

“Mumblin’ Mo”

Big Buts in the Bible – part #1

Exodus 4:1-17

[SLIDE 29] *Welcome, Prayer*

Christian author James Moore once wrote a book entitled, Yes, God, I have sinned, but I have several excellent excuses. It actually goes along with a study guide, so a small group can commiserate together and share their own “excellent” excuses. Of course, the whole point of the study is that our lame reasons do not excuse us from disobeying God, yet the premise behind the book stands: we are often better at making excuses to God than obeying God.

[SLIDE 30] Beginning this Sunday, we are going to take a journey through the Bible examining people who actually said “No” to God. All of them thought they had excellent excuses. Moses, Gideon, Peter, Abraham, and Jeremiah all tried to deny God’s call on their life. They all had their big “buts” (B-U-T-S); however, God still used them. From their stories, we hope to find encouragement for ourselves, so that we will stop making excuses and start saying yes to God.

[SLIDE 31] Moses is our first excuse maker, and he had several iron clad excuses for telling God “No.” Moses was a nobody – a wandering shepherd with no leadership resume, and Moses was terrified of public speaking. **[SLIDE 32]** In his own words, Moses said, “I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.”

Literally, he says he is “*heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue.*” (AMP Bible.)

Is anyone here terrified of public speaking? You may find this hard to believe, but I used to get pretty bad stage fright. My worst speech ever came during my freshman year of college. I was in a public-speaking class with about 15

students, and I froze so bad at the beginning of my speech, I literally went back to my desk and sat down without finishing. I was absolutely mortified. Fortunately, the instructor gave me a break and allowed me to try again the following week.

So I can understand Moses, especially considering what God was asking him to do. Moses was not about to give a five-minute TED talk debating the merits of free-range sheep farming. **[SLIDE 33]** God was asking Moses to go toe-to-toe with the most powerful ruler of that time, Pharaoh, and demand that the Israelites go free.

Ask yourself this question: what would you do if God asked you to lead a whole nation out of slavery? Would you risk your life against a powerful ruler who could snap his fingers and have you executed? As much as I’d like to think “Yes, of course I would!”, I would probably hesitate, too.

[SLIDE 34] Even though the Bible says repeatedly that God’s people cried out for deliverance from Pharaoh, it appears that Moses was content to just run away and hide. Actually, if you have read the first three chapters of Exodus, you would think Moses’s fear of public speaking was the least of his problems. To put it bluntly, Moses was a coward and a murderer. What? The Moses? Yes, that Moses, of the Ten Commandments and the parting of the Red Sea.

As a baby, Moses’s parents hid him in a basket on the river so the Pharaoh’s army wouldn’t kill him; then Pharaoh’s daughter found him and adopted him, meaning Moses mainly grew up sheltered in the palace; then, as an adult, he killed an Egyptian foreman who was beating up an Israelite; when Moses was later accused of the murder, he ran away to the wilderness of Midian and raised sheep for forty years. My resume may not sparkle, but at least I’m not an 80+

year-old shepherd with a felony conviction and penchant for running away. Still, Moses, the coward and murderer, was chosen by God.

[SLIDE 35] How often do you sell yourself short because of your past? How often do you think, “There is no way God can work miracles through me”? Be real with yourself for a moment. Do you expect God to work in you? Do we expect God to work through us, the church? What kind of excuses are we making?

Maybe we are saying some of the same things Moses says. First, Moses points out that there is no way anyone is going to believe him if he says he met God face-to-face in a burning bush in the wilderness. That is a pretty wild story, wouldn’t you agree?

[SLIDE 36] God’s answer to Moses’s first excuse is to give not one, not two, but three miraculous signs. First, Moses turns his staff into a snake, which, by the way, further proved his cowardice – when Moses saw the snake, he ran away!

Second, Moses’s hand goes from clean to leprous to clean again. And if those first two signs are not enough, Moses is told he can turn water into blood, which definitely foreshadows the plagues that God will use to wreak havoc on Egypt.

Three powerful signs. Miracles that no one could do without God’s help. That should have been enough for Moses, right?

Nope. Moses says, “But, God, I’m a terrible speaker, and I’m not getting any better talking with you right now.” Moses apparently thinks God is a bad speech therapist! But God again has an answer. God created the human mouth. God literally created speech, and if God can create all the languages the world has ever heard, God can and will give Moses the vocabulary he needs to speak to Pharaoh. This would have been enough for me. I admit, there are days when I

would love for God to be “with my mouth,” especially putting a hand over it when necessary!

