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Meadowbrooke Church
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"It's Okay to Be Angry with God"
Exodus 3:1-15; 33:17-23; 34:6-9; Romans 8:28-39

Introduction (Bruce Almighty movie clip)
It is possible that you are here today and are wondering how and why it is that a good God would allow some of the hard things you were forced to experience so far. Maybe you have said or identify with Bruce's description of his own experience with God: "God is a mean kid sitting on an anthill with a magnifying glass, and I'm the ant. He could fix my life in five minutes if He wanted to, but he'd rather burn off my feelers and watch me squirm."

If God is good, and if he is infinitely and perfectly sovereign… how and why does He allow so much suffering in the world? How is it that He allows so much evil when he is the measure of all that is holy and good? There seems to be a great divide between the God we read about in our Bibles and the world we live in. What are we supposed to do with the confusion, disappointment, anger, evil, and suffering God has allowed into our lives? Is it okay to be angry with God when we suffer? I plan to answer the above questions, but we must start with the nature and character of God as He revealed Himself to Moses after 40 years in the desert as a fugitive of Egypt after he murdered one of Pharoah's guards.

Moses' Encounter with a Holy God
Here is what you need to know about what led up to Moses' experience with the burning bush. God made a promise to Abraham, Isaac, and then to Jacob that their children would become His people; the promise was threefold and included the promise of land, the increase of their people, and that their people would eventually be a blessing to the nations. However, God also promised that they would spend years in a land where they would be afflicted (see Gen. 15:13; Exod. 12:40-41).

When Moses was born, the Hebrew people had spent centuries living in Egypt. The Hebrew people were first welcomed as honored guests under Joseph (one of the sons of Jacob) who was second to Pharaoh, but as the years past, so did the memory of Joseph. The Hebrews eventually became the slaves of another Pharaoh; he was so threatened by the birth rate of the Hebrews, that he implemented infanticide as the law of the land and wrote into law that every Hebrew son born was to be thrown into the Nile. Moses' mother refused to murder her baby, so she kept his birth a secret until she could not do so any longer; she put baby Moses in a basket covered with tar and pitch, put him in it, and floated it down the Nile where Pharaoh's daughter eventually found the basket with baby Moses whom she raised as her own.

Moses grew up in Pharaoh's house, but he was also aware of his roots as a Hebrew man. We know that Moses had a temper, and on two occasions, it cost him much. On one such occasion, after seeing an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, Moses killed the Egyptian and buried his body in the sand (see Exod. 2:11-12). When Moses learned that others knew that he killed the Egyptian, he

fled and hid in the land of Midian. Moses spent the next 40 years of his life in Median, got married, and worked for his father-in-law Jethro.

What We Learn About God Through Moses' Encounter

Before we can answer where or not it is okay to be angry with God, we need to consider the God who found Moses in Midian; against the backdrop of Joseph's 13 years of suffering, the generations of slavery the Hebrews suffered in Egypt, and Moses' 40 years in Midian.

God is Holy: *He is not like us.*

Moses approached the burning bush not only because it was weird, but because God called to him, "**from the midst of the bush and said, 'Moses! Moses!**" Moses' response was simple: "**Here I am.**" Notice that as Moses got closer to the burning bush, God said to him, "**Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground**." What made the ground holy? The presence of God made it holy. As R.C. Sproul wrote in his timeless and classic book, *The Holiness of God*: "God alone is holy in Himself. Only God can sanctify something else. Only God can give the touch that changes it from the commonplace to something special, different, and apart."[1]

Now, just so that you are aware, it is not only Moses, a mere mortal human, who must remove his sandals in the presence of holiness. The seraphim whose sole purpose is worship above the throne of God are not exempt from the kind of respect and reverence that was expected of Moses in the presence of the Holy One. Isaiah was invited into the throne room of Almighty God, and this is what he saw:

> **In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the LORD sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim were standing above Him, each having six wings: with two each covered his face, and with two each covered his feet, and with two each flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of armies. The whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke**. (Isa. 6:1–4)

The great Seraphim must cover their face and their feet in the presence of a Holy God even though they have not been stained by sin, but because they, like us, are creatures and God is the Creator. Isaiah's response before the Holy One was appropriate: "**Woe to me, for I am ruined!**" Moses' response was not only to remove his sandals, but to hide his face, "**for he was afraid to look at God**" (v. 6). Why? Because God is holy, and we are not. God is not like us.

