

## **Aug 31 You're the Answer**

Exodus 3:1-12

We need to recall the events that led up to this encounter between Moses and God in the burning bush. Jacob and his family had come to Egypt several generations before when there had been a drought in Judea. Joseph, Jacob's son, had been sold into slavery by his brothers and through his ability and God's grace had risen to a place of great power in Egypt. He had the ability to help and protect his family. Over time, Jacob and Joseph die and the Pharaoh who had known Joseph also died. The new pharaoh now sees the Israelites as a threat and an easily exploitable work force. He puts them to work building the great temples of Egypt. He also orders that all male Israelite Hebrew babies be put to death. His orders are disobeyed and they continue to increase in numbers. Moses is put in a basket by his mother in the river Nile hoping one of the Egyptian noble ladies, when they came down to bathe, would see him and rescue him. This happens and Moses is raised in the palace of Pharaoh as a prince of Egypt. One day Moses sees an overseer abusing the Hebrew slaves and he lashes out and kills the man. Fearing that he will be arrested he flees into the dessert where he marries and is happily taking care of his father-in-law's sheep. This is the context for the encounter.

Let's see how this story applies to us today? The Israelites were in trouble, they had a need and there had been many prayers for deliverance. For some time they had been wondering, "Did God hear our prayers? Does God really care?" Moses knew of the plight of his people even though he was in the Sinai dessert. I am sure he too had been praying for the deliverance of his people. Perhaps he too was wondering if God cared. We have all been there, haven't we? We are going through a tough time and we are praying about it to God and we wonder if God really hears. Or we know of a friend or family member that is struggling. We offer our prayers but wonder, where is God?

Then Moses encounters God in a burning bush. To make sure that there is no mistake God even says, "Take off your shoes for this is holy ground! I am the God of your father...and so on" God goes on to say, "I have observed the misery of my people and I have heard their cries. I have come down to deliver them." I am sure Moses was ecstatic. God knew of the plight of the Hebrew people, God had heard their prayers. God was going to act. I am guessing

that Moses was waiting to hear what great miracle or sign of power God was going to do now that God was on the move. But then came the shocker. He hears, "I am going to send you to Pharaoh." This is an entirely different thing, isn't it? It is one thing to rejoice that God hears and is going to act it is something quite different to hear that you are to be the answer to the prayers of the people. You are going to have to get involved. You are going to have to risk. We can guess from his response to this news that Moses was less than thrilled.

We can understand his feelings, can't we? We are all good at offering up prayers to God to help people. We sometimes get frustrated when God seems to not be listening or moving fast enough. We rarely ask, "Am I the one to be used by God?" We pray but don't really want to become that involved in the situation and to take risks.

So what does Moses do? He does what we all would usually try to do in such a situation. He makes excuses and tries to give the job to someone else. Think about the silliness of the conversation. "O.K. God, glad you asked me but there are problems. I don't know your name, I doubt they will believe that you sent me, oh and by the way I am horrible at public speaking." Moses is talking to God. Don't you think God would have figured all of this out before asking Moses? When prayers move from pious words to roll up your sleeves and get your hands dirty we, like Moses, pause and sometimes deflect, ignore or pass on God's call.

Today I want us to think for a little bit about what it means to say that we might be the answer to the problem we are praying about? First of all I think we need to hear a cautionary word. We are not automatically the answer. Too many of us are wired to be in a "fix it" mode. We see a problem and assume we are the ones to deal with it. This can lead to guilt when things don't work out feeling we must have done something wrong. It can lead us to becoming over extended financially, physically or emotionally when we think we have to do it all. This can lead to resentment and even anger or worse, being taken advantage of by a person unwilling to change. I have seen all of this happen to parents and grandparents who want to help. But sometimes the person they are concerned about doesn't want the help and are instead looking for someone to use. So, when we are praying about an issue we should not assume that we are the one to fix it. We need to give it to God and rest on it awhile. If we do this sometimes the

person will figure out how to move forward on their own. Perhaps they will find the resources they need. It is always better when someone figures out how to help themselves.

It is hard to step back and to be inactive. But it is important. The people of Israel were not ready to be led by Moses until the time God calls him. I am sure others before had wanted to do it, maybe even tried to do it but the timing was not right.

But now let us look at when we are called to help. First, whenever we are praying about a circumstance we do have to ask, "Am I at least part of the solution?" We need to be willing to get involved. It is not just up to God to deal with the situation. God needs people to help and sometimes that person is us.

So how do you know when to roll up your sleeves and dive in and when to step back and wait? There is no clear answer to that question. It is always a delicate dance. Each situation is different but I think there is one clue to help you to know when to move forward and see that you are called to help. What is it? If your first reaction is to reject the idea then you had better look at it even more closely. When we are in a "fix it" mentality we assume we are the answer. If you, like Moses, hear you may be the answer and you say, oh no, then it is probably worth a second look. That second look will come with all the excuses as to why you couldn't possibly deal with this situation. If you keep getting the nudge to help then you should probably investigate actually how you can do it. Moses found Aaron, a better speaker, to help him. He was given signs and names so the people would believe and he found he was the answer. It didn't mean it was easy. It wasn't. But he faithfully followed that nudge by God and ultimately the people entered the Promised Land.

Let me give you a couple of examples of people who ended up being answers to prayer. I just finished reading a book *David and Goliath* by Malcom Gladwell. In it he talks about people, who in spite of the odds, prevail. We think we know the classic story of David and Goliath found in the Bible. He asserts we get the story wrong. He states that the odds were actually in David's favor. Goliath was skilled in hand to hand combat. He was armed to meet a foe one on one and in that he would have prevailed. But David was skilled in long range tactics. They have done some studies and found that a skilled person slinging a stone can do it with the force of a bullet and with great accuracy. Goliath didn't have a chance. David would

never get close enough to engage Goliath in hand to hand combat, which he wanted. Goliath was too heavily armored making it impossible for him to move quickly to escape from the stone. David, by refusing to follow conventional rules of engagement defeats one who on the surface had all the resources. The book goes on to talk about many who overcome personal adversities to triumph. In some cases they become an answer to prayer.

The one story that I think about relates to a crime ridden area of New York. It had the highest crime and murder rate in the country. Many people had been trying to defuse this situation. The area was nothing but high rise low cost housing. The police had tried almost everything, more officers and more arrests and nothing worked. Then a woman was made police commissioner and given this area as her responsibility. Instead of continuing doing what had been done without success she was willing to risk a different model. She had been to a seminar where she had learned that areas where there was such high crime and arrest the police lost any validity. She got the cops out of their cars but no one would talk to them. She had building meetings but no one came. She had one very gifted cop who related to some of the kids. He came to her a few days before Thanksgiving. One of the boys he had been making friends with had been arrested. He saw him at the jail and learned his family had no food for Thanksgiving. The cop said, "Could we buy 1,000 turkeys for Thanksgiving?" It was a crazy idea to spend police enforcement money on criminals. She went to her boss, got the money, found turkeys and then she and two other cops went door to door handing out turkeys. A few days later she had another house meeting and the room was packed. The turkeys had turned her from being one of them to one of us. She heard, "You are the answer to our prayers." The police are now seen as a vital part of that community. And the crime rate, it has plummeted 80%. She had been sent to fix a problem and in being open to a different view, a different way God could use her, she found she was the answer to the prayer people had been asking.

This is a story that God does listen to our concerns but it is also a reminder that we need to be willing to risk and help. We might be the answer to another's prayer of deliverance. But first we must be willing to listen, to wait, to be open. May it be so.