



TIME OF GRACE®

Am I Strong Enough? When You Argue With God

Study Notes

Summary

What is God actually like? If God would speak to us today, what would he say? What would he reveal? Moses saw and heard the answers to all those questions and wrote them down so we could know and believe in the true God.

- Big Idea: God _____ objections.
- **Exodus 3:1-4,7,10:** ¹ Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.” ⁴ When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.” ⁷ The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”
- **Exodus 3 and 4, selected verses:** ³ ¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” ¹² And God said, “I will be with you. . . .” ¹³ Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” ¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” ⁴ ¹ Moses answered, “What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you’?” ¹⁰ Moses said to the LORD, “Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.” ¹¹ The LORD said to him, “Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹² Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.” ¹³ But Moses said, “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.” ¹⁴ Then the LORD’s anger burned against Moses and he said, “What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well.”

- God overcomes objections:
 1. God provides _____.
 2. God provides _____.
 3. God provides _____.

Points to Ponder

1. What do you argue with God about the most? Summarize your mental argument in a few sentences.

2. Think deeply about the three specific things that God provides from today's message. What would that look like in your life specifically?

3. Read 1 John 4:7-12. What connections do you see between today's message and these verses?

Homework for Next Week

Read Exodus chapters 5-12.

Time of Grace Ministry
Am I Strong Enough? When You Argue With God
Exodus 3:1-4,7,10
October 10, 2021

Pastor Mike Novotny

And whether it's racism, and the police or it's something else in your life, that's exactly how God operates. When you want to tap out, and the devil wants you to give up because it's messy and complicated, and there's no button you could push, God says, "Whoa, whoa, whoa! Let me help!"

So, here's my question. Do you ever argue with God? I do! For a couple of years now, I have been arguing with God about money. One of the things about being a pastor downtown, at a church like this, is that every single day, outside of my window, literally nine feet away from the place where I open the Bible and I read about Jesus, walks financial need. You know, it's not just once in a while, it's almost every single hour, I see someone, who, if you could judge a book by its cover, seems to be in financial need. Homeless people walk by my window, people pushing shopping carts, carrying everything they own in backpacks. When I leave my office and walk around downtown, and I start to pray, I see people, and it seems like every one of their possessions is on their person.

And when I see that, I want to do something. Not because I'm morally better in any way than those people. Not because I'm some middle-class kind of savior. I want to do something, because I can do something. I was raised in one of those privileged, blessed kind of homes, where my parents had work and they helped me pay for college, and they bought me a new car when I was -- I never had credit card debt, or car payments, I left grad school without a single dollar that I owed to anyone else, and then I married a woman in a same situation, which meant that we had the opportunity to help people.

And even more, I'm a person who follows Jesus. And if you know anything about Jesus, he's the kind of Savior who helps people. And so, when I was poor, and when I had nothing, Jesus gave me everything. When I was spiritually broke, he forgave me, saved me, redeemed me, cleansed me, purified me. Like, I owed Him nothing, he owed me nothing, and yet he gave me everything in the world. So, when I see people who have a need that I can meet, in response to Jesus, I want to do something.

And then, I read this book, the Bible, and it is so absolutely crystal clear that people should care about the poor. Right? Jesus said, "Sell your possessions, and give to the poor." His hype-man, John the Baptist said, "If you have two shirts, share one." So, you need to be an old Bible expert to know the Bible is all about giving, and sharing, and blessing. If you have the opportunity, you don't cross to the other side of the road, you be the good Samaritan, you stop, you check your pockets, and you do what you can.

Today, we're going to open up this Book, and we're going to look at a man named Moses. Quickly, some of you have heard of Moses before? Kind of famous as far as Bible characters go. But if you ever thought of Moses as the 10 Commandment carrying, confident, called, bearded, bold, "Let my people go!" kind of guy, the Bible's about to burst that bubble. And you're going to find out, at the beginning of his story, and actually through most of his story, Moses was the president of Objections Anonymous.

