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MOSES: His Anger And What It Cost Him

The Moses of the Ten Commandments is often thought of as a moral legend, bigger than life. But the person behind the story is a real man who according to the Bible was far more like us than many imagine.

In addition to his struggle with self-doubt and reluctance, he had a problem with anger. And his outbursts had serious consequences.

Who among us does not need to see the difference between healthy anger and the smoldering or explosive rage that can do real damage? In the following pages, Bill Crowder, RBC Director of Church Ministries, helps us not only to see the real Moses, but ourselves as well.

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“IT’S NOT THAT SIMPLE!”

Will Rogers addressed Congress during the early days of World War I. At the time, there was great concern about German submarines and their stealth capabilities. As he spoke to the nation’s leaders, Rogers humored them with the declaration that he had solved the U-boat problem. “All you have to do,” he informed them, “is boil the oceans. When the water becomes unbearably hot, the submarines will come to the surface, and then you’ll have them!”

“And how are we supposed to boil the ocean?” asked a congressman. Without hesitation Rogers quipped, “Listen, I’ve come up with the solution. I’ll leave it to

you to work out the details.” **Many Problems Are Complex.** Rogers’ humor reminds us that we can’t solve the complexities of life with simplistic solutions.

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Human beings are complex creatures, and our circumstances are complex. Our problems need to be understood in context and in perspective:

- If all we knew of Noah was his problem with alcohol in Genesis 9, we would assume he was a down-and-out loser. Yet, he was described by God as a “just man, perfect in his generations” (Gen. 6:9).
- If all we knew of David

was his adultery with Bathsheba, we would never assume that he was, for the better part of his life, “a man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14).

- If all we knew about Saul of Tarsus was his effort to kill Christ’s followers, we would never expect him to become the writer of half of the New Testament.

The same is true of Moses. If all we knew about him was the anger that occasionally consumed him, we wouldn’t see what an important example he is for all of us.

We All Struggle.

You and I know our own faults more than anyone else. Outside the home we may give the appearance of being in control. But our spouse, children, and closest friends often see another side of us. How happy we can be that some

of our most embarrassing moments are usually known by only a few people!

Moses was not so fortunate. This highly educated and capable leader had some of his

Moses had some of his lowest and most regrettable moments recorded for all time in the Bible for all the world to see.

lowest and most regrettable moments recorded for all time in the Bible for all the world to see. As a result, those who take the time to read his story discover a man who lost his temper and better judgment at critical moments. He seems to have fought a battle with anger his entire life—a struggle he sometimes lost, and

sometimes won. Yet in spite of his personal weaknesses, God used him to:

- Deliver his people from the bondage of slavery in Egypt.
- Lead the people of Israel to national identity.
- Establish the laws and structures of a brand-new culture.
- Lead the Israelites to become a worshipping community committed to a God long forgotten.
- Advise and counsel the entire nation.
- Lead purposefully and effectively in the face of great criticism from his constituency.

By any standard of evaluation, Moses had an amazing track record. Yet, along the way, he was afflicted with an Achilles' heel of anger. It dogged his steps his entire life.

We All Are Vulnerable. I believe the concept of an Achilles' heel

is precisely what the writer of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews was talking about when he said:

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us (12:1).

What weakness threatens to trip us up at critical moments in our lives?

“The sin which so easily ensnares us” is the problem. Peter struggled with impulsiveness, Solomon with a wandering eye, and Abraham with a manipulative spirit. What is it for us? What is that easily ensnaring weakness that threatens to trip us up at critical moments in our lives?

For Moses, it was clearly anger.

THE POWER OF ANGER

Today it seems we are more exposed to anger and rage than ever before. Domestic violence, spousal abuse, gang wars, road rage, and personal assault are growing to disturbing levels. Media reports indicate that America has become a “society of rage”—and the statistics seem to back that up.

The same media that report the violence, however, also promote it. Talk shows try to force on-screen violent conflicts; movies and television shows glamorize angry confrontations; and professional sports cannot seem to find a way to curb the explosive on-field violence that leaves some athletes crippled but the fans clamoring for more.

Another Time, Another Place. We are

not the first culture to feed on anger and violence. Ancient Egypt demonstrated some of the same traits. Though considered to be the

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most civilized and advanced society of its day, it was still a culture that achieved its advancements by the violent exploitation of slave labor, a significant portion of which were the children of Israel. How did this come about?