God is Omniscient: *He sees the big picture.*

When we come to verse 6, God let Moses who it was that was speaking to him: "**I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob**." And just as God was intimately acquainted with the lives of Moses' forefathers, He was aware of the suffering of Moses' kinsmen in Egypt: "**I have certainly seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their outcry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings**" (v. 7).

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[1] Sproul, R.C., *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers; 1998), 39.

When the Hebrews entered into Egypt, they were the size of a small clan, but after hundreds of years in Egypt, they had become the size of a small nation. When Moses fled to Midian, he was a 40-year-old used to royalty; the Moses who stood before the burning bush was any eighty-year-old shepherd. What the Hebrews did not understand, and what Moses could not have fathomed was that God was using the ugly, the hard, and the pain for something far greater than they could have imagined. God was aware of their suffering all along, and now in that moment was the right time to, "**rescue them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from the land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey...**" (v. 8) just as He promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob centuries before.

So, God said to Moses: "**And now come, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt**" (v. 10). To which, Moses appropriately responded: "**Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?**" All that the Hebrews could see was their slavery and suffering; all that Moses could see was his failures and incompetence. What God saw was that He alone can use the foolish to shame the wise and the weak to shame the strong (see 1 Cor. 1:26-31). What God saw was that His timing was infinitely better because He saw the big picture.

God is Faithful: *He keeps His promises*.
Remember that the Hebrew slaves in Egypt were surrounded by an Egyptian culture that worshiped Egyptian gods who were not gods, but demons (see Deut. 32:17). Moses questioned what name he was to give to the Hebrew slaves if they were to ask Who it was that sent Moses to deliver them (v. 13). Here is God's answer: "**And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "This is what you shall say to the sons of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you**'" (v. 14). Then God continued: "**This is what you shall say to the sons of Israel: 'Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is the name for all generations to use to call upon Me**" (v. 15). In other words, God told Moses: "You tell them that Yahweh sent you!"

At the heart of God's answer are four facts about His nature for why the Israelites should believe the He could and would deliver them:

1. **Yahweh is self-existent and not dependent**. God was unlike the Egyptian gods who were created by their own culture. Yahweh is the Elohim over elohims. The great I AM was bigger than the plight of the Israelites as He is greater than any trouble in our own lives.

2. **Yahweh is creator and sustainer**. Who wrote the Law of Thermodynamics? Who governs the laws of gravity? Who grants the Sun permission to get up in the morning? Who gave the song for the birds to sing? Who owns the cattle on a thousand hills? Who brings men into power, raises nations into prominence and then brings them to naught? Is it not the great I AM who keeps His covenant promises.

3. **Yahweh is unchanging**. Yahweh is the great I AM whose personality does not change. He does not suffer from a multi-personality disorder. He does not change with the ideas of his devotees. He is unmovable because He does not change. Because Yahweh is

unchanging, He is constant unlike the gods of the Egyptians or whatever idol we may have set up in our own heart.

4. **Yahweh is eternal**. Because He is the great I AM, Yahweh will never have a beginning nor will he ever have an end. Even though the fool has said there is no God, Yahweh is absolute reality with nothing before or after Him. The great I AM does not sleep, slumber, slack off, or slip into a daydream stupor.

What God told Moses is this: "Moses, you tell My people that the Covenant Keeper who promised their forefathers that He would make them into a great nation, would give them land as a nation, and would make them a blessing to the nations... you tell them the Faithful and Living One sent you!" God keeps His promises because He alone is faithful even when we are not.

