

## Wake Up to God Working Around You

a study of Exodus 2-4

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This was Part 2 of a series accompanying Henry Blackaby's "Experiencing God"

The Big Idea: **To experience God, we need to wake up to what He is doing.**

Imagine for a moment a woman named Jane. Jane has lived her entire life trying to escape the stigma of being feminine, the patronizing nonsense of being subordinate to anyone. She has striven to be accepted in the world of men without regard to her gender, and she married her husband Mark at least in part because he shared the same attitude.

Jane grew up in the church but left it, because she was looking for someone liberated from traditional ways of thinking, and Mark was a committed materialist, resistant, so Jane thought, to religious faith of any stripe. Theirs had not been an intimate marriage, but they respected each other's status, and that was the important thing, wasn't it?

But one day Jane found herself among people who defied her categories. Had she not grown to know them, she would have written them off as religious. These people, she realized, not only submitted to a divine authority, but they were also the most honestly full-of-life people she had known, and she realized she wanted to be with them.

She had always thought of religion as a sort of drifting upward, like smoke, of souls gifted in that way. By contrast, these people clearly saw themselves as serving a purpose for which they were made. And if they were made, that meant someone above them—above us—is more significant than all the ideals based on her own pride.

She had a moment at which she resisted this awareness, a moment in which she realized that God was not going to meet her by saying, with somber formality, "It is a great honor to meet you, Mrs. Studdock." She saw God laughing with her, as an adult smiles and laughs when being introduced to a young child.

And then, she realized, something seismic had changed. It was not an obvious and measurable change—not at the moment it happened—but a boundary had been definitely crossed into a world, or more accurately, into a Person, and into the presence of a Person. Something expectant came upon her with disarming intimacy. There had never been anything like this, and now there was nothing but this, giving meaning and, yes, purpose to everything else.

For the first time in her life, this was a Person she longed to please, because pleasing Him was becoming a part of pleasure itself.

Jane had experienced an awakening. That's what it was—not like agreeing to join something, but more like realizing you are a part of something, of someone—like waking up to an awareness to which everything before was, by comparison, only dreaming.

Jane is a character in C.S. Lewis' novel "That Hideous Strength" (MacMillan, 1946), and he describes her spiritual transformation a lot like his own from a committed atheist into a surprised member of the Body of Christ.

I read that account the same morning that I read George Ladd's description of two paths splitting apart in Biblical theology (in "A Theology of the New Testament," Eerdmans, 1974). One path proceeded under the assumption the Bible could be understood as a development of merely human thought; the other path was an admission that the Bible could be understood only as God's revelation of Himself.

Both Lewis and Ladd are saying that the biggest difference you can experience is the difference between seeing everything else *without* a God-awareness and seeing it *with* a God-awareness. If they are right, then there is no greater error than leaving God out of the picture. Once you know God as the Creator, Lord and Savior that He is, then it doesn't make any sense to leave Him out of the big picture and go on acting as if He were not here and involved in everything. God has significant plans for you.

I think we can learn something from the experience of Moses. When we hear the name *Moses*, many of us think of the great leader who led the entire nation of Israel across the parted waters of the sea and delivered the Law and brought them to the threshold of the Promised Land. But before that great work of the Lord, Moses had to learn something about God's involvement in the world: **To experience God, you have to wake up to what God is doing.**

To see that, look at **Exodus 2-4**. And to get the big picture, consider the background.

### **1. God is at work on behalf of His people.**

How did the Israelites get into Egypt in the first place? It is a story, by the way, of the beginning of enmity between Arabs and Jews. But for the purposes of this study, focus on how God wants his people to follow Him.

God had told Abraham that his descendants would become a great nation. Abraham had a son named Isaac; and Isaac had a son named Jacob. Jacob fathered a huge family--12 sons, with all their wives and children, amounting to a total of 66 people (Genesis 46:26).

This family of Jacob was starving in Canaan because of a famine. But God is in the saving business. Salvation is what He does. And God had been preparing for this. He had sent one of Jacob's sons to Egypt.

Joseph's brothers had actually sold him as a slave. But in Egypt Joseph was raised to a position of national prominence, and was—as it turned out—in charge of Egypt's food supply when his brothers came looking for food.

Hollywood would have written this as a revenge story, with Joseph doing in his evil brothers one by one. But what the brothers intended is secondary; what God is doing is crucial, and Joseph recognizes that. Joseph is awake to what God is doing. And Joseph, because he ended up in Egypt and ended up in charge of the food, is able to bring his entire family to Egypt, and they are saved from starvation.

