

## CALLING ALL FATHERS

*The Life of Moses: Deliverance through Faith.*

**Exodus 4:18-26**

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Well there's a lot of chatter these days about revival. People coming to know the Lord and Christians gathering to worship for days and weeks on end. Praise the Lord if it's genuine. I'm all about it. But maybe right now is a good time to remind ourselves that revival isn't just about a spiritual high for a couple of days, weeks, or months. The hope of revival, at least in my mind, is to see long term, disciple-making, Christ-followers made. And because of our passage in Exodus this week, I can't help but think about the consistent, long-term, generational, spiritual revival that would occur if men, young and old, husbands and fathers, stepped up to the plate to be the spiritual leaders they're called to be. That's sort of what we want to look at this morning as we continue our study on the life of Moses from Exodus 4:18-26.

Last week we saw God's commissioning of Moses. God appears to him at age 80 and calls him to his greatest task in life—to deliver Israel from Pharaoh's hands. But Moses didn't exactly accept this call with a jovial spirit due to his previous blunder in Egypt. In fact, he made multiple excuses—even trying to talk God out of choosing him. But even after all of Moses' objections and hesitations, he eventually answers God's call but with some compromise. It's not exactly the best picture of our beloved Moses but that's where we pick it up in verse 18.

*18 Then Moses departed and returned to his father-in-law Jethro, and said to him, "Please, let me go, that I may return to my brothers who are in Egypt, and see if they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace." 19 Now the Lord said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead." 20 So Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. Moses also took the staff of God in his hand.*

### I. **MOSES' LEAVE OF ABSENCE. (VV. 18-20)**

Now that Moses has been called of God, he has some family business to tend too. Since he is married to Jethro's daughter and is a key member in the family's shepherding operation, he respectfully asks for leave to go to Egypt and "*see if his brethren in Egypt are still alive.*" That sounds like a strange way to phrase things, but it does remind us of the length of time that has passed since he's been in Egypt (40 years) and the severity of the conditions his people are in.<sup>1</sup>

It also reminds me of how we might **communicate God's call to those we love and who might depend on us**. If God's call on your life leads you to make some life-altering decisions—like leaving an employer or moving away from those you love—Moses provides an example for us. Honestly, he's probably not the greatest example, but it does get the discussion rolling a bit. If God's call involves major life changes, that **needs to be sensitively communicated** to those who depend on us. I say *sensitively* because calls can be unexpected like Moses'. It wasn't in anybody's plans, which means it's going to conflict with expectations. Or you may have been

processing God's call for years and it has cemented in your heart, but it might be strange, even frightening news to others who depend on us. It's going to be a shock if you haven't already shared thoughts about God's potential leading along the way—especially with your spouse. Between spouses, this is not something that happens overnight. It's a prayerful decision to take together. It can also be very upsetting for parents or in-laws, especially those who aren't believers or don't have the same level of commitment to Christ. They may not understand the priority to follow Christ above all else (Luke 14:26) or the concept of a call. This is a time to tread prayerfully with caution, wisdom, grace, and patience.<sup>2</sup> I think Moses does that.

Second, **Moses didn't feel the need to share every detail** of his call. We could debate about Moses' courage—or lack thereof—to state his true intentions for going to Egypt, but suffice it to say that communicating every detail isn't always helpful. Jesus did say no prophet is welcome in his hometown and among his own relatives (Mk 6:4). On the other hand, if you are in the position of Jethro, the parents or in-laws of someone who has received a call from God into a specific door of service (like missions or the pastorate), this is a good reminder for you to beware of trying to prevent or manipulate what God has called them to do (i.e., grandkids).

But as we move on take note that Moses here is pictured as a good **husband** and **father** and **son-in-law**. He respectfully consults with Jethro. He also provides his family with a donkey to ride on back to Egypt while he walks. That **father-son image** continues throughout the passage.

