

Welcome

What's the last time you were asked to do something you felt really unqualified for?

<interview with Amanda>

I don't know anyone who enjoys feeling unqualified. We want to know we have the competence to do the things we're called to. We want to feel proud of what we've accomplished, and when we step into something we've never done before, we want to know we can do a good job.

We don't want to fail.

We don't want to look like fools.

We don't want to end up worse off than we were before.

But the reality is that God is doing something new among us. And you know who's qualified to do new things?

Nobody.

I want to consider what it looks like when God calls us to an uncertain future, when all we have to rely on is God's promise.

Not our skills or expertise.

Not our experience or training.

Not our talents or qualifications.

Just God's promise to be present, to guide and provide for us.

The truth is, friends, God's faithful presence with us is all we need. It doesn't feel like it, but God has a long history of putting us exactly where we need to be, if we'll trust and offer a faith-filled Yes!

Message

We're in a series called New Leaf. Now, I know you're thinking that this feels like more of a spring series but I live in Texas, which quit having real seasons a few years ago. And this is a series about change. Change happens to us all the time, at every level. We experience personal change in the form of new relationships, the end of long-term relationships. We experience it in changing jobs. Having kids, kids growing up. We experience change when we move and the world around us changes when we stay put.

And of course our church is changing. For almost 15 years, we've been a building-centric, locally focused congregation. But over the last few years, our circumstances have changed and we just voted on a new direction for our congregation. That's scary. I don't know very many people who love change, who seek it out. Most of us prefer predictability and stability, and one thing we know about change is that it's seldom predictable or stable.

So we're spending six weeks looking at some people in Scripture who had to face big changes - changes that felt as existential as the changes we're facing right now. We're going to explore the nature of the changes they faced, compare them to the changes facing us, and we're going to ask what we can learn about how to be faithful now from how they were faithful then.

We began by looking at the role of faith in change. We saw Abram's encounter with God and how he responded with faith in the face of uncertainty. Last week, we explored Joseph's story and saw what it looks like to have faith God is at work even when our Plan As fall through.

Today, I want to address a big reason a lot of us are afraid of change, particularly big, existential changes like those we're on the cusp of here at Catalyst:

We're pretty sure we don't have what it takes.

This is that phrase, "The devil you know is better than the devil you don't." It doesn't matter how broken the current thing is - it's something we know. We're familiar with it. We understand it. We've learned to accommodate ourselves to it.

And the new thing? We're not sure what that will require of us. New skills we have to learn. Talents we have to uncover. Comfort zones we'll have to step out of. New muscles we have to develop.

We don't know what the future will hold if we change, so we can't really be prepared. And no one likes to feel unprepared, unequipped or unqualified.

We shouldn't be surprised, then, when facing a big change, that our natural tendency is to shy away. But when God is calling us to something new, faith requires us to follow into the unknown. Faith requires courage. Trust not in our own abilities, but in God's presence with us and provision for us.

Turn with us to Exodus 3.

We're hanging out with Moses today. About 400 years have passed since Joseph saved Egypt from the famine. The Hebrews remained in Egypt and flourished, but now a new dynasty has taken over the Empire, and they've enslaved the Hebrews.

God is about to initiate a regime change, and God has chosen Moses as the guy who's going to lead the revolution. Moses is currently living in hiding - he killed an Egyptian overseer and fled the country. He ended up marrying a shepherdess and working for her father-in-law. For a guy who was raised in Pharaoh's palace, he's fallen about as far as possible.

This is the famous Burning Bush scene, where God appears to Moses and calls him to be his people's liberator. But Moses is *extremely* reluctant to join God's revolution. I want to do something a bit different with today's reading:

Rather than read the whole thing straight through, I want you to skip with me through Moses' objections. I want to look at each one and hear echoes of our own anxieties. Then I want to look at how God responds to Moses, because I think you'll see some big surprises. So let's begin with God's call:

Then the LORD told him, "I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land... Look! The cry of the people of Israel has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them. Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt." — Exodus 3:7-10

In Moses' defense, this is a *huge* calling. God is calling him to oppose the most powerful Empire in the world. It's a big, frightening task. It's world-changing.

The kind of church God is calling us to create is similarly scary. We're breaking out of a mold that's been around for hundreds of years, doing something that looks more like those first few hundred years of the church than what any of us is used to. And on the other hand, it's super different from even those churches. It's radical. We don't know what the next six months, year, five years hold.

No wonder Moses asks the most obvious question, "Why me?"

But Moses protested to God, "Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?" — Exodus 3:10-11

Do you feel that? Why us? What makes us so different from a thousand other churches with bigger staffs and way more resources, churches who aren't exhausted from all we've been

through in the last decade? Surely if God wants to do something radical, something new, there are better people to call?