For years, the Hebrew population flourished in Egypt under the influence of Joseph, the eleventh son of Israel (Jacob). But Exodus 1:8 states that “there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph”—and he felt no obligation to care for Joseph’s family. This

pharaoh subjugated the people and enslaved them.

From the pages and mistakes of our own history, we know the tragic and abiding effects on a culture that lives off the back of slavery. The landmark television mini-series *Roots* showed the demoralizing

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and dehumanizing effects of slavery on the America of the early to mid-1800s. The evening news regularly illustrates the lingering consequences of that tragedy as the United States continues to struggle with

racial tension rooted in the past abuses of slavery.

The same legacy was no doubt present in Egypt in both attitudes and actions:

- Attitudes of disdain among the Egyptians for the enslaved Hebrews, and of anger among the Hebrews for their taskmasters.
- Actions of violence by the Egyptians to maintain control of this nation of slaves, and of rebellion among the slaves as their lives became a weary treadmill of hard labor and suffering.

For 400 years the Hebrews endured these conditions of being brutalized and treated as subhuman. The anger and violence that result from slavery is tragic, but inevitable.

When Anger Surfaces. It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word for “anger” comes

from the words for “face” and “nostrils.” Anyone who has faced a truly angry person understands why. When anger builds up, it distorts our appearance, an outward manifestation of the fiery volcano within. Anger unchecked can eat away at the heart and affect the character of a person like few other emotions.

Yet, anger is not all bad. In its healthy form, properly controlled and expressed, it can motivate us to work for needed change. Consider Jesus’ anger at the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of His generation, and Paul’s anger at the legalism of the Galatians.

When anger is checked, it is like a refiner’s fire that tempers steel to make it stronger. When it is unchecked, it is as destructive as the wildfires that seasonally flare up in the hillside chaparral of Southern California. When

out of control, our anger can destroy us—and those we love.

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That brings us back to Moses. What did he do with his anger? Did it temper him or consume him? When did his rage reflect his own fear, frustration, and impatience? When did it show passion for the interests and concerns of God?

To unravel some of the complexities of Moses’ personality, we will take two quick passes through his life. First, we’ll consider his apparent tendency toward anger. Then we’ll consider the lessons he learned—the hard way.

MOSES' MOMENTS OF ANGER

Moses was a natural leader even though he didn't always think so (Ex. 3:11; 4:10). He was blessed with numerous gifts:

- Good looks (Ex. 2:2; Acts 7:20)
- Intelligence (Acts 7:22)
- Unparalleled opportunity (Acts 7:22)
- Eloquence (Acts 7:22)
- Leadership ability (Acts 7:22)

That's quite a résumé.

Yet, to whom much is given, much will be required. Even in the best of circumstances this is true—and Moses was not in the best of circumstances. While trying to use his God-given capacity for leadership, he was at the same time seeking to control the seething fire of anger in his belly over the plight of his

people. While Moses was following the clear direction of God, his anger would occasionally flare up and overtake the moment. We need to see these episodes of anger, and recognize them for what they were.

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Moses' Anger Over Injustice (Ex. 2). At age 40, Moses made a critical choice: He determined not to be identified with the life of privilege in which he had been reared but with the enslaved Hebrews whose blood and heritage he shared (Acts 7:21; Heb.

11:24). This would be an amazing choice under any condition, but it becomes even more dramatic when you see what Moses left behind:

- **Wealth.** He grew up amid the grandeur and excitement of Pharaoh's court and could have continued to live in material comfort.
- **Education.** He had become "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" and could have received all the benefits of being a nationally respected orator (Acts 7:22).
- **Fame.** For 20 years he had been a highly successful military leader. Josephus, the Jewish historian, says that he was a skilled general who brought Egypt a stunning victory in a war against Ethiopia.

No wonder Acts 7:22 says

that he became "mighty in words and deeds." Imagine the acclaim and honor that came from these achievements. Yet, incredibly, Moses walked away from it all and became a slave. Why? The writer of Hebrews said that he made two critical value judgments:

Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible (Heb. 11:25-27).