*21 And the Lord said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. 22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the Lord says: "Israel is My son, My firstborn. 23 So I said to you, 'Let My son go so that he may serve Me'; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I am going to kill your son, your firstborn.'"*

## II. YAHWEH AS FATHER. (VV. 21-23)

This material continues the theme revolving around the relationship of fathers to son.<sup>3</sup> As you can tell, in a deep, theological way, the **Exodus is a story about fathers and sons**. Moses' message from the Lord for Pharaoh is to let His people, His "*firstborn son*" —**the nation of Israel**—go, so that they can worship Him freely in the wilderness. And if Pharaoh doesn't, well, then, he is going to lose his firstborn son, which is exactly what happens in the last plague that causes Pharaoh to finally say, "*Fine. Let the Israelites go.*"

But you might have noticed with curiosity that **God is said to harden Pharaoh's heart**. Throughout the Exodus narrative, the "hardening of the heart" is a prominent motif or theme, mentioned some twenty times. A hardened heart basically means that Pharaoh will, in a negative sense, be strengthened in his resolve or determination to not let Israel go and be judged by God.<sup>4</sup> We'll talk about this more another time but times throughout the account, Pharaoh will harden his own stubborn heart. But also, at times God will also harden Pharaoh's heart. And that seems kind of strange to us, right? If God wants Pharaoh to let Israel go, why would He prolong it? So, just a couple of thoughts.

One is that Pharaoh is **already jaded** against God. He already has a hard, stubborn heart (Ex. 7:14). God is just confirming it through the signs just like Jesus' signs did to people. Some people saw Jesus' signs and believed. Others were hardened. The same sun that melts the ice, hardens the clay.

Second, this divine **judgement**. The status of Israel as God's firstborn son explains God's quarrel with Pharaoh and why His judgement is so harsh.<sup>5</sup> God will protect His "son". You have to think also that this is a *lex talionis* judgement. An eye for an eye, a son for a son. This is God's judgment on Egypt for the infanticide of all the Hebrew male infants that have been exposed or slaughtered at Pharaoh's request (Ex. 1-2). You have to remember too, that this is not just a battle with Pharaoh. This is a spiritual, cosmic battle with Satan who is trying to prevent Messiah from being born who will crush Satan's head. God is judging wicked men and the false, demonic gods of Egypt.

The main reason is that **God is forever getting glory through His sovereign demonstration over Pharaoh**. Proverbs says the heart of the king—and anyone's heart for that matter—is in the hands of Lord to channel it wherever He wishes (Prov. 21:1; Acts 16:14; Rom. 11:25). He has power to open and harden hearts. God's glory and presence is made manifest to the whole world at this time and to every generation since through the prolonging and increasing nature of the plagues. God says in **Exodus 7:3**, "*But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.*" **Exodus 10:1** says, "*I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, that you may know that I am the Lord.*" My encouragement to us in light of such a sovereign display is that we bow in humility. We are the clay. He is the Potter (Rom. 9:14-24). And just to praise God for His inscrutable ways (Rom. 11:33-26).

A final reason is that through the plagues God is also going to give us one of the greatest Jewish festivals pointing to Christ's substitutionary death: **Passover**. God passes over all the Israelites who are covered by the blood of the lamb (Ex. 12). The Exodus prophetically provides a picture of **Jesus' work** for us so that we would fear Him and trust Jesus as Savior. Both the Israelites and us are saved through the blood of the lamb by faith in Him so that God gets all the glory (Eph. 2:8-10).

### III. **MOSES AS FATHER. (VV. 24-26)**

*24 But it came about at the overnight encampment on the way, that the Lord met Moses, and sought to put him to death. 25 So Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet; and she said, "You are indeed a groom of blood to me!" 26 So He left him alone. At that time she said, "You are a groom of blood"—because of the circumcision.*

So honestly, this is one of the more bizarre texts in Scripture. You won't find it in any children's story book, I'll tell you that. It's also one of the most difficult texts to interpret in Exodus due to its brevity and the ambiguities in the Hebrew construction (that aren't evident in most of our

English Bibles). But many translators have come to the same conclusion that it is Moses who is under the death-grip of God and his son who had to be circumcised.

One the way back to Egypt, God confronts Moses with some sort of illness that incapacitates him and won't let him go any farther until he deals with this issue. If it seems like a shock that God would confront a man whom He has called into service, we need to remind ourselves that being a **leader of God's people comes with great responsibility and accountability**. Leaders of God's people and teachers of God's Word will incur a stricter judgement of their works (Jas. 3:1). That's why you want to make *certain* you are called by God, sticking to His Word, and not just driven by your own ambitions. Leaders are held to higher standards. There are certain qualifications required for the office of elder/overseer (Tit. 1; 1 Tim. 3).

