support—4:14-17 Then the Lord became angry with Moses. "All right," he said. "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he speaks well. And look! He is on his way to meet you now. He will be delighted to see you. Talk to him, and put the words in his mouth. I will be with both of you as you speak, and I will instruct you both in what to do. Aaron will be your spokesman to the people. He will be your mouthpiece, and you will stand in the place of God for him, telling him what to say. And take your shepherd's staff with you, and use it to perform the miraculous signs I have shown you."

Not only did God provide support, **he provided someone to take care of the one thing Moses knew he couldn't do: speak well.**

Maybe you're afraid. Maybe you can't explain it, but you just can't bring yourself to step out on god's behalf. **But God knows your fear, and he knows why you're afraid.**

And more importantly, **he knows what you need to overcome that fear.**

Remember the river that went through mountains and forests then dried up when it ran headlong into a desert? Well as it sat there scared and doubting itself and it's purpose, a voice spoke from the heavens.

"Let me lift you up and use you. Let my power work with what you can offer." So the river did and it evaporated, floated high into the clouds and drifted over that desert. On the other side of the desert the clouds flew over a huge valley.

The air cooled and that river became rain and poured onto the valley. And the river that only went so far alone...brought flourishing life to an entire valley.

Today as you leave I want you to **think on two things: First, where is your desert?**

Is it **doubting God?** Is it **fear of others?** Is it **doubting yourself?** Is it **just plain fear?**

None of those things are **insurmountable if you trust God.** God specializes in providing the right solutions to our problems.

The second thing is: **where's your valley? Where can you use what you have, combine it with God, and bring life?**

May you overcome your fears and doubts. May you find the true joy in joining God to help others. And may you be the rain that brings life to someone's life.