

Made for More: Miriam - Boldness and God's Protection

Exodus 1:15-20, 2:1-9; Numbers 12:1-15; Micah 6:4; Acts 5:29

Intro:

When I was about 16 years old, I knew that God was calling me into ministry but I didn't know exactly what I was supposed to do. I played in the band, helped with the children's church, stacked chairs, and was very heavily involved with multiple things in the church. One day we had a guest pastor that was coming for a youth group service. I was at the church cleaning before service. When he came into the auditorium, he looked at me and said "I'm hungry, will you take me to lunch somewhere?" I said, "Sure, let's go."

At lunch I told him I felt a call to ministry, but I'm not sure exactly what it was. He then gave me the best single piece of advice anyone has ever given me. "If you feel called to lead in ministry, but you don't know what 'it is,' simply serve someone else's calling until you figure it out."

So I did just that. I got to see the good, the bad, and the ugly of ministry. I served under multiple different pastors, youth pastors, and college ministry leaders. I got to see what good leadership looked like. I got to see what bad leadership looked like. I saw people get angry over stupid stuff. I learned how to deal with difficult situations. I grew and learned from all of these experiences which has shaped the leader I am today.

Today we will be focusing on Moses's lesser known sister, Miriam. Her story teaches us what it looks like to serve in the background until God leads you to your calling in ministry.

History Lesson:

Generations earlier, Joseph had been faithful to God, and through that faithfulness, God used him to save Egypt — and his own family — from a devastating famine. Pharaoh welcomed Joseph's family into Egypt and gave them a place to live and thrive. That's Genesis 47.

But time passes. Exodus 1 tells us a new Pharaoh comes to power — one who "did not know Joseph." He looks out and sees the Israelites have grown numerous and strong, and instead of gratitude, he feels fear. He's afraid they'll rise up. So what does he do? He enslaves them and works them harder. When that doesn't stop their growth, Pharaoh escalates. He orders the Hebrew midwives to kill the baby boys the moment they're born.

Read Exodus 1:15-20. The midwives feared God more than they feared Pharaoh, so they let the boys live. God blessed those midwives, not because they lied to Pharaoh, but because they refused to take innocent lives. When we're ordered to disobey God in order to obey a human authority, Scripture is clear: we obey God rather than men. (Read Acts 5:29)

So Pharaoh doubles down again. Since the midwives won't do it, he orders everyone to throw every Hebrew boy into the Nile river. This is the world that we find Miriam living in. A death sentence hanging over every baby boy in their community. Into this world, a mother named Jochebed, has a son. But she's not going to let him go without a fight.

Moses is Born:

Read Exodus 2:1-4. Jochebed made a basket — Scripture calls it an ark — out of papyrus reeds and coated it with tar and pitch to make it waterproof. The reeds grew as tall as sixteen feet along the Nile, thick enough that a small floating basket tucked among them would be well hidden.

Jochebed is not just tossing her baby into the river and hoping for the best. She's working within the letter of Pharaoh's law — the baby *is* technically going into the Nile — while doing everything in her power to give him a chance at life.

Miriam's Boldness:

Then Exodus 2:4 gives us this quiet little detail: "His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him."

That's it. That's Miriam's introduction in Scripture. Not a speech. Not a bold declaration. Just a girl, standing at a distance, watching her baby brother to make sure that nothing bad happens to him. Miriam isn't doing anything flashy. She's just present. She's watching. She hasn't been given a job yet — she's just refusing to look away from her brother's danger.

Sometimes our part in someone else's story starts exactly like that. Not with a dramatic act but just showing up and paying attention when it would be easier to walk away.

Read Exodus 2:5-6. Pharaoh's daughter would have known exactly what her father's decree said. Every Egyptian household would have known Hebrew boys were to be thrown into the Nile. This baby, by law, was already condemned. But the pharaoh's daughter had compassion for this baby. Not to mention she probably appreciated how clever the floating basket was.

This is the moment. This is where Miriam moves from watching to acting. Read Exodus 2:7-9. She steps forward, a Hebrew girl, approaching an Egyptian princess, and asks her a simple question: should I go find a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby for you?

Think about the boldness that takes. We don't know if Miriam was terrified at that moment. Scripture doesn't tell us. But it doesn't have to because we can imagine it ourselves. She's a kid, approaching the daughter of the man who ordered her brother's death, gambling that this princess's compassion might outweigh her father's decree. I even wonder, and this part is just me thinking out loud with you, if Miriam's question was the very thing that planted the idea in Pharaoh's daughter's mind to keep him. Either way, Miriam didn't wait to see what would happen. She created the opportunity. And Pharaoh's daughter says yes. Go.

Miriam runs to get her mother. And just like that, the woman hired to nurse this baby, paid by the very household that had ordered his death, is his own mother. The family is reunited, at least for a season, and Moses grows up not only knowing who he is, but under his mother's care.

Application:

Here's what I want you to get from this part of the story: Special opportunities often come unexpectedly, and fear can cause us to miss them. Miriam didn't know how the princess would respond. She didn't have a guarantee. She just knew there was an open window...and she took it.