I was also reminded too that **Moses is not alone in his struggle with God**. God **tests** his leaders and **disciplines** those whom He loves (Heb. 12:7-11). His discipline is proof that we are His children. So even though Moses is called by God and Moses doesn't have to fear the men who sought his life in Egypt anymore, he still has to fear the living God as a heavenly Father who disciplines His sons.<sup>6</sup> We all do. That is a fear you never graduate from. It's not fear of condemnation, but correction (Rom. 8:1). We have assurance of salvation, yes (1 John 5:11-13), but we are still accountable to God for how we live and operate (1 Cor. 11:27-32).

At one point in Genesis, God tested **Abraham** with regard to his son (Gen. 22). At another point, He, the pre-incarnate Christ, came down and wrestled with **Jacob** all night to teach him a lesson. God is teaching Moses a lesson too. I think the lesson is this: that **if you're going to lead God's people, you have to follow God yourself. How could Moses faithfully lead God's "son" – Israel – if he is not faithfully leading his own son, or own family, in the things of the Lord?** By the way, that's also one of the qualifications for church leadership too (1 Tim. 3:4-5). Elders are to manage their own household well and bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). So here's my big principle for us today:

**In carrying out our heavenly call, we must continually deal with areas of spiritual neglect.**

(1 Cor. 9:24-10:13; 11:27-32; Eph. 4:1; Phil. 3:12-14)

We must walk worthy of our heavenly call with circumspection (Eph. 4:1); aware of your **walk** with the Lord; circumstances and consequences; where you are at and where you are going (Gal. 5:16-24). And one of the areas that Moses has been **neglecting** in his walk was apparently as a **spiritual leader** of his home, involving the circumcision of his son (possibly his firstborn Gershom since that is the theme here).

Remember, since Abraham, God commands from Genesis 17 was that all the Hebrew males would be circumcised as an infant on the 8<sup>th</sup> day. This is something that set the Hebrew people apart. And God used this bloody, humbling act as the **sign of the covenant with God** in the Old Testament (OT). One thing I do want to make clear again for us is that **circumcision is not a requirement for salvation in the OT or NT** (Gal. 6:5). Abraham was justified—credited with God's righteousness—not by works, but by faith—*before* he was circumcised (Rom. 4:9-13). Circumcision was only a seal of **the righteousness of faith** he *already possessed*. So also, today, baptism doesn't save us. It is like a seal, or a sign, that we have believed in Christ and desire to

follow Him as members of the New Covenant (Acts 8:37). It's not for physical babies, but "newborns" spiritually in Christ (John 3:1-8). Paul says that the *true circumcision* God is after is a circumcision of the heart—pruning of the heart—by the Spirit of God (Rom. 2:29). He removes our hard hearts of stone and gives us a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26). I like what Al Mohler said about this: if we think circumcision strange, we should notes that the cross, too, is an outdated, bloody and bizarre offense that is foolish to the world (1 Cor. 1:18-31).

But back to the story.... Somehow **Zipporah**, Moses' wife, understands she needs to step in and circumcise her son for him (maybe God revealed this to Moses, but Moses is incapacitated at his point). And by her actions in doing what appears to be disgusting and detestable to her, this Gentile woman saves the life of Moses, her son, and Israel.<sup>7</sup> And she calls Moses a bridegroom of blood. I like how the Tyndale Bible of 1526 says: "*bloody husband art thou vnto me.*" But here's the thing, and **why this is God's goodness**: unless this young lad is circumcised, or any other Israelite for that matter, he will not survive the Passover when the angel of death works through Egypt on the night of the last plague. All Hebrew males must make sure they are circumcised—identified with the covenant of God—before the night of wrath comes (Gen. 17; Ex. 2:24; 6:4-5). So this is all preparation for the Exodus.