And when God told him something that was so, so clear, and so obvious, "One, two, three, this is what I want you to do, Moses," he rarely just went. He argued with God, and today we're going to see how God used even a man like that. Who dragged his feet and argued and objected, and God was so good, and so gracious, and so loving; here's the big idea I want to share with you today; that our God, and his grace and love; our God overcomes objections. He did for Moses 3,500 years ago, and he still does today for people like us.

So, we're going to be studying two chapters of the Bible today: Exodus 3 & 4. It's the calling of Moses to his great ministry, and here's what we find at the beginning of chapter 3. "Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So, Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight - why the bush does not burn up." When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

I wish I had about an hour more, to explain so many things about this part of the Bible. Here's the point of it, God appears to Moses in this really mysterious way, a bush, that's on fire, but it doesn't burn up. I think that means, that like a burning fire, God is dangerous. He's so pure, he's so holy, you can't just waltz into his presence any more than you can step into a fire. And you know, at the same time, God is incredibly life giving and good.

Like that blazing fire in the sky allows us all to live and the earth to look beautiful, that's the same when we get connected to God. And just like the bush didn't burn up, God doesn't burn up. He's eternal, he's always with us, Holy and loving, and life giving. And that God says to Moses, "Moses, I've seen. I've seen my people in their oppression, and Moses, I've heard about -- I've heard them crying out for mercy, and I'm concerned, Moses. So now you, Moses, go, and tell the Pharaoh to set my people free." And Moses said, "Amen!" Is what the Bible doesn't say! No, we're about to meet a Moses, perhaps, you've never met before. I'm going to summarize the 29 Bible verses of the arguments between God and the prophet Moses. And what you're going to find, is that every time, not once, not twice, not even three strikes, Moses objected, and God overcame.

Let me prove it to you. "But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" And God said, "I will be with you." Moses said to God,

"Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'"" But Moses said to the Lord, "Pardon your servant, Lord, I've never been eloquent, neither in the past, nor since you've spoken to your servant. I'm slow of speech and tongue!" The Lord said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight, or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, I will help you speak, and will teach you what to say."

"But," Moses said, "Pardon your servant, Lord, please send someone else!" Oh, there it is! "Please! Just send someone else!" Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses, and he said, "What about your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak well." And even God! Even the compassionate, patient, loving God says, "Agh!"

But you notice what he does? The burning bush, doesn't consume Moses, even though he drags his feet, he answers, and answers, and answers, and answers, he provides, and provides, and provides, and provides, because God, listen, God cared so much about that, that he refused to let this stop Him. God cared so deeply about that, that he wasn't going to let some little, or even a whole lot of objections, get in his way. And I love that story.

When it comes to planning church services here at the Core, we tend to plan our sermon series, and pick out specific Bible passages about nine to twelve months in advanced. Which meant, that I didn't pick this part of the Bible last Thursday, I picked it about nine months ago. And, God must have known what he was doing because in the last week, I have been in an argument with God that makes my money-poverty argument look small.

And, the argument has been about America. If you're anything like me, you have read the headlines and had the conversations about justice, and people, and race, and government. About systems, and bias and implicit, and I've been arguing with God about that, because I know he cares so much. If the problem with America right now, was me, I could read and listen, I could interview people and learn, I could study my Bible and pray, I can repent and be forgiven, and I can change. And I could gather, my family, my wife, and my kids and, Kim and I could teach our girls some of the things that maybe we didn't know, or learn growing up, and change how their hearts are wired, and how they react to people from different backgrounds.

But from what I understand, that's not the issue. The issue is a system and a culture that's so big, I can't even figure out where to start. And God said, "I want you to read about Moses. The guy who was completely unqualified, and yet the man that I used." And it hit me, that just because we're weak and we don't know what to say, just because it's messy, and there are no simple solutions, God cares so much about that, that he refuses to let that get in the way.

And whether it's racism, and the police or it's something else in your life, that's exactly how God operates. When you want to tap out, and the devil wants you to give up, because it's messy and complicated, and there's no button you could push, God says, "Whoa, whoa, whoa! Let me help!" And he does!

