

The University of Moses— The Failure Principle

Exodus 2:11-22

Dr. Barry McCarty

Exodus 2:11-22

¹¹ One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. ¹² He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. ¹³ When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, “Why do you strike your companion?” ¹⁴ He answered, “Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid, and thought, “Surely the thing is known.” ¹⁵ When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well.

¹⁶ Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. ¹⁷ The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock. ¹⁸ When they came home to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come home so soon today?" ¹⁹ They said, "An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds and even drew water for us and watered the flock." ²⁰ He said to his daughters, "Then where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread."

²¹ And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah. ²² She gave birth to a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, “I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.”



Even the people who don't know anything about the sport of hockey know about the **penalty box**.

That's where players who broke the rules—usually by fighting—must sit for two minutes while their team plays with one less man.

There are times in everyone's life when it might feel like we are having to sit in the penalty box.



If you've ever spent time in the "penalty box" of life, you have a friend in Moses. He lived 120 years. In his **first forty years** he was a prince in Pharaoh's court.

The **last forty years** he was the first lawgiver and leader of the nation of Israel.

But sandwiched in between he spent another **forty years in the penalty box** for manslaughter.



Although Moses was raised and educated as an Egyptian, he remained an Israelite in his heart. In time he realized the mistreatment his own people suffered as slaves, and he **became angry**.

He remembered the stories his mother had told him about how God had delivered him in a basket along the Nile and he knew **it was his destiny to deliver God's people**.

Moses was right to think that, but he made a crucial mistake in both the **timing** and the **means** by which God would use him to save Israel from slavery.

When Moses was grown, he began to go among his people and saw the oppressive measures under which they labored.



One day as he walked in the brickyards where his countrymen labored, he saw an Egyptian overseer whipping an Israelite. In a moment of unbridled rage, Moses forgot that he was Moses—the prince of Egypt, the adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He **struck the Egyptian** slavedriver and killed him. When Moses realized what he had done, he **hid** the man's lifeless body in the sand.



The flush of victory pulled Moses back the next day. He had removed one threat to his people and was determined to assist them again.

This time, however, he found **two Hebrews fighting**. After parting them, he questioned the offender in an attempt to mediate the disagreement. Two questions jolted him: **“Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?”**

The confidence of the self-appointed deliverer turned into fear. One of his own knew his “secret” and soon Pharaoh would, too.

It shocked Moses that his crime had become known. But what hurt him most deeply is that **his own people rejected him**. He thought they would understand that he was their deliverer, but they didn't. Moses had failed.

That wasn't all. By siding with the Israelites, **Moses had betrayed Pharaoh**, who now sought to kill him as a traitor to the palace. In order to save his life, Moses **fled to the desert**.

He had been driven from the palace.

Rejected by the people he had risked his life to help.

And, perhaps he felt, even betrayed by the God whom he thought would bless him for his willingness to risk all he had for the sake of his people.

He was qualified to be the king of Egypt, but here he sat by a well in the desert.

Why had all this happened to Moses?



There are some lessons that are better learned in the desert than in the palace.

1. In the desert, Moses learned to know God.



It's not impossible to know God while surrounded by the trappings of luxury and power, but it is exceedingly difficult.

