

“Thy Way or the Highway”

Exodus 3:1-15

Series: The Experiment

Week 4. Blessed are Those who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

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The Woodside Church

May 26, 2019

There may be a million ways to do something. My uncle, who married my Dad's sister, used to say there were only three ways to do something: the right way, the wrong way and the Hogle way. When we asked him, “What is the Hogle way?” he'd say, “It's the wrong way only faster.” Sometimes people say, “My way or the highway!” which usually means, “Do it my way or get out of here.”

My Way. You've probably heard the song which sums up the singer's whole life with the triumphant line, “I did it my way.” Now hear the story behind it. Paul Anka was on vacation in France when he heard the tune. He bought it for a \$1 and added lyrics he thought would be perfect for Frank Sinatra.

At one o'clock in the morning, I sat down at an old IBM electric typewriter and said, 'If Frank were writing this, what would he say?' I read a lot of periodicals, and I noticed everything was 'my this' and 'my that'. We were in the 'me generation' and Frank became the guy for me to use to say that.

Sinatra recorded and released “My Way” in early 1969. It became an instant hit and his signature song. It's been sung by Elvis, Sid Vicious, and millions of Karaoke wannabes. In England it's the most popular song sung at funerals. In the Philippines it even inspires violence and murders. Yet despite its popularity, Sinatra's daughter Tina says her father came to hate the song. “He didn't like it. That song stuck and he couldn't get it off his shoe. He always thought that song was self-serving and self-indulgent.”

That's true-be-do-be-do. Truth is if you do selfish, you'll be selfish and if you be selfish you'll do selfish. According to that great theologian Bruce Springsteen, “Everybody's got a hungry heart.” We all hunger and thirst for something - power, pleasure, popularity, possessions. But when you hunger and thirst for your way, you are never satisfied. Take one trivial example. In 1955, the largest soda McDonald's offered was 7 ounces. Today it has swelled six times that size to 42 ounces. That is a third of a gallon and it delivers over 400 calories. And what do we ask? “Does this come with free refills?” When we hunger and thirst for selfish things, we are never satisfied. The world knows how to scratch our itch, feed our hunger, slake our thirst *temporarily*. It can't satisfy our hunger and thirst and it doesn't care. Its only goal is to sell to our selfishness.

We are swimming in a sea of things which look good and taste good yet never satisfy. On July 30, 1945, the battle cruiser *USS Indianapolis* was returning from a mission when it was hit by a Japanese torpedo. In only 12 minutes, 300 of the 1,200 men died. The remaining 900 endured four days and five nights without food or water under

the blazing sun of the Pacific. Only 316 of these survived. One of those was the chief medical officer, who recorded his own experience. He wrote:

When the hot sun came out, and we were in this crystal clear ocean, we were so thirsty. You couldn't believe it wasn't good enough to drink. I had a hard time convincing the men they shouldn't drink. The real young ones...you take away their hope, you take away their water and food, they would drink the salt water and they would go fast. I can remember striking the ones who were drinking the salt water to try to stop them.

When you drink the salt water of society it never satisfies. It can even kill. When I live to do it my way, I may wind up all alone on the highway to nowhere.

Just ask Moses. This slave child is adopted into Pharaoh's family and ascends to be a prince of Egypt. To his credit, Moses never forgets his roots or his people.

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. Exodus 2:11

Imagine the conflicting emotions swirling inside Moses. Fists clench, teeth grit, eyes narrow when he sees the crushing enslavement of his kinsmen. He must also feel a gnawing guilt about his luxurious life. Suddenly this hot-headed revolutionary boils over. This angry young man takes matters into his hands. He will set his people free.

Mom asked nine-year-old Joey what he learned in Sunday school. Excitedly, Joey said, "Well, Mom, our teacher told us how God sent Moses behind enemy lines on a rescue mission to lead the Israelite people out of Egypt. When he got to the Red Sea, he commanded his army to build a pontoon bridge and all the people walked across safely. Then, he radioed headquarters for reinforcements. They sent bombers to blow up the bridge and all the Israelites were saved." "Now, Joey," mother asked with one eyebrow raised, "is that really what your teacher taught you?" "Well, no Mom. But if I told it the way my teacher did, you'd never believe it!"

In truth, Moses' first attempt to free his people his way is a complete disaster.

He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. Exodus 2:11-12

Moses strikes a blow for truth and justice but secretly like Batman. Unfortunately, it turns out Moses is terrible at this secret identity thing.