Today, I want to show you three things that God provides to overcome our objections. The three things that he gave Moses for his great mission and calling, and the same three things that he gives me, and he gives to you. So, let me show you those three things now.

First of all, God provides presence. You know, I feel so small looking up at the problems of poverty, or racism, or injustice, but poverty, racism, injustice feel equally small when they look up at the size of God. And if you believe that, like if you were to walk into that same messy situation and say, "Oh, yeah! God!" I mean, please try to convince me that there's any problem that's bigger than God.

That reminds me of the story of Stacey King, ever heard that name before? Back in March of 1990, Stacey King was a rookie for the Chicago Bulls. And it was an epic night in NBA history. Stacey King actually had a miserable game. The Bulls won in overtime, but he almost blew it. He missed a number of key free-throws. He ended up with one point. He made a single free-throw. But on that night, Michael Jordan scored 69 points. One of the best games of his entire career, I think he shot 23 for 27, Bulls overtime victory.

So, in the locker room, afterwards, reporters interviewed Stacey King and asked him, "What do you think about the game?" And Stacey King said, "I will always remember tonight as the night Michael Jordan and I, combined, to score 70 points." Isn't that so great? like -- Yes, "We won and not because I was so great," but because there was someone great. Do you get where I'm going? And so, you and I can say to God, "I made like, one free-throw in life, God." And God says, "I know. You may be weak, but I'm strong, and I'm still calling you, I'm still sending you."

Here's a second thing that God does. God provides people. Remember Moses? "God, I don't know what to say, I'm not good with words!" And God, in his patience and love, he gave Aaron, who had a way with words, and Aaron would speak. And God does the same thing for us. There are so many parts of life where we're just not gifted, we don't have the qualities, the capacity, but God never meant you to be an army of one fighting the way for good works. Instead, he gives all of these people with all these little bits of expertise, and you can do your part, and they can do theirs, and together God does something great.

That's my conviction about poverty in our city. That there's some things that I can do really well, and some things that I probably do more harm than good if I tried. I've decided that God's given me, you know, just a great ability, because my wife and I, a two-income family, to give to non-profits in our community. And if we give lavishly and generously, if we push ourselves to grow in that generosity, year after year, we don't have to feel guilty about not helping everyone in every situation. It's okay.

The devil specializes in guilt. Sometimes he makes you feel guilty for the bad things you do, and sometimes he makes you feel guilty for the things you did that weren't even bad. And so, I want to ask you, if you're facing some overwhelming situation, who could help? You know, what could you say, "I'm really good at this, I'm going to do this, because I care. And then, I'm going to have to ask my church, my family, Google, 'Can any of you help with this?'" You know, I

don't have a place to stay. I meet people on the streets, but I'm raising two little girls. And as a dad who loves them, I'm just not going to take that chance to open my door to strangers. But there are people who have housing options, what can we do together?

I'm not really trained in some of the mental health issues that you see on the streets, but some people are. They're gifted, they're wise, they have incredible boundaries and systems. So how could we partner together and do something. You will burnout, be overwhelmed and quit the "good works" game, if you try to do it yourself. So, the questions that wise Christians ask is, "What do I do, and what do you do, and how do we do that together?"

Actually, on that note, let me give you a really practical warning: be careful of the internet. Despite all of its amazing blessings, the fact that I can watch break dancing videos after my wife goes to bed, like all of you do, you know? You want to know the real dangers with this? Is that, every single day, with all these headlines, really good works, and really big problems are put before your eyes that you have nothing to do with. Right? No matter where it happens, people die in unjust ways every single day, there are natural disasters, children are -- I mean, that is the world that we live in, but if you're exposed to that day after day, what it will do to you is, it will paralyze you into doing nothing.

Jesus once told a story of the good Samaritan, and when the good Samaritan came across this man who had been jumped, left naked, left bleeding, and broke, he didn't check his pockets and say, "Can I help everyone in the world?" No, this guy, right in front of him, "I can do that." And he did. So, if you want to be an online kind of person, you can pray for the problems of the world, but please focus your attention and your gifts on the ones that are right in front of you. That's how things change. That's how they get better.