Interestingly, this New Testament perspective describes Moses' healthy response to someone else's anger. This passage tells us that Moses was not afraid to face the anger of the self-absorbed Pharaoh

who raised Moses in his own house.

To remain in Pharaoh's court would have brought Moses wealth and social privilege, but only for a short while. Given insight by God, Moses saw what was critical in decision-making—the need to look beyond the moment and see the result of the decision.

While not cowering before the rage of Pharaoh, Moses saw beyond the moment. We can probably assume that he must have felt some healthy anger as he observed the mistreatment of the enslaved people of Israel.

What we do know is that God gave Moses the wisdom to see that choosing the immediate pleasures of adoption as Pharaoh's grandson (material wealth, education, fame) did not deserve to be compared with the lasting honor of standing up to the plight

of his own flesh and blood.

Among those who worship material success, such a choice would evoke ridicule, mockery, and a sanity check. Yet this was Moses at his best. He made the right choice. Even though he could not have understood all that he was choosing at the time, he left the posh environment of

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imperial Egypt to suffer with those who needed his help.

Ironically, however, the healthy anger that Moses must have felt in behalf of his enslaved relatives ended up getting him in trouble. A life-changing event occurred

when he tried, in his own strength, to go to the aid of one of his Hebrew brothers who was being beaten by an Egyptian taskmaster. Moses' emotions took over and he committed a crime of passion—murdering the Egyptian and hiding his body in the sand.

Unfortunately, Moses' motives were not totally pure. The “why” behind the “what” isn't found in Exodus. It's discovered in a speech given by Stephen in Acts 7. Stephen's analysis of Moses' actions gives the additional insight that Moses killed the taskmaster while trying to step forward as the deliverer of the slave nation. Acts 7:25 says:

He supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand.

Moses was undoubtedly right about the mistreatment

of the slave. His response, however, revealed how unprepared he was for the task ahead. As Merrill Unger wrote, “He needed divine preparation, as is shown by his killing of an Egyptian taskmaster in anger.” He would never be able to accomplish this deliverance by his own strength and cleverness, and it was vital for him to learn this lesson.

Stepping out on his own with a rash act of anger cost him dearly. He spent the next 40 years of his life as an exile and fugitive in the wilderness of Midian—a far cry from the position of power and authority he had once held. Some say that “life begins at 40,” but Moses must have felt that his life had just ended.

Moses' Anger Over Pharaoh's Rebellion Against God (Ex. 11:8). Forty long years had passed in the blowing desert sands.

Moses had been humbled on the backside of a barren wilderness. Now he was about to face a new challenge. God was about to lead him back into Pharaoh's court.

The moment of truth occurred in the wilderness. God surprised Moses by speaking to him from a mysterious burning bush (Ex. 3–4). From the bush, God told Moses that He was going to use him to lead His people out of Egypt.

It didn't sound like a good idea to Moses. He remembered his last effort to be a hero. Yet, because of the conversation at the burning bush, Moses realized that he had little choice but to return to the place from which he had fled.

Imagine the inner turmoil Moses must have felt as he returned to the place where he spent the first 40 years of his life.

Things were different this time. No longer did Moses stand in the finery of Egypt, being groomed for greatness. Now he stood in the simple clothes of a nomadic shepherd to demand from the most powerful man on earth the release of Egypt's work force.

This time Moses didn't step forward in his own strength. Instead, he knew that if anything would be accomplished, it would be through God's power alone.

What was Moses' part? His responsibility was to trust God enough to stand in the Egyptian court and tell Pharaoh what God told him to say. He did not have to accomplish the deliverance, but he did have to believe God and do his part.

God's plan was to carry out a series of supernatural interventions—plagues that would attack the spiritual heart of Egypt. Each miracle-plague had a direct

correlation to the Egyptian nature-based religion. The one-and-only God would prove His authority as Creator by making His creation mock the idolatry of polytheistic Egypt.

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By the time this display of the supernatural was over, there would be no doubt in Moses' mind that he could trust God to meet the demands of the trying days ahead. Having witnessed God's power, the Hebrews could have hope in a future they had never before dared dream of.