Centuries went by, and the family grew into the nation that God had promised—eventually made a nation of slaves, but still growing so large that the Pharaoh of Egypt wanted to end their growth, and he ordered the extermination of every male born to a Hebrew woman.

Think about Pharaoh's plan: think about the long-term prospect: the elimination of the Hebrew race, to be replaced by a race of mixed-breed slaves. This is Moses' background: a threat of extermination.

Moses is born into that situation. A Hebrew mother gave birth to a boy, who was condemned to be killed. She sought to save her baby by hiding him along the banks of the river. It just happens that the daughter of this ruthless Pharaoh went to that very part of the river for a morning swim. She finds the baby!

Talk about a worse-case scenario: A king wants to kill Hebrew boys, and the person who finds Moses is a member of the king's family. Now the baby is doomed for sure, right?

No, because God is not missing from the story. God is at work. God is behind this, and God is in the saving business.

As it turns out, God planned for this princess to find this Hebrew baby. By God's providence, she chose to take the baby home and have him raised by his own mother. God wants us to know this story so that we will not grow weary or lose heart (Hebrews 11:23; 12:1-3).

So Moses is saved into the home of the killer. He's going to be trained as an Egyptian, and he'll always look down on his own people, right? No, because God is behind this.

Moses grows up in the greatest civilization on earth at the time, and he is trained in the best schools of Egypt. But he is raised by a mother who also taught him where he came from. He never forgot where he came from.

When he was a man, Moses was not a slave. He was a member of the court of the Pharaoh. But He still had a vision for his own people. He, like no Hebrew before, was in a unique position to do something for his people. He saw them enslaved, and wanted to free them from their oppression. This is not how any Hebrew would have planned it. But it is how a sovereign God works.

God also had a vision for his people. It was the same vision that Moses had. What went wrong? Moses tried to do it his way. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, so Moses killed the Egyptian. Moses' way of delivering his people was to kill one Egyptian at a time. He couldn't deliver the Hebrews that way. He needed what only God could do.

There's a principle to learn here: Understanding what God is about to do where I am is more important than telling God what I want to do for Him.

I can do what I am able to do, or, if I want to experience God, I need to wake up to what God can do.

There is an important corollary for God's people in the nation: What governments do is far less important eternally than what God is doing, and what God is doing is the first concern of God's people. Your faith is far more vital than your politics.

Now, Pharaoh, having heard that Moses killed an Egyptian, wants Moses. So Moses has to run for his life. Here's Moses, who has spent his whole life with the finest luxuries in the world, fleeing for his life into the desert. No doubt, he considered this the lowest point in his life. He didn't see that God is always at work on behalf of His people.

And, in fact,

## **2. God is at work in all the circumstances of life.**

Consider the events of Exodus 2. Consider someone saved from death, and saved into the riches and education of the greatest civilization on earth (at the time) without having to give up the influence of his own family. He has the desire to help his people.

And at the very time when he seems in the best position to do something for them, that position is lost, and this hot-headed young man spends years—probably up to 40 years—learning to lead a flock of sheep in the wilderness of Sinai.

Realize that Moses had considered himself a fugitive all that time; essentially, he was still hiding. Verse 2:22 says Moses gave his son a name meaning "alien," because he considered himself an alien in a foreign land.

Did God not care about the suffering of His people?

Was God finished with Moses?

Did God have him on hold?

Or was God developing a maturity to match the mission? When you look at how God used people in the Bible, you see that God develops character to match the assignment.

And that takes time. Think about it for a minute. Moses spent the first third of his life being educated in Egypt. He spent the second third of his life being educated by God in the wilderness. His mission—the reason we will always know Moses—was carried out in the last third of his life.

Suppose you were to live for 90 years. Your first 30 years would be in formal education and training. Your years from age 30 to 60 would be further preparation by the Lord for what your real mission on earth is. From age 60 to 90 you will be fulfilling your purpose in God's plan. What you think of as having to go to school might be crucial preparation. What you think of as your career might be further preparation. Why did God really put you in this world?

We think about the great things God accomplished through these people, but we seldom realize how long God worked on them before the assignment. Moses had the right vision, but he didn't at first have the right heart, and he spent years as a fugitive shepherd before leading the nation to freedom.

David left shepherding at the call of God, but he spent years as a fugitive before leading his kingdom to its golden age.

Paul was called by God and then spent 14 years learning, before being sent on his first mission.

Enthusied, passionate people like Moses often have an urgency that doesn't expect God to do any preparation. But notice in the Bible that when God gives an assignment, He usually develops the character of his people before enabling them to fulfill the assignment.