But the last answer's my favorite. God provides his presence, "I'm with you." He provides us people, like Aaron, the body of Christ. My favorite thing is that God also provides grace. God provides his love, his mercy, his forgiveness, his compassion, and his unfailing commitment to be with us. Do you know how I know that's true? Moses survived. God gave him such a clear command, "I don't want to do it!" He eventually admitted, but God still loves him, he still saved him, he still forgave him.

And God does the same thing with us. You know, I'm so glad that I'm not God, because I think I would have consumed Mike Novotny a long time ago, but I'm still here, alive and breathing, and that's proof of grace. You know, Moses tried to approach the burning bush, and God said "Wait, wait, wait, take off your sandals. This is holy ground. Nothing dirty, even on the bottom of your shoe, can come into my presence." And yet, despite the dirtiness of our hands, our thoughts, our minds, our hearts, you and I can walk into the presence of God because of grace.

Because 2,000 years ago, there was a better Moses, whose name was Jesus. And God was so concerned about the problem of our sin, the fact that there's no way we can do enough to make God love us, and earn a place in heaven, and you know what Jesus said when God called Him? Okay? He didn't say, "Send someone else!" He didn't say, "I'm really not good at this God!" He didn't object, he submitted. And because of Jesus Christ, and his incredible commitment to you,

there is grace, and there is forgiveness, and there is love, and I get to the end of my days in these stumbling efforts, I look back on years where I wish I could redo them, and yet -- and yet, I don't have to live with shame because of grace, and neither do you. No matter how worn out the toes of shoes from dragging your feet in the calling of God, there is grace.

I have this really sharp memory from the late '80s when I was a kid of just seven or eight years old. I'm kneeling on the couch, and I'm holding on to the back of it, and I'm kind of peeking, spying at my mom and Bob. It's night time, the light of the dining room table is on, and I see the tops of their heads, as they both stare down at our kitchen table, and then I hear their voices, first my mom's and then Bob's. Because my mom was teaching Bob how to read. Bob was a factory worker from the city I grew up in. He was quiet, kind, compassionate, and he was illiterate. As a second grader, I could read words that Bob could not. And so, week, after week, after week, he knocked on our door, my mom invited him inside, and they sat down at our kitchen table and sounded out the simplest words, syllable by syllable. You know how long my mom did that? For years. Years! And even now, I could have given her a thousand reasons why she shouldn't have. We don't even know this guy, and it's not your expertise, and there's a lot of people who could. But mom didn't object, she just did.

And that story makes me think, not just of my calling, and yours, but looking back, despite the complexity, people will have a memory of it being beautiful and powerful and sacrificial. That memory reminds me of Jesus. Who, when we were Bob, did not just give a few years, but he gave his life, so that one day, you and I take our last breath, we would look down at the book of life and what could we read there? Our names, written by Jesus, himself. And the more you remember that, that there's presence in people, and there's grace that gives you that, you'll look at God, and unlike Moses, you just might say, "No further objections."

Let's pray.

Our gracious Father in heaven, I thank you for the good works that you prepare for us to do. Just because they're good, you never said that they would be easy. And so, for all the things you've been thinking about for the past few minutes, for the relationships of the challenges and the goals, for the neighbors that we want to serve, the family members that we want to love, the people from our past that we long to forgive, for the challenges in our culture, and in our world, the things that seem so much bigger than us, today, God, we remember, and we keep the faith, that they are not bigger than you.

And that you have said, through faith in Jesus, that the Holy Spirit himself will be in our hearts. Father, you have not given us a spirit of timidity and fear, but one of power and self-control. And so, we step into this moment, not afraid of what you have called us to do, but confident that if you called us, you will equip us, and even more importantly, God, you will go with us. So, for the sake of every beautiful, big change you want to make in this world, and in our own hearts, we say amen. We say, "Your will be done." We say, "Heavenly Father, send us." And we pray this all, for your glory, and for the good of your people. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.