

What do you fear? May it's the news that you see in the news that's planting fear in your heart? Kim Ju On claims he has a Nuclear Button on his desk; President Trump claims his button's bigger. Maybe your fear is more personal. You want to retire, but you're afraid you won't have the resources to pull it off. You're a senior in High School. You're wondering if you have what it takes to make it in college. Or you're a little older. You're seriously dating someone. And you're wondering if the guy/or girl you're dating is the healthy choice and marriage to them will end up in a high-quality marriage and family. Or you're a farmer. The economy has been somewhat good. Do you have what it takes to expand the operation, new home, new hog barns. Or the prospect of welcoming a new pastor to the Raymond Church is a little scary. The Pastor Search and the Council did their homework. We interviewed and called him. Will it work out, we wonder? Will there be a good fit. Sometimes, fear grabs us in the gut, and robs us of sleep at night. Let's tell it like it is. The challenges surrounding us frighten us. We're all weak and wounded and often very tired believers. And as Vince Lombardi said, "**fatigue makes cowards of us all.**" This afternoon the living God wants to show up in this room and ignite more passion in you than you ever imagined. Yahweh wants to fuel you with the fire that will make you fearless. Weak though you may be, He wants to use you. Consider Moses.

I. A TERRIFYNG FIRE. It was 1446 B.C. There on Mount Sinai, high above the desert landscape an 80 year-old weather-beaten shepherd stumbles upon a sight that shakes him to the core. There it was--a bewildering sight. A bush ablaze that refused to burn-up. With trembling feet, Moses edges closer. The action continues with verse 4. A voice thunders, "**Moses, Moses!**" Quivering, he responds, "**Here I am.**" "**Don't come any closer, Moses. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.**" Inside Moses trembled. "**Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God**" [vs. 6b]. Moses hid his face; he recoiled, and then removed his sandals. Why bare feet? Like Moses, right now, you're on holy ground in the terrifying presence of the Living God! So God begins to unpack His plans to Moses. So I've seen the oppression of my people. "**I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land.**" And then God comes to the punch line. [vs. 10] "**So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.**" Moses is terrified. God was calling him to confront the fiercest tyrant on the face of the earth, Pharaoh. And it scared Moses spit-less. The excuses begin to spill from his lips.

II. A MONUMENTAL TASK & A BOATLOAD OF EXCUSES.

Excuse #1—Who Am I? I'm a Nobody! [vs. 11] "**But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?'**" Look God. At 80 I'm entering male menopause. I'm worn out, wasted, tired and don't have much juice inside to try anything new. 40 years ago I had a nervous breakdown. I murdered a man and fled for my life. Cut me some slack. I can't take on the task. I'm a "nobody." I don't have what it takes. God gives Moses a precious promise, a sacred crutch, to sustain him in the dangerous venture. Don't be afraid, Moses [vs. 12] "**I will be with you.**"

Excuse #2—Who are You? With excuse #1, Moses is unsure about himself. With excuse #2 Moses is unsure about God. [vs. 13-14]. "**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?'**" I mean, Egypt has zillions of

gods. "**Then what shall I tell them?'**" Moses was asking for God's Name, God's American Express calling card, a card that would give access to heaven's throne room, shape history, shake up and overthrow Pharaoh and the demonic hordes of Egypt. Tell me what is Your Name? "**God said to Moses, 'I am who I am. That is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you''**" [vs. 14]. When God speaks of Himself, He says, "I Am!" When we speak of God we say Yahweh or He Is!

Moses in his radical impotence is face to face with the God of omnipotence. God's Name: I Am that I AM or Yahweh for short, affirms that this God is the all-sufficient One. If I ignite a lighter, in time the fire will go out. The fire burns up the fuel. But our God fuels the universe! He never runs out of gas, like the burning bush that burned but never burned up. God is the Nuclear Power Plant that energizes the Universe. He is Generative Being Par excellence. But just like the burning bush that refused to burn up, God's energy keeps going and going. He's **ENDLESS ENERGY.** He's the **SOURCE OF INEXHAUSTIBLE ABUNDANCE.** As the Belgic Confession says, He's "the overflowing fountain of all good," In Israel's wilderness wanderings He sent water from the rock, manna from the sky...everyday for 40 years, and wonderful meat to eat. He was Israel's and our overflowing fountain of all good. There is no problem you face He doesn't have the answer for. Whatever I need, whatever we need, we can depend on Him, count on Him. He is the all-sufficient One. He is faithful. The Lord will provide. Moses! It may be tough but you will never crumble under the load. I will be with you. **I will provide!**

Excuse #3—I have No Leader's License. [4:1] "**What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you'?"**" I am a card-carrying preacher. On September 14, 1976 I received a certificate of Ordination. Pastors, doctors, teachers, police officers, builders, counselors, all need a license to prove to skeptics and cynics that they are equipped to take up their tasks. They are credentialed. Moses is telling God, I have no leader's license, no proof that you really showed up and commissioned me. I can't slip the burning bush in my back pocket. The folks back home just won't believe me. So God credentials Moses with three miracles that will prove to Israel and Pharaoh's court that God means business. 1) Moses' staff will turn into a serpent. 2) Moses' hand stuck beneath his robe is first diseased by leprosy, then removed, is whole again. 3) Finally water is changed to blood. All this miraculous stuff is calculated to grab Israel's and Pharaoh's attention. Trust me, Moses, I will be with you. I will provide for you. And to this objection God says, "**I will equip you!**"

Excuse #4—Moses says, "I'm a lousy preacher" [can't think too well on my feet] I'm definitely not Your man for addressing the Egyptian Court" [Karen Hinckley, *The Story of Stories*, p. 45]. The text is so honest. **Excuse #5—O Lord, please send somebody else!**" God is ticked. Vs. 14 says hot under the collar. Look Moses, "**If I made your mouth, can't I fill it?'**" **Don't you think I know what I'm doing?'**" God agrees to give Moses a colleague, mouthpiece-prophet Aaron, his own brother. He's got a flair for words. Together you'll march into Pharaoh's court and trumpet the word of the Lord: "**This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go!'**" [5:1].

Let me return to the third excuse (I've got no leader's license. I'm not credentialed. And God says, I will equip you. And one of the ways God equips Moses is with his staff; a staff

that turns into a serpent. [In one song Ken Medema calls it a hot rod!] Study that staff. We read in 4:20 that as Moses started back to Egypt **“he took the staff of God in his hand.”** Moses’ ordinary 6ft shepherd staff became a revolutionary tool. Do a word study on the staff of Moses. God used that staff with ten plagues to bring Pharaoh to his knees. It’s used to turn the Nile to blood [7:17], with the plague of frogs [8:5], of gnats [8:16], of hail [9:23], of locusts [10:13].

And then there’s that moment when the people of God stood between a rock and a hard place; between *“the Devil and the deep blue Sea.* They were hanging, so to speak by their fingertips. They were stuck. Directly in front of Israel to the East was the frightening Red Sea. To the West stood Migdol, a formidable mountainous Egyptian fortress. Likewise to the South Israel was hemmed in by the mountains. To the north was this massive horde of Egyptian horses, three manned chariots, Pharaoh’s desert tank division. God’s people figured they were dead meat and wished they could have died in Egypt. Moses answered, urged faith and brought powerful comfort. **“Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still”** [14:13-14]. What Moses promised, God delivered. We read in 14:21-22 *“Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left”* [14:21-22].

Think of the staff. With this staff the Red Sea Waters part [14:16]. A massive Amelekite army is smashed [17:9]. Water gushes from the rock. Francis Schaeffer put it this way: **“God so used a stick of wood”** [No Little People, pp. 13-14]. There’s so much evil in the world, so much radically wrong. What can one person do, what can one small church do? But then I think: *“God so used a stick of wood!”* The staff of Moses became the rod of God and turned the world upside down. Mother Teresa was only a tiny woman. She called herself, **“I’m only a tiny pencil in the hand of God.”** But with that tiny pencil God rewrote history. Mother Teresa became a lightning rod for the power of God on earth.

God asks you, as he asked Moses: **“What is that in your hand?”** [4:2] a wrench, a truck steering wheel, a pen, a computer keyboard, a checkbook, a scalpel, a hammer, a paint brush, a violin, a guitar, a voice, a mind? What is that in your hand? Give it to God. In God’s big hands our small tools can register maximum impact and the course of history can change. God says, *“I will equip you.”*

In the film, **The Help**, Viola Davis plays a maid [Aibileen] in a 60’s white racist home in Jackson, Mississippi. Aibileen is more than a maid. She’s a surrogate mother. Mae Mobley’s biological mom doesn’t do much mothering at all. So the burden comes on Aibileen’s shoulders. Everyday she picks up her little girl, Mae Mobley, cups her face in her hands and says to her: **“You is kind. You is smart. You is important.”** [Clip] And the little girl repeats it. And it becomes truth for her. Moms and Dads! Little Girls and young boys often can’t feel the love and approval of Jesus, until you speak it into their little hearts! Let me show you what I mean. [Christ-Confidence diagram]. Remember Peter in the boat and on the Sea of Galilee with the rest of Jesus’ disciples. Buffeted by the winds and the waves, they all were

shaking in fear. Then they saw Jesus walking on the water and they were terrified beyond belief. Then Jesus spoke six words: **TAKE COURAGE. I AM. FEAR NOT!** [Matthew 14:27]. Jesus breathed courage into Peter’s soul. Suddenly, Peter believed he could walk on water too. When he kept his eyes on the winds and the waves, he sunk. When he kept his eyes on Jesus he did the miraculous. A human being walked on water.

Inside each one of us is a little kid, weak scared, and riddled with self-doubt. Sometimes we believe the Deceiver’s lie. We believe we’re useless. We believe we’re failures, we believe we’re weak and dumb and ugly. But a Master Teacher walks into our lives, a new mentor. His hands, his feet, his face is scarred. He looks us in the eye and says, *“Take courage! I Am.”* He steps to the chalkboard to sketch out our life assignment. *“I have a mission for you.”* We protest. Slip Him all our flimsy excuses. He encourages us. **“Don’t be afraid.” I WILL BE WITH YOU. I WILL PROVIDE FOR YOU. I WILL EQUIP YOU. I’LL GIVE YOU ALL THE TOOLS YOU NEED. TOGETHER WE’LL CHANGE THE WORLD.** Remember, the staff of Moses, became the rod of God. Forget the excuses. If God could change history with a stick of wood, why would you doubt He could use you? **God so used a stick of wood.**

Excuses, excuses, excuses. Sometimes teachers are up to their Adam’s Apple with parent written student excuses. Some are classics like: *“My son is under the doctor’s care and should not take P.E. today. Please execute him.”* Here’s another: *“Please excuse Ray from school. He has very loose vowels.”* Another, *“Please excuse Jimmy for being. It was his father’s fault.”* Here’s a crazy one, *“Sally won’t be in school a week from Friday. We have to attend her funeral.”* One more: *“Please excuse Lisa for being absent. She was sick and I had her shot.”* [Web: Teachers Jokes- Funny School Excuses] Pretty flimsy, pretty crazy excuses. Our excuses aren’t much better are they? You know what’s exciting?

Hudson Taylor wrote: *“All of God’s giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them”* [Multiplying Disciples, p. 15]