[SLIDE 37] God promises many times in the Bible to give us the right words to say. The Lord speaks to both Jeremiah (1:9) and Isaiah (51:16) - “I have put My words in your mouth.” According to Deuteronomy 18:18, God will always put the right words in the mouths of true prophets. Jesus reassures his disciples that when they face persecution, they will never have to worry about what to say, for at the right time, the Holy Spirit will speak through them. (Matthew 10:19-20, Mark 13:11.) Their speech will be so persuasive, none of their adversaries will be able to resist or contradict them. (Luke 21:15)

These promises aren’t just true of prophets from long ago. They are for us today. **[SLIDE 38]** Consider Psalm 51:15:

“O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise.”

Church, never doubt the fact that the Lord will always give you the right words to say if you trust God and commit your life to prayer and obedience. That is a sure and steady promise.

[SLIDE 39] Still, even that promise is not enough for Mumblin’ Mo. Do you notice that Moses’ excuses become increasingly desperate? And at the same time, God becomes increasingly more insistent.

Finally, Moses begs God, “Please, please, please, oh please, don’t send me. Send somebody else.” I think I have a witness today that someone else besides me and Moses have prayed this prayer before, haven’t we? When we see that homeless person we walk past, or the car broken down on the side of the road we drive by, how often do we pray, “Please, Lord, send someone else to help them”?

We have all failed to say “Yes” to God. Even though God himself has chosen us, we think we have nothing to offer and that we are not qualified.

[SLIDE 40] Just as we overlook our own selves, Moses missed the many assets that made him a great choice for God. Moses grew up in Pharaoh’s house. He already had access to the palace; he already spoke the language. He knew just how bad the oppression of the Israelites was. Granted, he used the wrong method by killing an Egyptian. But Moses had passion. If he could just get over his reluctance and fear, and just trust God, then God could do miracles through him. And that is exactly what God did.

So what about you? What has God called you to do? You may think, “Nothing, Pastor. God hasn’t shown up in a burning bush. God has not spoken to me out of thunder and lightning.” Friends, God still speaks! Listen to God’s voice now, direct from God’s Word.

- **[SLIDE 41]** “Be ready to give an answer for your hope.” (I Peter 3:15)
- “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of eternal life.” (I Timothy 6:12)
- **[SLIDE 42]** “Set an example for the believers in speech, action, love, faith, and purity.” (I Timothy 4:12)
- “Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:44)
- **[SLIDE 43]** “This is my command: Love one another.” (John 15:12)
- “True religion is this: take care of the orphans and widows.” (James 1:27)
- **[SLIDE 44]** “Spur one another on to love and good deeds.” (Hebrews 10:24)

There are so many things that you and I are called to do. A Christian, a follower of Jesus, is supposed to be active in faith. When we join the church, we express that commitment to each other. We promise in our membership vows to

support the church by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness. If you have said yes to Jesus and yes to the Bride of Christ, the church, you have a calling. You have a testimony to give.

[SLIDE 45] The two greatest commandments are to love God and love people. We show our love in our presence, together in worship and in the lives of people who need us. We show our love in our giving and support of the church’s ministry. We need to answer God’s call to be present in the community, healing, teaching, and serving. There is something every one of us can do. But how often are we telling God by our actions, “Please, oh please, send someone else”? How does that show God our faithfulness?

God redeemed us with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. We were bought at a great price. Our lives are no longer our own. Our talents, our resources, and our words – they all belong to God. We are just stewards. Are we going to roll up our sleeves and serve, or just make excuses? Our ministry will only go as far as we are willing to participate in God’s work in this world.

Maybe you don’t feel as bold as Moses, yet. However, you all have one gift you can use for God every single day: your prayers. Give me a praying church, and I’ll show you a church that grows. I’m talking about real, deep, honest prayer that impacts all the other things. Give me people who are willing to take risks, and I’ll show you a church that changes the world. Give me just five people who will listen to God and say yes without hesitation, without excuses, and you better be holding on to your seats, because revival will break out so fast, you’ll get whiplash.

If we do these things, God will do mighty things in us, in our church, in our community, and in our world. The parting of the Red Sea will be small stuff

compared to the lives Jesus changes, the marriages he saves, the children and parents he reconciles, the creation God protects, and the grieving and broken hearts the Holy Spirit heals.

Instead of saying, “But, God, I can’t!” we reword our response. “I can’t, but God, you can.” God has the biggest “but” in the Bible. God always has an answer to your excuse.

God will also never force you to do anything, but God invites you, right now, to renew the calling God has placed on your life. The invitation is always there. Will you answer? Or make excuses? Let’s listen to this song as we ponder and respond to God’s call.

Big Daddy Weave – Alive (But God)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiuw2QX4Rpl>

Memory Verse: Psalm 51:15

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise.

Reflection Questions:

1. How do you feel about public speaking? It is a fear or a joy for you?
2. When has God showed up in your life in surprising, almost unbelievable ways?
3. When do you feel most able to obey God? When do you feel most like making excuses?
4. What is a gift or talent God has given you to use to help others? How is God asking you to use it?
5. Name one area of your life where you need to say, “I can’t, but God can through me.”