God prepared a man who could go back to Egypt, negotiate directly with Pharaoh, in his own language and terminology, rely on God for what only God could accomplish, be an available servant while God saved his people, *then* lead God's flock patiently in the wilderness of Sinai for 40 more years. With that assignment, what parts of Moses' background don't fit? They all fit! God had been intentionally preparing Moses for what lay ahead.

Moses had changed. Before the years in Midian, Moses saw a Egyptian beating a Hebrew, so Moses stepped in to kill the Egyptian. He gets to Midian, and sees some shepherds harassing some young women, so he comes to the rescue and drives off the shepherds. Moses himself wants to be in the saving business. But he want to be the avenger, stepping in with his pistols blazing. Years later, he has learned that he can't do it all himself. He's ready to be used for what only God can accomplish.

Could Moses see that at the time? No! Like every other person God has called, Moses could only see things from his own perspective. You're not called to understand everything. You're called to humble yourself before God.

### **3. You need to wake up to God.**

We come to Exodus **chapter 3**. Moses is tending sheep in the wilderness of Midian, and he sees a bush that is glowing, as if on fire, but it isn't burning up. He goes over to investigate, and God speaks to him from the bush. You see that

#### **3a. God shows up in the ordinary things of life.**

God didn't have to speak out of the sky. He didn't have to speak out of the mountain. He didn't have to speak out of a towering tree. He chose an ordinary bush. (I think it was Tony Evans I once heard say . . .) When God is the fire, any old bush will do. You don't have to be a celebrity. You don't have to be rich. You don't have to have degrees. You don't have to be talented. You don't have to shine like a star. When God is the fire, any old bush can shine.

We don't dictate to God where He can speak. So God speaks to Moses out of a bush, and in **verse 5**, Moses answers God, and God says, "Take off your shoes, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."

### **3b. God is holy; you don't hear Him without removing the dirt.**

In that culture, feet were considered the dirtiest part of the body, the part that touched the earth. Cleaning the feet represented shaking off the dust of an unclean world.

It's not that you have to be clean before you can come to God. He calls you to come, no matter how dirty you are. He called Moses, who was busy herding sheep at the time. But you can't stand in the presence of God and not recognize your need to remove the world's dirt.

We won't hear God's voice if we don't humble ourselves before Him. God's people are called to humility. God is up to something higher than our little dust-grubbing perspective sees. You want to see from God's perspective, so take off your dirty shoes.

Then God introduces Himself (in **verse 6**). "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

Now, why does God introduce Himself by referring to these people from Moses' past? Because these are the forefathers through whom God had done great things in the past. In other words,

### **3c. God has already made known His ways.**

God is not unknown to Moses. He has already made known His thoughts and His ways, many times before. And this truth has been passed on to Moses.

And it has been passed on to us. God is not merely a mysterious unknown. He has told us and shown us, repeatedly, what kind of a world we live in. This is not new. God's people have a history of unexpected terror. (Read the book of Judges.) We know what kind of world we live in, and we have extensive testament to the kind of God He is, and to what He is doing in the world.

We don't have to wonder what God wants. We know from the past what is important to Him. We also know that it is international and cross-cultural in its scope.

Moses could have known that. But God went on to be specific (in **verses 7-10**). "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."

That's the kind of God we know, so here's what He's going to do (**verse 8**): "I have come down to rescue them." Jump to **verse 10**: "So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt."

### **3d. God is still in the saving business.**

God introduces Himself as One Who's ways are known from the past. Then He gets specific: He is still a saving God. Now, what is the application of that knowledge? "Go. I'm sending you."

Basically, God used the same words when He came in the flesh (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus said, "Now you know why I came. Go. I'm sending you. (And I will be with you.)" God's revelation of His activity is an invitation for you to join Him. God says, "You know what I care about. You know what's important to me. I'm in the saving business. I want you in this with me." If you read the Bible, it's hard to miss that message.

Moses knows what God wants. Does that settle everything? Not yet.

#### **4. To experience God, you needed your body to follow your awakening.**

When the alarm goes off in the morning, you're suddenly awake and you know the alarm means it's time to get moving, because you're aware of things you have to do. But your body still says, "I really don't want to get up yet." Your mind is awake to something, your body doesn't want to make the necessary adjustment, and your will has to decide which one is going to win.

It's one thing to know what God wants. It's another thing to do it.

Look at Moses' excuses, starting in **3:11** and stretching through **chapter 4**.

(11) Moses: "**Who am I** that I should go to Pharaoh?"

Does God answer the question? No! "Who am I" doesn't matter.

God: "**I will be with you.**" That's all that matters.