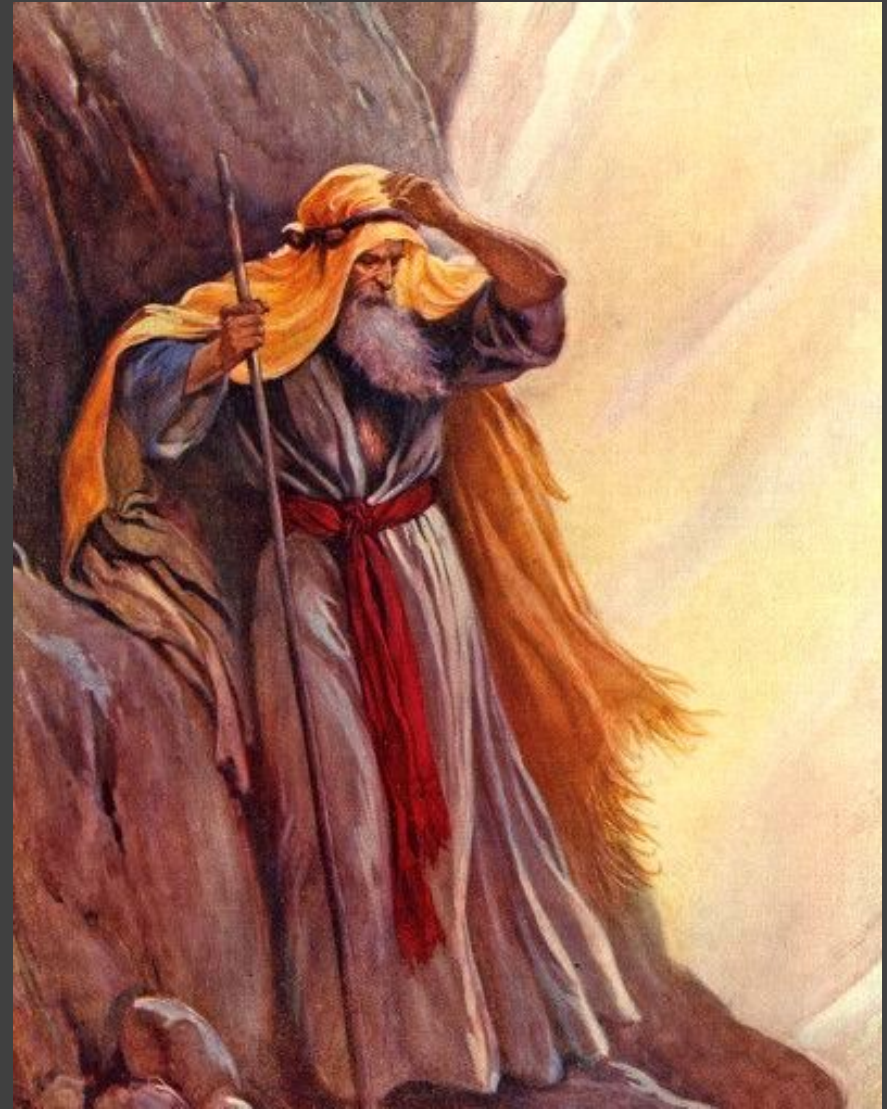
God took Moses into the desert because he wanted Moses to know him more intimately than any human being had ever known him before.

In the desert, Moses had time to remember, time to reflect, and time to pray. What seemed to be the end of a meaningful life was actually the beginning of one of the most celebrated careers in history.



“Be still, and know
that I am God.”

—Psalm 46:10



Moses had been tending a flock of sheep on the far side of the desert when he came near to Mt. Sinai.

There to his surprise he encountered a bush that was on fire but which was not consumed.

When Moses went over to investigate the burning bush, God called Moses by name and told him to take off his shoes because he was standing on Holy ground.

With fear and trembling Moses listened as God told him that he had heard the cries of his people in Egypt and he was commissioning Moses to go back to Egypt free the Israelites from Pharaoh's hand and lead them to the Promised Land.



Moses realized that was tall order, beginning with the fact that the people might not believe God had sent him.

So Moses says to God,
“Suppose the Israelites ask who sent me, what do I tell them?”

God’s answer is one of the most important truths revealed in all the Bible. For here God gives Moses his personal name.

“Tell them I AM has sent you.”

When you look for the *name* and *title* on God’s business card, all it says is *I AM*.

That God’s name is the *Hebrew verb “to be”* is a vivid way of describing his eternity. He is the ever-present one.



2. In the desert, Moses learned the first lesson of leadership: servanthood.

As a prince, Moses was accustomed to being waited upon.