Notice how the plagues

expressed God's righteous anger toward the idols and false gods of Egypt:

1. ***The Nile turned to blood*** (Ex. 7:14-25). The Nile was the center of Egyptian religion, and the agricultural lifeblood for the nation. The gods Hapi and Osiris supposedly protected the river.
2. ***Swarms of frogs*** (8:1-15). In Egypt, Heqt, the frog god, was a symbol of fertility and resurrection.
3. ***Dust became lice*** (8:16-19). The Hebrew word for lice, *kinnim*, refers to gnats.
4. ***Swarms*** (8:20-32). The exact nature of this swarm is not certain, but some commentators believe it was the dog fly, a bloodsucking insect that laid eggs on other

creatures and “swarmed with a voracious appetite, attacking every man, inflicting painful wounds.” Kheper, represented by the scarab beetle, was the insect god shown to be impotent by the third and fourth plagues.

5. **Pestilence** (9:1-7). This was a fatal disease for cattle, which were also considered sacred and supposedly protected by the bull-god Apis and the cow-goddess Hathor.

6. **Boils** (9:8-12). These painful sores were seen as a failure of their personal god of healing, Thoth.

7. **Storm and hail** (9:13-35). This plague destroyed the crops and food supply. Nut, the sky god, failed to stop this weather-borne disaster.

8. **Locusts** (10:1-20). A locust can eat its own

weight daily, and locust swarms of 400 square miles have been recorded (a single square-mile swarm could contain 100 to 200 million locusts). Osiris, protector of agriculture, was seen as the ineffective god in this plague.

9. **Darkness** (10:21-29). Ra, the sun god of Egypt, was the god mocked by this plague—a plague of darkness that was so thick it could be felt.

10. **Death of the firstborn of man and animal** (11:4-5; 12:29-30).

This plague marked the failure of Pharaoh himself, who was considered a god. He was powerless to stop it—even losing his own firstborn.

This was the final blow against the idolatry of Egypt. God executed His

own righteous anger on both Pharaoh and Egypt's gods. The God of the Hebrews demonstrated that He was indeed the one true God with power and authority over all creation, and that He would use any means necessary to secure the freedom of His people.

Yet, even with the suffering generated by these plagues, God displayed the depth of His mercies. He made a way of escape for the tenth and final plague. The warning was given that the firstborn would die, but God made a provision. The provision was that the firstborn did not have to die, as long as a substitute died in his place.

The firstborn would live if a flawless lamb was slaughtered and its blood placed on the doorway of the house. For those homes, the death angel would “pass over.” (The Jewish feast of Passover was begun to

remind Israel of this event.) No wonder the writer of Lamentations wrote, “[The Lord's mercies] are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (3:23). Even in the midst

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of divine judgment, God demonstrated the faithfulness of His mercy.

The great sadness about the judgments on Egypt, however, is that they never needed to happen. God is merciful and loving and provided a way for Egypt to avoid judgment, but Pharaoh hardened his heart against the warnings of Moses—and calamity fell.

It was this rebellion that brought down the wrath of God and caused the anger of Moses, who answered Pharaoh's hard heart with this cryptic prophecy of the results of the final plague:

All these your servants shall come to me and bow down to me, saying, 'Get out, and all the people who follow you!' After that I will go out. Then he went out from Pharaoh in great anger (Ex. 11:8).

This time, Moses' anger was healthy. His anger with Pharaoh mirrored God's disapproval, and the ensuing tragedy devastated an Egyptian generation. God showed His power over the gods of Egypt. He used a series of plagues to break Pharaoh's iron grip on the children of Israel. Finally, by God's power a slave nation escaped the boundaries and armies of Egypt. But the challenges facing Moses were far from over!

Moses' Anger Over The Hebrews' Idolatry (Ex. 32:19).

A few weeks into the wilderness, God called Moses to the top of a rocky barren mountain called Sinai. As the people of Israel waited below, God wrote on two stone tablets His laws for a new society.

Looking back, we can see some of what God was doing. For any nation to function in an orderly way, there must be a system of law. For Israel, however, the value of these laws was dramatically increased by the fact that they were not just a nation of people—they were God's people. God's laws followed by God's people were meant to demonstrate God's goodness to the world.

The laws of the new society were summed up in 10 rules that would indicate whether or not they were showing love for God and for one another.

An Immediate Violation (Ex. 32:1-14).
As important as these laws were, the people of Israel were breaking them even as they were being given. The first four of the Ten Commandments called for proper worship of God. Yet, as Moses lay on his face worshipping the invisible God from the top of Sinai, his brother Aaron was at its base fashioning a calf of gold for the people's hearts of stone.