Moses' next objection is a little more practical:

But Moses protested, "If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they will ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what should I tell them?" — [Exodus 3:13](#)

Remember how God just sort of randomly chose Abram? Well this is sort of what's happening again. Moses is supposed to go to these folks who have been enslaved and say, "Hey good news... I was just walking along not enslaved and your god showed up in a bush and told me to come liberate y'all!" Really? Why would they believe me?!

Again, I get Moses' objection here. I feel it when I look at our call: we live in a country *saturated* in god-talk. From our governmental meetings to our football games, people pray to God everywhere. Politicians quote the Bible in their speeches. Corporations call employees evangelists. And even though the number is lower than it's ever been, more than 80% of Americans say they believe in God (that's 4 of ever 5 people).

But we're not being called by some generic god of good vibes and positive energy. We're called by Jesus, the one who liberates the oppressed, opposes the powerful and lifts up the vulnerable. We're trying to celebrate a very specific god in a culture that doesn't like specific claims about God. Are they going to listen? Are they going to care? Why would they bother, when Christianity has such an awful reputation?

Moses was afraid they wouldn't listen. I get that fear.

As it turns out, a big part of Moses' objections stemmed from his own insecurities:

But Moses pleaded with the LORD, "O Lord, I'm not very good with words. I never have been, and I'm not now, even though you have spoken to me. I get tongue-tied, and my words get tangled." — [Exodus 4:10](#)

Whew... it took a bit friends, but it's getting real. When I look at the call ahead of us, I'm deeply afraid of my own inadequacies. Like Moses, I'm pretty sure I don't have the skill set God really needs to pull this off. What about you? As you consider what's ahead for us, as you consider what will be asked of you, do you feel that same sense of inadequacy?

But Moses again pleaded, "Lord, please! Send anyone else." — [Exodus 4:13](#)

I love how honest this prayer is. "Literally anyone else, God. Please!"

Moses has made a little life for himself in the wilderness. He has a wife and a job. He's comfortable. It's not the life he was born into, and certainly his life hasn't played out the way he thought, but he's doing *fine*. And probably most of the time, he's gotten good at not thinking about his parents and siblings, his cousins and aunts and uncles all still trapped in slavery.

God's call upends that. To say Yes to God means to close this chapter of his life forever. It means to risk everything on a promise that the God speaking from the bush will deliver him yet again from the Pharaoh.

I hear echoes of Moses' prayer in Jesus' the night before he was crucified, when he asked God to take the cup of suffering from him.

But, ultimately, both Moses and Jesus said yes, despite their fears, anxieties and protests.

Can we make space in our worship for our fears, anxieties and protests? Can we make those part of our worship?

Song

So far, we've looked at what Moses said to God. Now I want to look at what God says to Moses. I think you'll pick up on a theme.

When Moses asks, "Who am I to go to Pharaoh?":

God said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain. — Exodus 3:12

God could have said, "Uh, well Moses you grew up in Pharaoh's palace. You have the education of an Egyptian and the ethnicity of a Hebrew. You're sort of perfect for this." But instead, God says, "I will be with you."

When Moses asks why the people would believe him:

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you'... — Exodus 3:14-15a

God does two things here: God gives Moses God's true name - this is the first time in Scripture this has happened. So Moses has this deep, intimate encounter with God, where God gives Moses a glimpse of God's true self. And then God grounds their identity in God's history with Moses' people. "I am the god of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

And to Moses' final objection - that he's not qualified to be a public speaker:

Then the LORD asked Moses, "Who makes a person's mouth? Who decides whether people speak or do not speak, hear or do not hear, see or do not see? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go! I will be with you as you speak, and I will instruct you in what to say." — Exodus 4:11-12

I love this. "Oh, your mouth doesn't work? Who do you think made mouths, my dude?" But beyond God's sarcasm is a promise: God takes full responsibility for equipping Moses for the task God has called Moses to.

In fact, as we look back, again and again this is God's answer to Moses. Moses says, "What about me? What about the other Hebrews? What about Pharaoh?"

And God's reply is always, "I Am."

The success or failure of Moses' mission isn't up to Moses. Because it's not really Moses' mission. It's God's mission, and Moses has been invited into it.

So too for us. The world is changing. Our culture is changing. And there are a whole bunch of people who've been hurt, oppressed, crushed by a version of Christianity that's been very popular for a lot of years.

God is not deaf to their cries. And God has invited us to be on the front lines of something new, a revolution in religion. We have a thousand and one legitimate reasons it won't work. Some of them have to do with the culture, the people. A lot of them have to do with the people God called. With me.

But this is not *my* revolution. This is not *our* movement. This is God's new thing. We just get to be part of it.

Communion + Examen

We gather at Jesus' table to imitate Jesus' faith

How have my actions been shaped by trust in God in the last week?

Where have I hid from God behind anxieties, fears or insecurities?

What anxieties, fears or insecurities might keep me from following God into this next phase of our church?

How can I make space to rest in God's promises this week?