**In summary**, I want to return to the thoughts of spiritual revival. As Christians, we long for genuine spiritual revival. But not just a spiritual high for a couple of weeks or months. We're talking about something that will last, hopefully, for generations. Genuine revival produces disciple-making Christ followers. If anything like that is going to happen, let's understand it must be a work of the Lord in peoples' hearts as we share the gospel. Second, godly men and women who step up and lead their families in the Lord can make an incredible difference. And praise God for the Zipporah's out there, but I want to focus on the men this morning because it's sad when, for example, wives have to do what God is calling the husbands, or men, to do. But this has been the trend in recent decades: women dragging their husbands to church. I praise God for the men in our church, but this passage should make us do some introspection here and think. Am I really leading my family in the Lord? By God's grace, how could I be better at it?

This is important. It's critical in our culture today. The **influence of a father on the home is incredibly powerful**. If a man isn't a humble, servant-hearted, spiritual leader—who doesn't follow the Lord himself—the odds are that his children will follow suit. I can hear kids saying to mom on Sunday morning, "*Why do I have to go to church. Dad doesn't!*" That's sad.

The enemy knows how important fathers are. He is behind this **culture war on men** today. The biblical role of men as shepherds, both in their homes and in the church, is under attack in our society. God made men to be the shepherds, the heads, of the home and leaders of the church. He designed them for this. This is timeless truth in God's Word as early as Genesis 1-2 where Adam was created first and made to lead his wife, Eve, who came from him (Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Cor. 11:1-12). However, in our current culture war with feminism and wokeism, where they're trying to "blur the lines" between men and women, men are being *shamed* and *pressured* by the voices out there to compromise this natural and spiritual reality. They're made to feel like guilty bigots for being men. Masculinity is preached as toxic. Every superhero movie has a woman-version superhero now.

Socialist, communist Marxism continues to make inroads into our culture as well. And Marxism doesn't put up with competing authorities. In Marxism the government is the sole authority and everyone is to be subject to it. This means that the biblical, nuclear family design that places the father as the head of the household, must go. Marxists don't want kids subject to anyone but the government. As far as Marxists are concerned, a parent's job is to feed their physical bodies and the government will see to it that they feed their souls and develop their worldview for you. Remember *Black Lives Matter* used to plainly state on their website that they seek to "dismantle the patriarchal practice" adopted by the western society from Scripture.

Besides these external attacks, because of the fall into sin, **men struggle within themselves**. They are continually battling sinful **passivity** and **complacency**. Ever since the fall in Genesis 3:16 the tendency is for the husband to be passive and the wife to dominate him. So men are always in danger of **neglecting** and **overlooking** their spiritual leadership responsibilities.

In order to move on in God's call for him, Moses had to remedy his sin of omission. Circumcision is a private thing. Nobody knew about it. *But the Lord did*. And that's what matters. He had a closet skeleton to clean out. God knows what's under our rugs even if our friends don't. So maybe the Holy Spirit has his finger on an **area of neglect** in your life today. God might be saying something like look, "*You have a heavenly call. Your my son. And because I love you and I want to continue to use you, you need to deal with this issue in your life.*" Maybe it's a relationship that needs reconciled. An apology that needs given. Maybe it's a sin you've become passive with. An addiction that the Holy Spirit wants to replace with self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). Maybe it's anger or anxiety. Prayer life. Water baptism.

As we take communion this morning, let's pray that the Lord would reveal these areas of neglect in our hearts and lives. This is a time for that introspection and staying current with the Lord. **1 Corinthians 11:31-32** say, "*But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.*" You know Paul in Corinthians (and I would love to do a sermon on this sometime) analogizes the Israelites' exodus. He parallels their walk through the Red Sea with water baptism and their eating of the manna with communion. He does that to make the point that even though they were baptized and took communion, they were disciplined for their spiritual neglect of sin in their lives.<sup>8</sup> They were laid low in the wilderness as an example for us (1 Cor. 9:24-10:13). The song we're going to play for communion this morning is directed at the men here. It's called "Calling All Fathers."

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<sup>1</sup> John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 55.

<sup>2</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Moses, A Man of Selfless Dedication* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 133-134.

<sup>3</sup> Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2014), 224.

<sup>4</sup> See Titus Kennedy, *Unearthing the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2020), 52-53.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2105), 115-116.

<sup>6</sup> Albert Mohler, "Did God Try to Kill Moses?"

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 566, 582-585.