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It's hard to believe how quickly the Israelites lost sight of reality. How could the invisible God who demonstrated His power

over the visible, material world through the plagues, the opening of the Red Sea, and the daily provision of food and water be reduced to a humanly-crafted idol? Like the picture of paganism found in Romans 1:18-23, they had turned to worship the creature instead of the Creator.

Their actions revealed how little they had learned. Even as God was speaking to Moses on the mountain, the Hebrews were corrupting themselves on the plain below—and now it was time to pay the price. Moses was furious.

A Return To Anger (Ex. 32:15-30). It is important that we see through Moses' eyes the events that followed. He had just spent 40 days in communion with God. Moses had seen nothing but what was pure and holy. But when he came down from the mountain, he

experienced an unexpected culture shock. The religious adultery that Moses saw at the foot of the mountain profaned the relationship with God that had been enveloping him.

How did Moses respond? What Joshua the general thought were the noises of war, Moses the prophet recognized as the tumult of sin. He probably felt a range of emotions that included fear, frustration, and despair. His actions also indicated that he was overcome with anger. In an act of apparent fury, Moses broke the tablets on which God had engraved the laws His people were now breaking. In what appears to have been an ongoing expression of smoldering anger, he destroyed the golden calf and made 3,000 worshipers drink its crushed residue.

The first half of his reaction is troubling. There can be no doubt that Israel's

idolatry deserved a strong response. But to destroy the tablets of the law written by the finger of God seems like the expression of a lost temper. As understandable

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as it is that he would be angry with his nation, it seems hard to justify his action in breaking the tablets that God had engraved with His own hand.

What a visual display this was! Their false god (the golden calf) was not able to save itself from Moses, let alone save the people from the wrath of God because of their idolatry.

Could it also be that God

used Moses' temper to tell us something about the law He was giving? As important as the law is in showing us what a right relationship with God looks like, the law cannot save those who violate it. A broken law can condemn, but the law cannot save.

Moses' Anger Over His Disappointment With God (Num.

11:10). The old saying is often true, "Be careful what you ask for, because you might get it!" After believing he had been chosen to lead the Israelites, after failing in his own strength, and then after succeeding in God's strength, Moses was the leader. Yet, this "dream come true" became a burden that he not only didn't want, but that for which he seems to have become angry with God! Notice the description that appears to reveal Moses' frustration and anger with God:

Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the Lord was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased. So Moses said to the Lord, "Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,' to the land which You swore to their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me. If You treat me like this, please

kill me here and now—if I have found favor in Your sight—and do not let me see my wretchedness!” (Num. 11:10-15).

The key word in this text is found in verse 10, where Moses is described as “displeased.” The same word is found in verse 1, but it is actually much stronger. In verse 1, God also was “displeased” (literally, “it was evil in His ears”) and the result was His intense anger. In verse 10, the word *displeased* is so similar (literally, “evil in the sight of”) that it would appear that Moses was mirroring God’s angry displeasure.

It is significant to notice, however, that God’s righteous anger was stirred against the faithlessness of the Hebrews, but Moses’ anger was directed at God Himself. At the root of his anger was pure, unadulterated frustration. Why? Because, once again, Moses had

reverted to attempting to lead in his own strength, and the pressure was overwhelming.

Moses’ Anger Over The Hebrews’ Complaining

(Num. 20:8-11). After 38 years of leading a stubborn people through the wilderness, Moses failed again. It was Moses’ anger that we see, and this time it was not a reflection of God. It was human frustration. It’s like the woman whose bumper sticker said, “I only have one nerve left, and you are starting to get on it.” Moses was fed up—and he didn’t care who knew it.

In Numbers 20, the people again complained, and again it was about lack of water. Once in the past, God had instructed Moses to strike a rock, and water would be provided (Ex. 17:6). This time, however, he was only to speak to the rock. But in anger Moses disobeyed. He displayed his

frustration with the people, calling them “rebels.” Along with Aaron, he claimed credit for the miraculous water when he said, “Must we bring water?” And then Moses struck the rock a second time (Num. 20:8-11).