The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, "Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?" The man said, "Who made

you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known." Exodus 2:13-14

Fearing the wrath of Pharaoh, Moses drops everything and flees to the desert. Doing it his way put him on the highway to exile in the desert.

Jesus says there is another way.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Matthew 5:6

Righteousness is the third way. It's the right way. It's God's way. Instead of my way or the highway, it's Thy way. It takes Moses forty years in the desert and a conversation with some smoldering shrubbery to get him on the right path. He's married, has children and works in his father-in-law's sheep herding business. He's out in the sticks with the hicks. How do we know? His father-in-law's name is Jethro.

One day, while Moses leads his flock through Hicksville, he spies some sticks on fire. Curious, he says, "I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up" (Exodus 3:3). Like a moth to a flame, Moses draws closer to the inferno when suddenly it calls his name, twice: "Moses, Moses." When I was a child, I was afraid when the furnace in the basement ignited at night. It sounded like an intruder slowly climbing the steps to get me. Now imagine a furnace which roars into flame and calls your name. "Here I am," Moses says with a trembling voice. "Do not come any closer," the Voice replies. "No problem," Moses probably thinks.

"Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God (Exodus 3:5-6).

No words can describe the terror racing through Moses. Raging fire, jagged lightning, nuclear annihilation cannot compare because Moses is now face to face with the God who creates all those earthly powers. Yet God does not come down to condemn the world, but to save it. He tells Moses He sees the suffering of His people Israel. He will free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and take them to the Promised Land.

Then, through Moses, God will teach the world His way. Righteousness goes in two directions. There is spiritual righteousness and social righteousness. Spiritual righteous is vertical. It's love for God. Social righteousness is horizontal. It's love for others. Years later, Moses and Jesus will simplify this into two key commandments:

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Matthew 22:37-40; Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18.

Both ways are essential. Those who fight for social righteousness without God can cause just as much oppression as their opponents. Think of the French and Russian Revolutions. Those who seek spiritual righteousness but love not their neighbor become like the religious people who judged Jesus. The Apostle John teaches it is impossible to love God and not your neighbor.

We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. I John 4:19-21

Together spiritual and social righteousness make for a more satisfying, fulfilled life. The Pew Research Center found:

People who are active in religious congregations tend to be happier and more civically engaged than either religiously unaffiliated adults or inactive members of religious groups, according to a survey data from the United States and more than two dozen other countries.

Moses may be the first person in history to learn this lesson. God is looking for leaders like Moses who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who hunger to know Him, who thirst to help others. There are millions God wants to set free – free from sin, shame and selfishness. Maybe you feel unworthy for this mission. So did Moses.

When the Lord says, “So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10). Moses’ first objection is *I’m Nobody*. “But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” (Exodus 3:11). He’s a toppled prince, a guilty murderer, a desperate fugitive. He’s been out of the loop, in the desert, for forty years. Nobody back there knows him and those who do want to kill him. Do you ever doubt yourself? Do you ever focus on problems instead of solutions, on your weaknesses and faults not your God-given gifts? Instead of learning from mistakes, are you imprisoned by them? Do you feel discouraged and drained of all your energy? Moses sure did.

Now notice, God doesn’t argue with Moses. He doesn’t pump him up with affirmations or stroke his self-esteem. He replies with this promise: “I will be with you.” (Exodus 3:12). Luis Palau is one of the most powerful evangelists in the world. I heard him at the Creation festival. But when he was in Bible College he had a lot of doubts about his ability to preach. Then Ian Thomas preached at one of their chapel services.

He talked about how it took Moses 40 years in the wilderness to learn that he was nothing. Then one day Moses was confronted with a burning bush—likely a dry bunch of ugly sticks—yet Moses had to take off his sandals. Why? Because God was in the bush!

Major Thomas said, “God was telling Moses, ‘I don’t need a pretty bush or an educated bush or an eloquent bush. Any old bush will do as long as I’m in the bush. If I’m going to use you, it won’t be you doing something for me, but me doing something through you.’”

I was that kind of bush: a useless bunch of dried up sticks. I could do nothing for God. All my reading and studying and modeling myself after others was worthless unless God was in the bush. Only he could make something happen. When Thomas closed his message, I ran back to my room and in tears prayed in my native Spanish. My spiritual struggle was finally over! I’d let God be God and let Luis be dependent on him.¹

God can do great things with nobodies like you and me.