How many opportunities has God put in front of you that you let close because you were scared of what might happen if you spoke up? Somebody needed you to make an introduction, say a kind word, vouch for them, stand next to them and you hesitated because it felt risky. Miriam didn't have the luxury of hesitating. And because she didn't, history changed. Miriam didn't need superhuman strength or a perfect plan. She just needed willingness. God doesn't need much from us to accomplish His plan. He needs us to be willing.

Because of Miriam's boldness, Moses grew up learning the ways of the Egyptians, an education that would matter enormously later in life when he would stand in front of Pharaoh demanding freedom for his people. Miriam's protection in that moment rippled forward into everything that came after.

Miriam, the Leader:

Decades later, after the plagues, after the Passover, after the Israelites cross the Red Sea on dry ground and then watch Pharaoh's army swallowed up behind them — Miriam shows up again. Exodus 15 calls her a prophetess. She leads the women in song and celebration, tambourine in hand with worship pouring out of her.

She's called a prophetess not only because she received revelation from God, but because of her musical gift (in Scripture, prophecy and music are often closely tied together). Micah 6:4 even puts her name right alongside Moses and Aaron as one of the leaders God sent to bring His people out of Egypt. Read Micah 6:4.

Think about that arc. The girl who once stood quietly at a distance, watching from the reeds, is now standing in front of the entire nation, leading them in worship.

That's what happens when somebody starts by lifting others up. Miriam's courage, initiative, and willingness to protect someone else's calling before she ever stepped into her own demonstrates her leadership. It didn't start with a title. It started with a girl by a river who refused to look away.

Miriam's Mistake:

Miriam's story doesn't end with the tambourine however.

Read Numbers 12:1-15. Aaron and Miriam are jealous of Moses, but instead of going to Moses with their issues, they create a problem, when there was really not a problem to begin with. They create a smoke screen to criticize Moses and his leadership so that they can be exalted. This obviously didn't go well for Miriam.

Smoke Screen:

I want you to sit with that for a second, because I think most of us have done exactly this. We don't always fight about what we're actually upset about. We create a smoke screen. We criticize somebody's spouse, their tone, their style, some small and unrelated thing when what's actually eating at us is that they have something we want. Recognition. Position. Influence. Success.

Here's a question worth asking yourself honestly: when you're in a disagreement, are you arguing about the real issue, or have you introduced a smoke screen by publicly attacking someone's character instead?

And if you're on the receiving end of criticism like that, here's something worth remembering: your critics may be afraid to face the real problem themselves. Don't take it too personally. Ask God to help you see what's actually going on underneath it.

God's Judgement:

God does not let this slide. He calls Miriam, Aaron, and Moses to the tent of meeting, and He makes it unmistakably clear that Moses holds a unique position as God speaks to him face to face, not through dreams and visions like the prophets. When God's presence lifts, Miriam is struck with leprosy.

Aaron pleads with Moses not to hold this sin against them. Here's where the story turns and gives us maybe its most powerful moment. It's easy to look back at our mistakes once the consequences are already in front of us and see how foolish they were. It's much harder to see it in the moment, while we're still convinced we're right. That's true for Miriam and Aaron and honestly, it's true for us.

So what does Moses do? The one who was criticized becomes the one who intercedes. He cries out to God: "Please, God, heal her!"

Miriam had just accused him, undermined him, and tried to diminish his calling. However, Moses' response isn't to gloat over her punishment or demand more. He prays for her healing. The roles have completely reversed. The girl who once stood at a distance to protect her baby brother is now the one being protected boldly, immediately, by that same brother now grown.

That's not a small detail. That's the whole message wrapped up in one moment.

So What Do We Do With This?:

The motives behind criticism are often more important than the criticism itself.

Before you criticize someone else, pause long enough to ask yourself why. Is this righteousness, or is this jealousy wearing a righteous mask? Sometimes what gets labeled "constructive criticism" is really just insecurity looking for a target because it's always easier to point out someone else's flaws than to sit with your own. Before you point that finger, ask if it needs to be pointed at yourself first.

On the other side of that, when Moses had every reason to hold a grudge, he chose mercy instead. Godly people do not repay hurt with hurt. Hurt people Hurt People.

Two Pictures:

Miriam's life gives us two pictures. One is a girl at a riverbank, watching, waiting, and then boldly stepping forward to protect someone else's calling before her own had even begun. The other is a grown woman letting jealousy convince her to tear down the very person she once protected.

Both of those are in you and me: the instinct to lift someone up, and the instinct to tear someone down when they have what we want. The question is which one are we feeding?

Like Miriam, I want to challenge you this week:

- Be courageous enough to step forward.
- Be faithful enough to serve.
- Be humble enough to guard your heart.
- Be willing to let God deal with your motives.

Some of the most important things God will ever do in this world, He'll do it through people who are willing to stand at a distance, watch, and then step forward, not for their own name, but for someone else's calling.

Reflection Questions:

- What opportunities has God placed in front of you that fear is causing you to avoid?
- Are you lifting others up, or secretly resenting their success?
- Do pride or jealousy affect your obedience to God?
- Are your criticisms rooted in truth, or in insecurity?