The *Expositor's Bible Commentary* puts it this way:

Then, at long last, Moses exploded! Was he disappointed that the Lord had not burst out against His people, as had happened time after time? Moses burst out at them—and against the rock—to his lasting regret. . . . In his rage Moses disobeyed the clear instructions of the Lord to speak to the rock.

In the account of this event recorded in Psalm 106:32-33, Moses' angry heart was fully exposed. The New English Translation reads, “They made him angry by the waters of Meribah, and Moses

suffered because of them, for they aroused his temper, and he spoke rashly.”

How tragic. It seems that Moses had returned to where he began—presenting himself as the answer to the people's needs rather than God—just as he had done in the killing of the Egyptian taskmaster. For Moses, the battle with anger was not a struggle for a day, or a week,

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or a year, but for a lifetime. And it cost him dearly. His life's mission was terminated just short of its goal. He forfeited the privilege of leading the children of Israel into the Promised Land.

LESSONS MOSES NEEDED TO LEARN

In recent years, I have had the privilege of teaching pastors in the former Soviet Union. Many of those pastors had great insight and understanding, but the classes I taught were the first formal training they had ever received.

It should be no surprise to us that God is so creative. He's not limited to our ideas of "higher education":

- David was trained as a shepherd but appointed king over Israel.
- The disciples were trained as fishermen but called to be apostles and evangelists.
- Paul was trained as a Jewish rabbi but called to evangelize Gentiles.

For the significant lessons God wanted to teach Moses, the grace and patience of the Lord would

work over and over in his life—molding him, shaping him, teaching him. What were those lessons? As we retrace the life of Moses, we will see the lessons God wanted him to learn—a path more honorable than what Moses walked in his occasional outbursts of anger.

LESSON I: Solitude With God

Not only were David, Paul, and the Twelve greatly used of God, these individuals all had one thing in common: They were trained for service by spending significant quantities of time alone with God.

There is much to be learned in the classroom of the desert and its experience of solitude with God. It is there that we begin to grasp how great God is and how dependent on Him we are. In the wilderness we begin to discover the alternative to

angry, self-protecting ways.

For Moses, the desert classroom was the land of Midian, a portion of the Sinai peninsula. It was a mountainous area with some forage for the flocks of the nomads. Moses had arrived there because of his flight from Egypt—the

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consequence of murdering the Egyptian taskmaster. Yet, how wonderful it is that God took this wilderness experience and worked it for good in Moses' life. The time of exile became a time of preparation, training, and spiritual development.

It was in this land

with these people that Moses found refuge and peace. Like the Hebrews, the Midianites were descendants of Abraham. They befriended this “man without a country” and gave him a home, a family, and a life. Moses had traveled far away from the things that he had grown to consider his destiny. It was here, in this simple life, that Moses began to learn the lessons God desired to teach him.

Remember that Moses had grown up in the schools of Egypt, which were rooted in polytheism. The Midianites, however, were monotheistic and still committed to the God of Abraham. Jethro, who became Moses' father-in-law, was the priest of Midian (Ex. 2:15-22; 3:1). It is likely at this point in history that Midian was the only place where Moses could have learned about the true God—and that's

where God drove him! In the training ground of the desert, Moses would meet God.

Not only is God aware of what is needed for our spiritual development, He is capable of providing it. Not only is He capable of

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providing it, He is relentless in bringing it about. I suppose there were times when Moses shook his head and wondered, “How did I ever get here?” I can imagine it because I have thought those same things myself, many times, as God has continued to unfold His

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plan for my own spiritual training.

LESSON 2: Humility

In Acts 7:25, Stephen said that Moses knew he was to be Israel’s deliverer. He had killed the Egyptian in his attempt to deliver his people from Egypt in his own strength. He had sought to be the deliverer without any thought of God. But where did he end up after his failed attempt at leadership? Look how far he had fallen:

- He was not in a palace but a desert (humbling).
- He was not leading a nation but tending sheep (very humbling).
- He was not in the service of the great Pharaoh but in the service of his father-in-law (radically humbling!).

This was not a short “vacation Bible school.” He spent 40 long years in the desert learning to commune with God, escaping the false

values and dangerous religious ideas of Egypt, and sifting out the truths that his parents and Jethro had taught him.