And notice what God says is the proof that God was behind it: After they are successful, they'll worship God. The sign of success will not be the annihilation of the enemy; it will be people seeing the glory of God.

(13) Moses: "Suppose they ask **who sent me?**"

God: "**I Am Who I Am.** Tell them, the same God I've always been. I'm still committed to saving you."

(4:1) Moses: "What **if they don't believe me.**"

God: "**I'll give evidence.**"

(10) Moses: "But **I'm not qualified.** I don't speak well."

God: "Is that a problem for me? I'll help you speak, and **I'll do the teaching.**"

(13) Moses: "Lord, please send somebody else." No more excuses; only refusal.

Then God got angry. He said, "I've covered the bases. Just go."

Every excuse was self-centered, and every answer was God-centered. It's a huge transformation to adjust from thinking only of yourself, your fears, your insecurities—to thinking of God, God's will, God's power.

To know and do the will of God, you must adjust to a God-centered life. That's why Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:34-35).

What is Moses' primary motivation at this point? To be left alone. But for God's people, the primary issue is not what you want to do. The primary issue is, are you going to go with God? To experience God, we need to wake up to what He is doing.

It's not that different for us. God has not changed. He still speaks to His people. We know who He is and we know what matters to Him.

When God spoke the divine Name: “I Am Who I Am,” He was declaring that His very existence should be sufficient to get our full attention. God’s reality is a bigger factor than anything else we know. We are either God-centered or not.

Suppose the President of the United States invited you to the White House to share with you new plans for restoring the nation. You walk with a hand-picked assembly of people into the briefing room, and you see the president. He shares the goal and how to be involved in achieving it.

You know he has spoken, but you don’t really listen to him. You don’t even look at him. You don’t ask any questions. You’re fascinated by the atmosphere and the mixture of people, caught up with your own thoughts and concerns. You’re thinking about what you’ll tell your friends, what was the White House like, how many secret service agents were there.

A reporter stops you and asks you, “Do you believe in the president?” You say, “Of course.”

“Do you believe he is at work here?” “Sure he is.”

“Do you know that he invited you personally?” “Yes, and I appreciate it.”

You say that, but without ever listening what’s on His mind, you act as if he didn’t exist. He’s obviously not in the forefront of your attention.

The vast majority of people who say they believe in God treat him like that. They believe in the same sense they believe in oxygen. You believe in it because you learned about it in school, but knowing that you’re breathing it, you forget it and focus on what seems bigger to you at the time.

Do you believe in God? We say, “Yes!”

And isn’t it true that the more honor and importance and power and significance a person has, the more attention and respect and responsiveness we show them? Again we answer, “Yes.”

Then if you believe God exists, why do you treat Him like oxygen? (This illustration came from John Piper, “I Am Who I Am,” 9/16/84)

We can know what God is up to. If we’re asleep to the truth of God’s existence, we think only of what we can do in our own limited strength. **To experience God, we need to wake up to what He is doing.**

Gladys Aylward was a missionary in China in the 1930s. When the Japanese invaded Yangcheng she was forced to flee.

She didn’t think only of her own skin. With one assistant, she led more than a hundred orphans over the mountains toward Free China. They were literally trying to outrun the Japanese army.

In the mountain forest, they stopped to spend the night. Gladys couldn’t sleep all night, and when morning came she was in despair. The journey seemed so immense, and the task of caring for 100 children so hopeless, that she sat immobile and said, “We’ll never get to safety.”

A 13-year-old girl said, “You told us about Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea.”

Tears ran down Gladys’ cheeks and she cried, “But I’m not Moses!”

The girl said, “Of course you aren’t. But God is still God.”

When Gladys and the orphans all made it through, they knew that despite our inadequacy and vulnerability, God is still God. (“The Hidden Price of Greatness” by Besson & Hunsicker)

## **Wake Up to God Working Around You**

a study of Exodus 2-4

The Big Idea: **To experience God, we need to wake up to what He is doing.**

To know and do the will of God, you must awaken to a God-centered life.

**1. God is at work on behalf of His people. (background of Exodus)**

Understanding what God is doing is more important than telling God what I want to do.

**2. God is at work in all the circumstances of life. (chapter 2)**

God develops character to match the assignment.

**3. You need to wake up to God.**

**a. God shows up in the ordinary things of life. (3:1-4)**

**b. God is holy; you don't hear Him without shaking off the dirt. (verse 5)**

**c. God has already made known His ways. (verse 6)**

**d. God is still in the saving business. (verses 7-10)**

God's revelation of his activity is an invitation to join Him.

**4. To experience God, you need your body to follow your awakening. (verse 11 - chapter 4)**