Moses’ second objection follows the first: ***Who Are You?*** Seems like a strange question. But remember, Moses was raised among the Egyptians who worshiped multiple gods. He lives with Jethro’s multiple gods. Moses lost touch with the One True God.

America is fast becoming a supermarket of religious beliefs. Freedom of religion is truly one of the great strengths of this nation. In fact, a Newsweek poll found that 84% of Americans say that spirituality is very important or somewhat important to their daily lives.² Yet the Pew Research Center found:

Overall, 35% of adult Millennials (Americans born between 1981 and 1996) are religiously unaffiliated. Far more Millennials say they have no religious affiliation compared with those who identify as evangelical Protestants (21%), Catholics (16%) or mainline Protestants (11%).³

Today it’s Do It Yourself Religion. They derive their understanding of God from a mixture of childhood lessons, movies, TV, the Internet and their personal preferences. Instead of making up your own god, why not meet the One True God? That’s why we need Discovery Kingdom team members, Adventure Club parents, Youth leaders and Growth Group leaders who will introduce the Lord to this generation.

When Moses asks, “What is your name?” God replied, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’ (v. 14). He is not the sun god, the earth god, the war god or the love god. He is not the money god, the power

¹ Luis Palau, *Men of Integrity* (May/June 2002).

² Jerry Adler, “In Search of the Spiritual,” *Newsweek*, August 29/September 5 issue, p. 48.

³ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12/millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/>

god, the popularity god or the pleasure god. He is not a made up god or a DIY god. His name is "I AM." He is and He is with us always. There are no other gods. To be spiritually righteous we must hunger and thirst for the One True God.

Moses' third objection is: *I Can't Do It.*

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." (Exodus 4:10)

26% of Americans say their biggest fear, even more than death, is public speaking. But God won't let Moses get away with that. "Who gave man his mouth? Is it not I the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say" (Exodus 4:11-12). The truth is God has been preparing Moses for this moment his whole life. This Prince of Egypt will go face to face with the King of Egypt. This Desert Shepherd will lead God's lambs through the desert for forty years. This Fugitive who knows the pain of breaking the Law will be the Great Lawgiver to God's people. And this man who claims to be afraid of speaking to Pharaoh is doing a pretty good job of talking back to God. If God calls you to serve Him, He will fully equip you.

Finally, Moses simply says, *"I Won't Do It."* "But Moses said, 'O Lord, please send someone else to do it'" (Exodus 4:13). Now God gets mad. Don't ever say to God, "I won't do it." You don't want to make Him mad. Despite Moses' refusal, God still moved him to become the Deliverer of His people. He led them from Egypt through the desert to the Promised Land.

Here are Five Experiments you can try to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

1. Stand up for someone who is being treated unfairly
2. Be fair to God's creation, use only reusable containers this week (ie: grocery bags, water bottles, decrease your trash output...)
3. If you hear gossip, shut it down
4. Pray about an important decision until you know what God's will is. Then do it.
5. Approach your daily Bible reading and prayer like a starving person eating a meal

God wants to set you on fire. He knows your weaknesses but they don't matter – He'll be with you. He knows you don't know everything. He'll teach you. He knows you need help. He'll equip you. He knows you don't want to go. That's the one thing you have to do. You have to go. And if you do, He'll be with you. Will you decide to work with Him or will you make Him work around you?

Like Moses, Lok Mani Bhandari was a hot-headed revolutionary "freedom fighter" in the Himalayan nation of Nepal. He already earned a reputation as a national martial arts champion. His father was grooming him to become Prime Minister of Nepal. Yet God had different plans. Nepal is the only official Hindu kingdom in the world. It is so difficult to share the Gospel here that one famous professor of missions "considered the Himalayan region a hopeless case for Christianity."

Then in November, 1983, while praying in the forest, Lok received a direct revelation from the God of Israel to establish a school to share the Gospel in Nepal. Today Lok is an ambassador for Christ in his home country and not discouraged by the 30 times he's been detained, arrested and persecuted for preaching the gospel. Now Lok tells crowds of 65,000 to 70,000 how Jesus revolutionized his life. Christians in Nepal now number more than 700,000, a great work of God considering that 50 years ago there were no known Christians in Nepal. All because Lok Bhandari didn't say to God, "My way or the highway" but Thy Way.