

10 Lessons From the Back of the Desert

“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.”

Exodus 3:1 (NKJV)

As I reflect on this season of Coronavirus COVID-19, the wildfires in California, Hurricanes off the Gulf Coast, the killing of unarmed Black people at the hands of police, poverty and homelessness, illiteracy, mass incarceration, femicide, and so much global unrest, I recognize that many people perceive themselves to be living in a wilderness. And truthfully, many afflicted by the turmoil of this world find themselves not just in the wilderness, not just in the desert, but in the back of the desert. And it's normal to, when in the back of the desert, ask, where is God?

The beauty is that according to the book of Exodus the mountain of God resides in the back of the desert. If you find yourself struggling in the back of a desert what you need to know is that there are 10 lessons to learn while there. Let's take a dive into Exodus chapters 3 and 4 and discover these 10 lessons.

Lesson #1: God Will Get Your Attention

In Exodus chapter 3:2 the Bible says, “the Angel of the Lord appeared to [Moses] in a flame of fire from the midst of the bush. So, he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but was not consumed.” As you read this I am certain that you know what it feels like to be in the desert. Many of us know what it feels like to be in a place where there's little sign of life, the environment feels unbearable, and God feels absent. But the end of verse 1 tells us that the mountain of God is in the back of the desert. So, no matter how much you believe you're alone, the truth is that the back of your desert is where God resides. And whenever you find yourself in the back of the desert know that God will get your attention. Right now, as you are in the back of your desert, how is God trying to get your attention? What in your life is on fire, but not being consumed?

Lesson #2: God Will Require Your Sanctification

Now, the moment God has your attention He will immediately require your sanctification. Verse 5 says, “Then [God] said, ‘Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’” This is a critical command. Oftentimes, we want to be in the presence of God, but don't consider the reverence requirements necessary to enter.

God tells Moses he has to take his shoes off because the ground is Holy. In your wilderness, where is the holiness of God? What has God asked you to do, to stop, to take off in reverence of His presence? We've got to understand that in the wilderness God is going to do whatever is necessary to get our attention and then He will require our sanctification.

Lesson #3: God Will Call You to a Mission

Once God got Moses' attention and Moses could discern that it was in fact God speaking He then surrendered to God allowing himself to be made holy. Then, God shares with Moses the mission He was calling him to in Exodus 3:7-10. In this moment we see that the Creator God is not a far off, disengaged Being. Instead He is one that is intimately acquainted with and concerned about the unjust treatment of humanity. So much so, that God declares that He has come down Himself to use His own hand to deliver the Israelites. The only caveat is He desires to accomplish this in partnership with Moses.

This is such a powerful truth because it in the back of our deserts, that God shares His heart with us. It's in the wilderness that God crosses space and time and inserts Himself onto the Earth seeking to partner with humanity for the liberation of people. The question is, have you stopped to give Him your attention? Have you allowed yourself to surrender to His holiness? Have you heard the heart of God and received the call on your life?

Lesson #4: God Will Read His Own Introduction

It's when we hear the heart of God that we come to know the character of God. But when Moses asks God what His name is, He says, "I AM WHO I AM." This is so powerful to me, because Moses has heard the heart of God, learned what is burdening Him, and now He has learned His name.

And when God says, "I AM WHO I AM" He is saying, I am the origin of all families, the seed of all heritage, the spark of all culture, the Father of every living thing. In me exists all things and without me nothing was made that was made. So that in God at all times is whatever you need. And we see God manifest this truth throughout the Exodus Story. In the back of your desert have you allowed God to introduce Himself to you?

Lesson #5: God Will Declare Your Recitation

In Exodus 3:16 God tells Moses to "gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob appeared to me, saying, I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt; and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.'"

In other words, God gave Moses the script. Not only did God share with Moses his mission, but He also told him exactly what to say. So many times, we worry and shrink back from what God has called us to do because we don't believe we know how to do it. But in the life of Moses we see that God won't just call you to a mission, but He will also equip you for it. What has God told you to do? And how did He tell you to do it?

Lesson #6: God's Liberation Promises Reparations

The title of this lesson alone may have caused you to tense up, but I want you to look with me in Exodus 3:21. The Bible says, "And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed." Here we see that God desires not just to use us to free people, but He also desires that we do it in such a way that they are economically, socially, and physically repaired from the oppression they lived through.

Ellen White in her potent article "Am I My Brother's Keeper?" published in the *Advent Review* and *Sabbath Herald* in 1896 begins saying, "The American nation owes a debt of love to the colored race, and God has ordained that they should make restitution for the wrong they have done them in the past. Those who have taken no part in enforcing slavery upon the colored people are not relieved from the responsibility of making special efforts to remove, as far as possible, the sure result of their enslavement."

If we were to be honest, oftentimes, our approaches to serving and saving people oppressed by various systems fails to do this. We must consider who are the people in our contemporary period in need of freedom? What does it look like for them to leave their oppressors emancipated and not empty-handed?

Lesson #7: God Will Show You Confirmation

The wilderness is a difficult place to be. And the back of the desert seems even more overwhelming. This is why whatever God shares with you in the back of the desert He confirms with you in the back of the desert. Chapter 4:1-9 God shows Moses a variety of signs and wonders to prove His power. He turns the rod into a snake, inflicts Moses' hand with leprosy, and declares that Moses will turn water into blood. In other words, God will confirm your calling and seal within your heart and mind His power so that you will know without a shadow of a doubt that this is what He's called you to.

Lesson #8: God Will Give You Affirmation

Now, oftentimes, even after the confirmation of our calling and the confirmation of God's power we still doubt, we remain insecure. We feel like what God is asking of us is far too much for us to take on. Immediately, we join in with Moses and begin sharing with God all of our short comings, inadequacies, deficiencies, along with every reason why He should have picked someone else. But I love how in our moments of insecurity God declares His confidence in Himself!

This reiterates that we are not doing anything we've been called to by God in our own strength. He says, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what to say." Here God is saying, your weaknesses, your inadequacies, your deficits are no match for My power! God is not looking for qualified people. He's looking for willing people. Any

willing heart can become qualified. Particularly when they have the power of God flowing through them.

Lesson #9: God Will Provide Collaboration

Technically, God's confirmation and affirmation should be enough for us to accept the call and walk in obedience. But some of us are like Moses and we require a little bit more. And according to Scripture our lack of faith does frustrate God. But even in that anger He is gracious enough to give us individuals that we can collaborate with who have strengths where we have weaknesses.

In Exodus 4:14 God encourages Moses to partner with his brother Aaron. And this is important because it's critical for you to understand that God has people in mind who will come alongside you to aid in you in fulfilling His purpose for your life. The question I want you to wrestle with is, who has God encouraged you to collaborate with?

Lesson #10: God Expects Dedication

After all that, the only thing left for us to do is obey. Once we allow ourselves to go through this entire process, God is then looking for us to be dedicated to completing the mission. My prayer is that you receive this truth. While you may be in the back of your desert God has everything you need in the back of the desert in order to prepare you to come out equipped and empowered to accomplish His will in the Earth. Take some time to consider these lessons, ask yourself these questions, and allow God to speak to you.