But on his first day in the desert he had his first opportunity to really serve when he **protected Reuel's daughters** and **helped them draw water** (Ex. 2:16-17).



Moses was invited to Reuel's home and married Zipporah, one of the man's daughters. And from then on he was a **shepherd**.

Shepherds were an abomination to the Egyptians (Genesis 46:34).

For the next forty years Moses did what he had formerly been taught to despise. Now this prestigious child of fame and fortune was doing what the most unlettered slave could do.



In India, the **Yadav** or shepherds are a low caste people.

This also shows up in the history of English words after the Norman conquest. The names of most livestock animals are **Saxon**: “steer,” “cow,” “calf,” “sheep,” “deer.” But when served as meat for the table of the **Norman** lords, they become “beef,” “veal,” “mutton,” and “venison.”



The first principle of biblical leadership is that leaders serve.



Moses learned servanthood in the desert.

Matthew 20:25–28.

²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

3. In the desert Moses learned to do God's work in God's way.

Forty years before, Moses tried to pull off the Exodus in **his own strength and failed**.

Not only was he powerless to save the Israelites from Pharaoh, but he couldn't even save himself and fled into the desert.

After forty years in the desert, Moses was a far different man.

Humility replaced pride and the power of God replaced his own feeble strength.

Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah who directed the rebuilding of the Jewish temple after they returned from captivity in Babylon.

Seventy years before, the Babylonians captured Jerusalem and deported the Jewish leaders to Babylon.

Twenty years later they leveled the city, ransacked and destroyed the temple, and took most of the remaining Jews as captives.

Fifty years after the destruction of the temple, Zerubbabel was allowed to lead a group of Jews back to back home to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple.



Zerubbabel
had no army and
limited
resources.

Yet God had
called him to do
this work and he
spoke these
words of
encouragement
through the
prophet
Zechariah.

Then he said to me, “This is the
word of the LORD to Zerubbabel:
Not by might, nor by power, but by
my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

ZECHARIAH 4:6

4. In the desert Moses learned that God is working even when we don't see or understand what he is doing.

The truth is that most of the time we are **unaware** of most of what God is doing for us.

