

Questions

GOD ASKS US



What Is That In Your Hand?

A Christian legend relates the thought that **God sends each person into the world with a special message to deliver, with a special song to sing for others, with a special act of love to bestow.** No one else can bring our message, sing our song, or offer our love. Only we can. This legend reminds us that **each of us has something of value to offer to the life of our world**—something that can make the world a much better place.

However, you may struggle with this idea, especially when it comes to the challenge of tackling some of the problem areas in our society...and when challenged to make a creative difference, we often put forward excuses as to why we cannot. Our excuses vary and usually revolve around the lack of suitable abilities or resources. We don't have the necessary qualifications. We don't have enough money. We don't have the available time. We don't have significant influence or adequate knowledge. And so, armed with one or another of these reasons, we justify our lack of action and try to escape our personal responsibility in building a better world. **In many respects, we are like Moses.**

Excerpt from *Questions God Asks Us*, pp. 37-38

To begin, I encourage you to read Exodus 3, as it will provide a picture of what is happening in this conversation prior to God's question for Moses in Exodus 4:2.

In Exodus 3, God calls to Moses from a burning bush and commissions him to return to Egypt to liberate God's people. The resolve of God to transform, to let the oppressed go free, is met by Moses' determined resistance. The task of getting Moses' on track is no simple matter. Even having been assured about God's presence with him and given God's very name, Moses is still not convinced. Understandably, Moses raises a handful of questions and objections to God about the task at hand. What if they won't believe me? What if they won't even listen to me?" Though he never fully explains the reason for his reluctance, Moses' excuses are altogether reasonable, the kind anyone might make who understands the risks at hand.

In fact, throughout the Old Testament, the typical commissioning scene in the OT involves an objection to God's calling. In these scenes, the objection ultimately highlights the person's dependence upon God in undertaking God's work and reveals an appropriate sense of humility. But Moses is not typical in any sense. Instead of one objection, Moses raises four (3:11,13; 4:1,10) before saying flat out, "Please send someone else!" (4:13).

Moses proves quite adept at coming up with excuses, and in the process he illustrates our fears and insecurities as humans when it comes to stepping out in faith to follow God's call. Hudson writes that **Moses' excuses "sound a lot like those we sometimes make when God calls us."** His paraphrase of Moses' excuses likely sound familiar to many of us. Do you recognize any of these statements from your own experience?

1. I'm nobody. (3:11-12)
2. I don't know enough about God. (3:13-14)
3. What happens if I fail? (4:1-9)
4. I don't have what it takes. (4:10-11)
5. Someone else could do it better. (4:13-17)

Read Exodus 4:1-17. In Exodus 3, Moses' first objection was simple. "Who am I?" Who am I to go and deliver the people of Israel? The second objection was "and who are you?" What if the people ask me who is the Lord who sent you? Now we come to his third objection. "What if they will not believe me, and what if they will not listen to my voice?"

Moses isn't exactly a shining example of faith in this story. There's some unbelief that he's wrestling with in his heart. Moses is saying, "Could God *really* work through *me*? And for something like this? What if they don't believe me? What if they don't listen to my voice?"

Moses offered one reason after another as to why he could not fulfill God's calling. In response, God asks Moses one simple but powerful question, "**What is that in your hand?**" This question shifts the dynamics of the conversation. Until now it has been Moses asking all the questions.

Hudson observes that it was a question aimed at "helping Moses recognize that **he already had all the resources he needed to fulfill God's calling.** At that moment Moses holding a staff. God wanted to use this simple stick to liberate a nation. **When we make available to God whatever we are holding in our hands, we will always be astounded by what God can do with it**" (pg. 39).

In the end, the story in Exodus 3-4 is not much interested in Moses' resistance or his reasons for God to look elsewhere. God does not answer or dismiss the reasons of Moses, but simply overrides them with a stronger assertion of God's own intentionality, presence, and faithfulness. Thus, Moses' sense of his own inadequacy is not met with an assurance of his adequacy, but with an assertion that God is the God who will be present with him and can use whatever Moses has in his hands, both literally and figuratively.

Our Abilities & Our Life Experience

"What is in your hand?" It's the same question God asks each of us. We often minimize what we have in our hands. We don't think that our skill, talent, or experience is anything special that God can use right now. Perhaps we don't think what we have is all that "important" because it seems so ordinary to us. Yet by asking this question, it is clear that God thinks otherwise. Hudson explains:

God has uniquely gifted you for a specific purpose. You already possess what God wants to use to bless others All of us have certain abilities in our hands—whatever they happen to be: running a business, using the computer, managing projects, resolving conflict, working with figures, managing money, coaching sports, offering hospitality, and so on. God is able to use them for the sake of the common good. We need to acknowledge what we do well and invest whatever it is in God's work of mending our broken world, even when we believe our talents are rather insignificant.

Excerpt from *Questions God Asks Us*, pp. 39-41

God has created you with something in your hands that you may see as "ordinary" but that God can use to do extraordinary things. The primary gift we bring to the world is always who we are, the compassionate and responsive person that the Spirit is gradually forming. And it is in this formation that God writes the special message which we are called to deliver throughout our lifetime.

