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Leading When You'd Rather Hide

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Leaders sometimes face intractable opposition. The resistance seems too strong, too entrenched and too organized. Resources seem too limited.

That's how Moses felt when God appeared to him in the burning bush and said, "I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt" (Ex.3: 10). Moses responded to God's promise with four questions that expressed his fear and unbelief. And God gave four answers that buoyed his courage and confidence.

1 + God = A Majority

First, Moses asked, "Who am I?" That question revealed a change in Moses. Forty years before he had tried single handily to deliver the Israelites from the Egyptians. Now he felt inadequate, even though God had sent him. Previously, Moses acted alone . . . without God. This cause of failure eluded Moses. He only knew he tried and failed.

How did God respond to Moses' question? He told him what he needed to hear: "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12). Moses would soon discover that 1 + God = A Majority. This is true for you today.

God is with you

Moses' second question was, "What shall I tell them?" (3:13). Moses realized few people in Egypt would remember him. Demanding the release of two-and-a-half million slaves was a tall order. Moses would need an authority higher than himself to persuade Pharaoh.

Again God gave Moses what he needed. The Lord told Moses to say: "I AM has sent me to you" (Exodus 3:14). With that name God revealed himself as the eternal God who is always there for his people. Because it's hard to grasp the concept of an eternal being, God explained that though eternal he had invaded time. He was the God of "Abraham" and the God of "Isaac."

God will convince skeptics

Still uncertain, Moses asked a third question: "What if they do not believe me?" (Exodus 4:1). Moses remembered what had happened forty years before. While trying to settle a dispute between two Hebrew men one of them asked, "Who made you ruler and judge over us?" (Exodus 2:14). With those words echoing through his mind Moses feared rejection.

The Lord told Moses he would validate his leadership with a series of miracles that would convince even the most hardened skeptic. With God at his side, Moses could abandon fear.

God will help you

Moses' fourth and final question wasn't actually a question but a statement. He implied he wasn't qualified to lead the people to freedom because he wasn't an eloquent speaker. At this point Moses' fear of failure overcame his memory. Years later, Stephen would say that Moses was a powerful communicator (Acts 7:22). Moses' problem was that it had been so long since he had used his skills of persuasion he thought he had lost them.

Once more God responded with compassion to Moses. The Lord told him, "I will help you speak and will teach you what to say" (4:12). God then went a step further by promising to send Aaron to help Moses.

After God had addressed Moses' final objection, Moses agreed to return to Egypt and lead the Israelites to freedom. Without question Moses stands as one of the great leaders of world history. Yet, when God told him to lead in a difficult situation, Moses hesitated before he obeyed. But he did obey.

Like Moses, you'll also face tough challenges. Although, you won't stand toe-to-toe with the world's most powerful man or seek to liberate two-and-a-half million slaves, you'll encounter seemingly insurmountable obstacles. At such times you too need to take your fears to God, listen for his response, and then obey.