Conclusion

So, the question you may still be asking is whether it is or is not okay to be angry with God? Is it okay to be angry with He who is Holy and infinitely unlike us creatures? Is it okay to be angry with the One who sees and knows all things perfectly? Is it okay to be angry with the One who keeps His covenant promises because He is faithful while we are faithless time and time again? Is it okay to be angry with Yahweh who is Almighty God?

As you know, God did use Moses to lead the Hebrews out of the bondage of slavery from Egypt, and He did it miraculously and profoundly. Yet, even after God delivered them, Moses found himself shepherding and leading a people who demonstrated over and over again just how faithless they really were. After their grievous sin of idolatry with the golden calf, Moses pleaded with God for mercy for His people who sinned, and God granted it. In Exodus 33:17-34:9 we are given a glimpse into Moses' heart as a shepherd absolutely in love with Yahweh, and in that exchange asked to see God. God told Moses that he could not see His face and live, but this is what God did say He would do: "**I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion to whom I will show compassion**" (Exod. 33:19).

When God did pass, He hid Moses in the cleft of a rock, and allowed His goodness to pass by him and when it did, Moses heard God proclaim of His goodness: "**The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in faithfulness and truth; who keeps faithfulness for thousands, who forgives wrongdoing, violation of His Law, and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, inflicting the punishment of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations**" (Exod. 34:6–7). So, what does God's goodness include? It includes His mercy, patience, faithfulness, truth, and grace. But it also includes His justice and wrath in response to sin.

So, again I ask you: "Is it okay to be angry with the God who is Holy and infinitely unlike us creatures? Is it okay to be angry with the God who sees and knows all things perfectly? Is it okay to be angry with a holy God who is faithful while we are faithless time and time again? Is it okay to be angry with Yahweh who is Almighty God?" Let me reframe the question for you: If God is infinitely good and we are the ones who need to improve upon being good, do we have any right to be angry with God?

Now, think about the effects anger has on a relationship. When you are angry with someone because you believe you have been wronged by that person, it interferes with communication. Anger towards a friend or a member of your family often drives a wedge between you and that person. Anger typically results in the one offended distancing himself/herself from the person who wronged them.

If there is no need for God to improve, especially in being good, then to suggest that it is okay to be angry with Him is to suggest that it is okay to accuse Him of wrongdoing. Psalm 145 is a great Psalm to visit while suffering or confused why God would allow you to suffer; verses 8-9 say the following: "**The LORD is gracious and compassionate; slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works**." Again in Psalm 145:17-18, "**The LORD is righteous in all His ways, and kind in all His works. The LORD is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth.**"

I have head Christians and Pastors console the suffering and confused: "It is okay to be angry with God." To which I ask, "How is it okay to be angry with He who is infinitely holy, how is it okay to be angry with Him who sees all while my vision is limited, how is it okay to be angry with the Almighty whose faithfulness has been proven time and time again while my faithfulness has been found wanting more than I count?"

Listen dear friend, not only are we not given permission in all of Scripture to be angry with God, but we also have no right to be angry with Him. Here is what is permitted and even expected by God: We can be confused, frustrated, and even hurt emotionally. If God is infinitely good, which He is, then we can run to Him with our confusion, we can run to Him with our frustration, and we can run to Him with our wounded and bleeding hearts knowing that even though we can't see His goodness in and through our pain, we can trust that He is still good and will turn it around in His way and in His time for His glory and our good!

After Moses experienced the goodness of God when His glory passed by while he was in the cleft of the rock, Moses responded on behalf of the sins of Israel: "**If in any way I have found favor in Your sight, Lord, please may the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our wrongdoing and our sin, and take us as Your own possession**" (Exod. 34:9).

Dear brothers and sisters, if your faith and trust is in Jesus as proof of God's infinite goodness, then my plea to you is not to run from Him in anger but to him with all your pain, confusion, and frustration. Run to the God of Romans 8:28-32,

> **And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?**