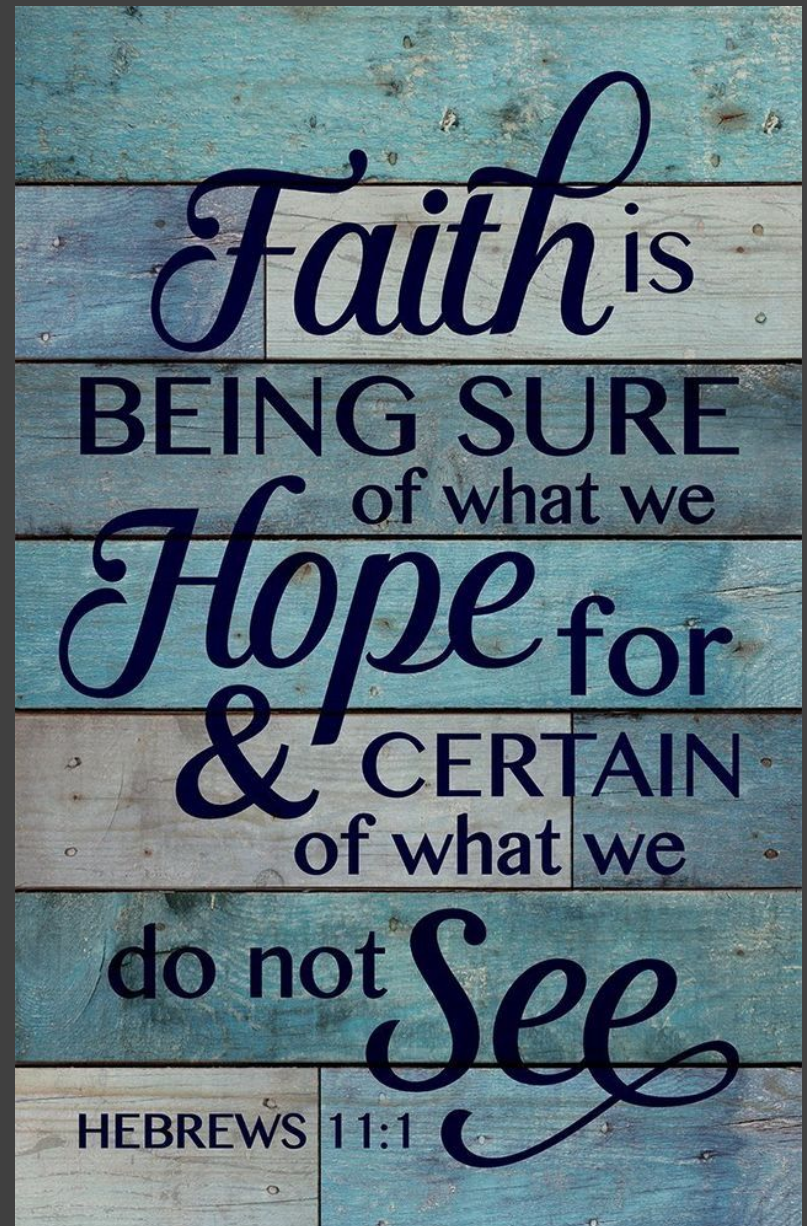


**SOMETIMES WHEN THINGS
ARE FALLING APART
THEY MAY ACTUALLY BE
FALLING INTO PLACE**

If you are trusting God,
then you are, at every
moment, exactly where God
wants you to be.

Heb 11:1

Now faith is the assurance
of things hoped for, the
conviction of things not
seen.



Israel was in
Egypt for
430 years.



Exodus 2:23–25

²³ During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. ²⁴ And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. ²⁵ God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.

To Moses it may have looked like God was doing nothing during those 430 years Israel was in Egypt or the 40 years Moses spent in the desert. But God had not forgotten his people.

God heard the groaning of his people. He wasn't deaf after all. Though He didn't respond to His people's cries immediately, He was listening.

God remembered his covenant. Though we may forget promises or even fail to deliver on those we remember, God is never careless with His commitments. For Him time does not erase details; everything is fresh in His memory. He remembers a thousand years ago with the same clarity that He remembers yesterday.

God also saw the needs of his people. He felt their hurts. Their ways were not hidden from Him, though deliverance was long in coming. For the moment, Moses had to learn to trust God even when He appeared to be indifferent regarding the needs of His people.

It is easier to trust God when the bush is burning, the waters are parting, and the mountains are shaking; it's those silent years that are discouraging.



But *blessed is the person who does not interpret the silence of God as the indifference of God!*

It's in the desert and not in the palace that God finds out the depths of our yieldedness.

It's when He is silent, not when He speaks, that our faith is precious in His sight.

Moses was learning that even when life is slow and God is silent, he is moving events along according to his timetable.





Never forget that while God isn't
always on your schedule, he is
always **on time**.

5. In the desert Moses learned that God's power is made perfect in weakness.

Exodus 3:11

But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

By the time God called to Moses out of the burning bush, Moses had no hankering for greatness.

A.W. Tozer has said that the best leaders are not those who want the job but those who are conscripted by God for leadership.

When Moses met God in the desert he struggled, unsure of his own gifts and abilities.

Yet for all of his doubts and reluctance he was finally qualified for leadership.

It is much easier for God to use a **faltering man with doubts** than an **eager man brimming with independence and self-will**.



But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

—2 Corinthians 12:9.



Conclusion

It is often necessary for God to take us on a darker, stonier path through the desert to teach us the really important lessons and make us what we really need to be.

God is more interested in making servants than Pharaohs. And He does some of his best work in obscurity, not in the limelight.

Don't let Satan talk you into wasting your failures.

God is with you in the desert to teach you to know him and his wonderful plan for your life.