When God called Moses at the end of those years, what had he learned? He had learned to be content with a lowly shepherd's task. He had learned his own frailty. He had begun to learn meekness in the hard life of the wilderness (Num. 12:3).

LESSON 3: Dependence

After long years of preparation, Moses was ready for the task. The humbling of the great man of Egypt was a vital part of Moses' training for leadership, and God was behind it all, equipping His man for service.

Once the time for deliverance had come, God prepared to respond to the cries of the people in

bondage (Ex. 2:23-25) and called 80-year-old Moses to the work for which he had been born. While tending the flocks, Moses saw a bush that was burning—but not being burned up (Ex. 3:1-2). This was something astounding, and Moses felt compelled to investigate. Now came Moses' first test: Was he humble enough?

Unequivocally, the answer was yes. On God's command, Moses humbled himself and removed his shoes. After all this time, his dream job was offered, but he repeatedly turned it down. Why? Because he now felt incapable of it. Forty years of living with sheep had taught him lessons of humility that he had needed to learn, and he displayed it by giving God a dismal review of his shortcomings, not a résumé of his glorious achievements (Ex. 3-4).

Could this be the same

Moses who was “mighty in words and deeds”? Moses was saying, “I am a nobody. I don’t have all the answers. I have no significance. My greatest abilities are of no value.” That was definitely not what Moses thought 40 years earlier. The time of training had been well spent. Instead of trusting his own strength and wisdom, Moses would now lean on God—and it would make all the difference!

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The Lord had prepared Moses for 80 years, and He would use him to bring His people out of slavery and into the land of promise. Jehovah had patiently and

carefully invested in Moses—and Moses had grown in humility. Like a potter working the clay, God had worked on His man. Remember, “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

LESSON 4: Spiritual Confidence

Moses stood up to Pharaoh in God’s strength and became His instrument to deliver the children of Israel. I can only imagine the joyous relief it was for them to leave 400 years of pain and slavery behind.

Unfortunately, the joy was short-lived. Shortly after they began their exodus, the Hebrews began to show Moses what pressure really looked like. And to make matters worse, Pharaoh had second thoughts about giving up his labor force.

The situation came to a climax on the shores of the

Red Sea as Moses became the human rope in a titanic tug of war. How did he face the pressure? By confident trust in the God who had called him, equipped him, and granted him success in securing freedom for His people. Moses' trust was based in his . . .

Confidence that God had led them to this point. Terrifying as it was, God led them by giving them a visible sign. Although He is the invisible God, He appeared to them in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21-22). Wherever the cloud or pillar moved, the people moved. That included the shores of the Red Sea with the armies of Pharaoh breathing down their necks.

Confidence that God was still superior to the circumstances. Moses had learned well from the plagues. God had defeated

the false gods of Egypt, the forces of nature, and the stubbornness of Pharaoh to release His people from bondage. It would be reasonable to assume that this challenge was not beyond His ability.

Confidence that God still intended to deliver them. After all God had done to bring them out of Egypt, the people still didn't believe that He would protect them. They had heard about a burning bush speaking its promise of freedom. But they heard the story secondhand. Moses, however, had been the direct recipient of the promise and had good reason to believe that God still intended to keep it.

But the people didn't catch Moses' faith—and the pressure increased. As Pharaoh's armies bore down on them, they showed an absolute absence of trust in God, in spite of the

powerful, supernatural plagues He used to rescue them. They asked if Moses had brought them to the desert to die (Ex. 14:11). They second-guessed their long-sought-after freedom and concluded that it wasn't all they thought it would be. They believed they were better off as live slaves than as dead freedmen (Ex. 14:12).

What was their problem? They had lost perspective. It was a combination of fear of the unknown and a lack of future focus that was at the heart of their complaint. They looked back to the familiar and assumed it had to be better than the unknown future.

Moses responded to the pressure by challenging the people to have confidence in God as he had learned to do. God, who would make for them a path in the desert, made for them a highway through the Red

Sea while blocking the advance of Pharaoh's armies. Before, they were pinched by two unconquerable problems. Now, there was only God's protective care. And not

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only did God make a way through the Red Sea, He collapsed the water on the Egyptians, removing the threat completely.

The lesson of spiritual confidence learned at the burning bush and in the court of Pharaoh had taken deep root in Moses' heart. And in a key moment of crisis, that confidence

carried him through the danger of the moment.