Along with our abilities, gifts, resources, and opportunities, we must also consider how God's question in this story points to **the value of our life experience**—experience which we all have! In the excerpt below, Hudson describes three ways that God uses Moses' life experience to fulfill God's calling to Moses:

First of all, there was Moses' childhood experience.... He grew up in Pharaoh's household with all the privileges that brought. No doubt he received an excellent education, along with an insider's understanding of the workings of power in Pharaoh's court. Think about how this knowledge would later be put to good use when he went to Pharaoh and confronted him with God's demands....

Then there was Moses' experience of working for forty years as a shepherd in the desert.... Consider the many skills he must have acquired, skills that would one day prove invaluable when leading a stubborn and resistant people through the same difficult terrain, skills that he could have learned nowhere else except through personal experience....

Third, Moses had the benefit of the spiritual preparation that took place during these long, lonely years. Shepherding has always been a lonely occupation. Solitude and silence have the power to transform us. It provides space for reflection, self-examination, and encounter with God. During his time alone in the desert he seems clearly to have developed a spiritual sensitivity that would strengthen him in the difficult years ahead.

Excerpt from *Questions God Asks Us*, pp. 42-43

Just as God uses the life experience of all kinds of people throughout Scripture, God's work through us often flows through our own experiences—the victories and struggles we have endured and the wisdom gained from them. Hudson writes, "From the moment we were born, through all the troubles and tensions of growing up, the adventures of young adulthood, through all our different jobs, all the joys and sorrows we have known, God has been forming us to be a difference-making member of the human family. What we have to do, however, is to offer God the life experience we bring in our hands."

Our Inadequacy

I'm nobody...I don't know enough about God...What happens if I fail?...I don't have what it takes...Someone else can do it better. We are well acquainted with Moses' excuses and resistance. Perhaps with Moses we want to say: "No, Lord, please use someone else. Please send someone else."

Yet we are not left to face these fears and feelings of resistance alone. The God who calls us also empowers us in a multitude of ways. The joy we experience in pursuing our calling strengthens us. Other people cross our paths with gifts of affirmation and encouragement. In time the word of promise given to Moses is made real for us.

Hudson writes, "Moses' story reminds us that one of the clearest marks of God's call is that it leaves us feeling totally inadequate. What matters, however, is how we choose to deal with our inadequacy...We can allow it to paralyze us. Our excuses then end up having the last word. Or we can let our inadequacy lead us into a greater

dependence on God. This is what Moses chose to do. He took seriously God's promise to be with him and began to follow God's call, one step at a time. Let us resolve to do the same."

Answering God's Question¹

So what's that in your hand? Answering God's question could open up an exciting journey for you. Think about it for a moment. **God wants to use whatever resources are already in your hand to bring hope and healing to a hurting world** — just as God used Moses' resources 3,200 years ago. But first you need a willingness to converse with God around this question.

1. **Begin by being honest with God about some of the excuses you make when you sense God is calling you to make the world a better place.** Getting real about your resistances often clears the way for a deeper engagement with God. Once you have done this, imagine God whispering to you, *"As I promised to be with Moses, so I promise to be with you. My presence and power will always be available to you. No difficult experience can separate you from me. And whatever you bring in your hands, I will use."*
2. **With this assurance of God's promise echoing in your heart and mind, speak with God about what you bring in your hands.** Name your abilities; give thanks for them; offer them to God. Reflect on the richness of your life experience. Tell God about the pain you have gone through. You could find hidden there the seeds of the important things that God has for you to do. Above all, share with God your feelings of inadequacy, because this will be the area where you most experience God's power as you step out to follow God's calling.

Remember, God has something beautiful for you to do in this world. Sharing that message, singing that song, and offering that act of love will bring tremendous fulfillment. It will also enrich the lives of others. May answering God's question help you know that you already possess whatever you need to make this come true.

Discussion

1. Can you name a person in your life who believed in you, helped you to recognize your abilities, and encouraged you to move outside of your comfort zone by using them? What did that mean to you?
2. Name one ability that others value and appreciate in your life. (Remember, each of us has something!). If someone struggles to name something about themselves, ask your group to name an ability of that person that is valued and appreciated.
3. What is your reaction to the numerous excuses that Moses offers in Exodus 3 & 4? Is there one that you can identify with the most? What are some of the most common excuses (or reasons) that we give to avoid the challenges that come from God's calling?
4. Describe one resource that you bring to others because of your unique life experience.
5. How have feelings of inadequacy led you to greater dependence on God? How has God been faithful?
6. How will you answer God's question in the week ahead? In what ways would you like to have God use you to make a creative difference in the world around you? Pray that each person will give thought to abilities they hold in their hands and the value of their life experiences — and that they would commit themselves to honest and open dialogue with God about these things and what God is calling them to do with them.

¹ Portions of this section are excerpted from *Questions God Asks Us*, pg. 34-35