

Sunday, August 28, 2011: Exodus 3:1-15

by [Douglas D. Webster](#) in the [August 23, 2011](#) issue

The life of Moses is so large and significant that it's hard to imagine that we have anything in common with him—until he opens his mouth. As soon as he starts to talk he sounds just like us. When he starts offering excuses, he's not saying anything that we haven't used as reasons for not surrendering our lives to God.

I identify with his reluctance. It took me a long time to feel comfortable with my calling as a pastor. I had to be more vulnerable, accessible and responsible than I'd been as an academic, and I wasn't sure I was up to it. This is what makes Moses' encounter with God important—we tend to counter everything God says to us with a quick excuse. When God called Moses, he responded with at least five excuses, all of which believers have stubbornly used throughout the centuries.

Moses began with the "wrong number" excuse. As soon as God called his name, Moses was ready to tell God to call another number. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" A while ago our church administrator called a woman who answered the phone pleasantly. Before he had a chance to say anything, she said, "Hello, you've got the wrong number. If you dial 543-6789 you'll reach the person you want." He responded, "OK, then if I call that number I'll be sure to reach Jane Smith?" "Oh," she said, "I'm Jane Smith. It's just that I get so many wrong numbers I'm always prepared to give them what they need right away."

Moses was sure that God had gotten the wrong number. What could God want from him? He was so concerned about his own little "I" that one wonders if he'd even heard the "I" statements of God that dominate this text. Did Moses honestly believe that he could avoid becoming involved in God's will by feigning anonymity? One feels like saying, "Excuse me! This isn't about you. It's about God and his people."

When God calls us, God says, "I've seen the confusion of your family, the brokenness of your home. I want you to be a Christ-centered servant-leader in your family." If we say, "Who, me?" God says, "Yes, you." God never expected or wanted Moses to think he could do God's will on his own. "I will be with you" is God's answer to Moses and to us.

When in doubt we stall for time with the "let's talk about it" excuse. Moses illustrated a common trait among God's people when he said, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" This is an infamous delaying tactic. But God wasn't buying it. If ignorance was Moses' problem, God would give him wisdom; if Moses had questions, God had answers. "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'" This is true for us as well. Our false humility is nothing but an excuse. God will give us what we need to obey his will. "For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power" (1 Cor. 4:20).

Following these excuses, Moses played the "why try if you know it's going to fail" card. When God won't be refused, make your obedience contingent on the untried response of others. "But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, 'The Lord did not appear to you'" (Exod. 4:1). Since when did our response to God's call depend on other people's response? We can't base our decision to follow God's will for our lives on what other Christians do or on what popular culture does.

Then came the "woe is me" excuse. After challenging God's command, feigning ignorance and blaming others for how they might react, Moses claimed incompetence. He implied that God's work required his ability to perform and that success was dependent upon his skill. "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exod. 4:10).

Finally, having exhausted all his negative possibilities—denial, delay, deferment and dissuasion—Moses came to his "can't you find someone else" excuse. "O my Lord, please send someone else" (Exod. 4:13). Moses had finally arrived at his bottom line. If the truth be told, he just didn't want to be involved. In spite of God's call, God's backing and God's power, he was afraid. The will of God required that he face up to his feelings of inadequacy, but he wasn't prepared to do that.

I am amazed at what we will do for ourselves but refuse to do for God. Many of us go to great lengths to live an adventuresome life, but to live our lives for the sake of Christ is asking too much. If we are capable of life-sacrificing passion for our ego goals, why can't we surrender ourselves to God? If some of us can risk our lives to climb Mount Everest, why don't more of us risk our reputations for the sake of the gospel?

Winston Churchill said, "You can always count on Americans to do the right thing," then added, "after having exhausted all other possibilities." Most of us begin where Moses began—with excuses.