LESSON 5: **Compassion**

Moses' anger with the people worshipping the golden calf appears to have been the same anger that had driven him to kill the taskmaster so many years earlier. But, on further evaluation, we see an element to his anger on that occasion that is striking. His anger was laced up with compassion! How do we know? Notice what happened when Moses left the people and returned to the mountain to the presence of Jehovah:

Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." Then Moses returned to the Lord and said,

"Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written" (Ex. 32:30-32).

Moses' anger in this situation was very different from that displayed years earlier in Egypt. Ephesians 4:26 challenges us to "be angry, and do not sin." There is a time for anger—when God is being dishonored. That's not the anger of personal agenda. It's the anger that is consumed with the honor of God. It's the same kind of anger that caused Jesus to make a whip and clear out the dishonored temple in Jerusalem (Jn. 2:13-17).

The purity of this anger is seen in what Moses did next: He interceded for these people, even to the point of offering himself to God as a

substitute for the sinning nation! This dramatic offer displayed just how different his anger was, and how far Moses had come. No longer the arrogant man of Egypt or the broken man of the desert, he was now a man of God. Now Moses was the man he needed to be—consumed with the goodness of God and concerned for the people of God.

Moses was the man he needed to be—consumed with the goodness of God and concerned for the people of God.

It is a balance that comes into a life that has learned to worship in the presence of God by the standard of His Word. Moses interceded for those who had sinned so dramatically. He had

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learned what true compassion was, and he had placed that compassion on the altar of sacrifice for the people—even though they had sinned terribly against the holiness of God.

LESSON 6: Accountability

We saw in Numbers 20 that Moses became angry with the people because they complained about their lack of water. In anger, he struck the rock when God had clearly instructed him to speak to the rock.

It seems like such a small thing, doesn't it? How much difference is there between speaking and striking? It was only a rock. But in God's eyes, the difference was enormous! It was a power play on Moses' part, a declaration that somehow it was within his power to get water for the people. In anger, Moses attempted to take for himself the glory

that should have gone to God—the true provider for all the needs of His people.

And then came the consequences—just as there had been consequences in Moses' life for killing the taskmaster; just as there had been consequences for Pharaoh's refusal to heed the warnings of the plagues delivered by God upon his nation; just as there had been consequences for the idolatry at Sinai.

By failing to give God glory, Moses undid years of service in an instant and was forbidden by God to enter the land of promise that was now in sight. After decades of waiting to lead his people into the Promised Land, that privilege would pass from Moses to another. What a sad ending.

In the movie *The Natural*, Roy Hobbs is a young man with limitless baseball ability on his way to the major leagues. Then, in an instant

of time, one foolish choice took it all away. Years later, from a hospital bed, he explains his wasted life to his childhood sweetheart with these profound words: “Some mistakes you never stop paying for.”

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Such is the nature of the choices we make—and their consequences. Our lives rise, fall, and turn on our choices, and often are never the same because of them. The choices may be well-planned or spontaneous, but the results always seem to last longer than the choices themselves. Moses' choices, too often laced with anger, finally robbed him of his 80-year-old dream.

FAITH IS THE VICTORY

The story is told of a school principal who was passed over for a promotion. His argument? “I have 25 years of experience!” But the superintendent responded, “No, Joe. You have had 1 year of experience 25 times.” For Moses, like Peter walking on the Sea of Galilee, there was great safety as long as his eyes were focused on his Lord. The moment he was distracted by the problems or people around him, he was in danger of relying on himself—and falling into the vortex of frustrated anger.

First John 5:4-5 says, “Whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” We cannot do it alone. We desperately need the Lord.

If you don't know this

Lord, there's only one place to begin. The Bible tells us to recognize our failures, frailty, and sin, and to rely on Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross for forgiveness. The life of faith begins with the faith that believes God for salvation. Trust Him today.

If you're a believer, don't lose sight of your dependence on God. The only answer for anger is seen in the example of Christ, who humbled Himself in obedience to the Father's plan and purpose (Phil. 2:8). We are to have the mind of Christ (v.5) by acting in humility—not in self-assertion and anger. When Moses was humble, he was useful to God. When his anger took over, he dishonored Him.

May we learn from Moses' examples, both good and bad, to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God (1 Pet. 5:5-6).

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