

Where Is God?

1. Warm up: We're in the Halloween season. If you were to carve a pumpkin face that captures how you're feeling this week, what would the face look like and what feeling would it be meant to convey?
2. In Week 2 of our study of Moses, we saw how, in a fit of anger, Moses killed an Egyptian taskmaster who was abusing one of his enslaved relatives, then had to flee Egypt to escape the wrath of Pharaoh. As we pick up the story this week, Moses has been living in the Sinai wilderness for almost 40 years, tending sheep, when he encounters an amazing burning bush. Let's read Exodus 3, selected verses, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. After some 40 years living in obscurity in the wilderness, how would you guess Moses was feeling about his life and his relationship with God?
 - b. The bush Moses encountered was an amazing site not just because it was ablaze, but because it was not being consumed. Have you ever seen something that was so unusual you almost couldn't believe your eyes? If so, tell us about it.
 - c. How do you think Moses felt when he heard a voice speaking to him from the burning bush?
3. The first thing the voice said was, "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." In the ancient world, it was customary to remove your shoes out of reverence when entering a temple because temples were believed to house the concentrated presence of a god. In our Bible story, Moses was startled because he never expected to encounter God on an ordinary work day out in the middle of nowhere on some godforsaken mountain in the wilderness. From this we drew a key insight: **God is everywhere and in everything, even the most unlikely places.**
 - a. Do you believe God's presence is more intense in a temple or church setting? Why or why not?
 - b. What's the holiest place you've ever experienced?
 - c. In Genesis 28:16, another Bible character (Jacob) encountered God when he too was on the run, scared, and exhausted, sleeping out in the open beneath the sky. After encountering God in a dream, Jacob exclaimed, "Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it. . . ! How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." When in your life have you encountered God in an unlikely place or situation?
 - d. Read the excerpt from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem Aurora Leigh, as printed on p. 3. As you read her words, what are your thoughts?

- e. What's the most challenging situation you're facing in your life right now? How would it feel to believe God is right there with you, intensely present, in that very situation? Do you believe it?
4. When Moses heard God say, "I have observed the misery of [the Hebrew] people in Egypt . . . , and I have come down to deliver them," Moses must have been thrilled . . . until God went on to say, "So come, Moses, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt." Moses was stunned and reluctant and made lots of excuses. From this we drew a second lesson. **Yes, God is present with us in every situation, but God doesn't just do it all for us. Despite our weaknesses and self-doubt, we are called to actively partner with God to channel God's presence and power into each situation.**
- a. Jeff shared a time in his life when God called him to do something he felt he didn't have the power to do – to shout and disrupt a hearing at the Indiana Statehouse. Looking back across your life, when have you felt God calling you to do something that you doubted you could do? How did you respond? What happened?
- b. Read the famous Marianne Williamson quote on p. 3. Does it resonate with you? Why or why not?
- c. Is there something God is calling you to do in your life right now that frightens you? If so, what? What holds you back?
5. The third insight in this week's passage is drawn from the place where Moses asks God's name and God replies, "I am who I am." In the ancient world, names were thought to reveal one's character and destiny. The name God gives here, translated as "I am" comes from the Hebrew verb Ehyeh (EYE-yay), which means "to be." So when God says, "My name is "I am who I am," that means, "I am the One who causes things to be." Theologian Walter Brueggemann sums it up by saying, "God is the power for life, the power of being, the power of newness." In other words, **God is a verb, not a noun. God is the one who causes things to be, always actively working to create something beautiful even out of profoundly challenging circumstances. And if that's what God's like, we should be the same.** We should be God's change agents in the various situations of life.
- a. Jeff shared the story of a San Francisco bus driver who is a transformational presence on her bus, sharing the love of God with her passengers in wonderful ways. Tell us about a time when you've witnessed somebody transform a situation by channeling the presence and power of God into that situation.
- b. Think about your workplace, your home, your family, your circle of friends, your neighborhood, your church, your social media presence, and what's going on in the world today. In which of these spots might God be calling you to channel the presence and power of God in a way that might transform the situation? Tells us about it.

Exodus 3:1-15, selected verses

1 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro. He led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb [HOAR-eb], the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. 3 Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up."

4 Then God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 God said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. 6 I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

7 The LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt. I know their sufferings, 8 and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians. 10 So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

13 But Moses said, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you', and they ask me, 'What is your name?' what shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. Thus you shall say to the Israelites, I AM has sent me to you. 15 This is my name for ever, and this my title for all generations."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Aurora Leigh, excerpt:

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God.
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes.
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.

Marianne Williamson

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. . . . We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone."