

## “Mumblin’ Mo”

### *Big Buts in the Bible – part #1*

Exodus 4:1-17

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.

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 “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.

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. 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 I am *“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 20 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 speech debating the merits of free-range sheep farming. 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'd probably hesitate, too.

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 know the story of the first three chapters of Exodus, you would think Moses' fear of public speaking was not the worst 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.

Here's a quick review of Moses' life: as a baby, his 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.

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 use you? Do we expect God to use us, the church? What kind of excuses are we making?

Maybe we are saying some of the same things Moses says. Let’s see. 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?

God’s answer to Moses’ 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! Not a good omen, because Pharaoh’s crown was the shape of a snake. Maybe that’s no coincidence. Moses has to grab the snake by the tail in order to regain his staff. There seems to be some foreshadowing going on there.

Second, Moses’ hand goes from clean to leprous to clean again. Those who know the rest of the story might note that Moses never used this miracle. 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.” There is some ironic humor there! 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,” and put his hand over it when necessary!

There are dozens of bible verses where God promises to give us the right words to say. God reassures the prophet Jeremiah (1:9), "Behold, I have put My words into your mouth." God says the same thing to Isaiah (51:16), "I have put My words in your mouth." According to Deuteronomy 18:18, God will always put his words in the mouths of his 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. 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.

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.

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 he had passion. If he could just get over his reluctance, his fear, and 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.

- “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)
- “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)
- “This is my command: Love one another.” (John 15:12)
- “True religion is this: take care of the orphans and widows.” (James 1:27)
- “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.

As your pastor, I will say there are two painfully obvious ways we say “No” to God. The first has to do with our presence. Remember Easter Sunday, it was so beautiful, with a full house? Why are there less people here today? We celebrate the Resurrection every Sunday! When we fail to honor God by dismissing the opportunity to worship together, we are making a poor excuse.

The second excuse we make is in our giving and generosity. It takes a group of committed people to support the ministry of this church, to the tune of \$160,000, to be exact. If all of the families in this church would practice a tithe, it would be simple to meet that goal. But many of us say, “But God, that’s too much!” What, then? Is God going to send someone else in your place? If God does, do you think God will give you the credit for it?

Of course, those are just two examples. We should also be present in the community, healing, teaching, and serving. That 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 will that show God our faithfulness?

God redeemed us with the precious blood of his only Son, Jesus Christ. You were bought at a great price. Your life is no longer your own. Your talents, your resources, and your words – they all belong to God. We are just stewards. Are

we going to serve, or make excuses? Our ministry and our message will only go as far as the people are willing to participate.

Here’s what I know. You all have one gift you can use for God every single day. Your prayers matter. 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, our church, town, community. 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, the grieving and broken hearts he heals.

“But, God!” Take out the comma. “But God...” God has the biggest “but” in the Bible. God always has an answer to your excuse. But God will also never force you to do anything.

God invites you, right now, to renew the calling he 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>