

PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.

Questions

Read Exodus 3:1-17. Note every occurrence of LORD (*Yahweh*) in these verses.

Background – There is a 400 year gap between the close of *Genesis* and the opening of *Exodus*. *Genesis* is the story of the *Patriarchs* (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and *Exodus* is the story of the descendants of the *Patriarchs*, the Israelites, becoming a nation under the leadership of **Moses**. *Genesis* closes with **Jacob** and his extended family (about seventy people) moving from Canaan (the Promised Land) to Egypt to escape a severe famine. Jacob's family moved under the blessing and protection of Jacob's son **Joseph** who had arrived in Egypt years before after his brothers sold him into slavery. Because God blessed and cared for him, Joseph rose in power and influence in Egypt, becoming a great ruler second to only the Pharaoh. In the years that followed their move, the Hebrew people "were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land (Egypt) was filled with them" (**Exodus 1:6-7**).

1. For 400 years, God continued to bless and protect the Hebrew people as they lived in Egypt. From **Exodus 1:8-22**, summarize what happened that changed their circumstances.

A new king (Pharaoh) came to power in Egypt who did not know his history and the story of Joseph, whose wisdom had saved Egypt from a great famine. The new king did not understand why the Israelites were living in Egypt. All he could see was that had become more numerous than the Egyptians and he was afraid that they would someday turn on the Egyptians or leave the country. For this reason he enslaved them and forced labor. But God blessed the Israelites and the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread. As a way to control the population, the new king then told the Israelites midwives to kill any boy babies that were born. When this order was disobeyed, the king ordered that every baby boy be killed by being thrown into the Nile river.

- ♥ If you are not familiar with the story of **Moses**, read **Exodus 2** to get the background on his life. Why was he on the "far side of the desert" tending sheep? Even though he was raised in Pharaoh's family, Moses had to flee Egypt because of his murder of an Egyptian slave driver. How long had he been there (**Acts 7:20-32**)? He was 40 years old when he fled Egypt and he had been tending sheep for another 40 years.
- ♥ Why do you think God led the Hebrew people to Egypt if they were eventually going to become slaves? God led Jacob and his small family to live in Egypt where Jacob's son Joseph was already a powerful ruler – second in command to the Pharaoh – because in this friendly and fertile environment the Israelites flourished and multiplied. They were welcomed by the Egyptians, given their own land and had no enemies – and therefore no wars or struggles. Egypt was a much safer and more comfortable environment than the land of Canaan where Jacob lived with his sons. Canaan was still filled with hostile enemies and Jacob and his small family had no way of protecting themselves. The Israelites were able to flourish and multiply much quicker than they could have in Canaan – and become the large nation that God had promised they would become. What does this reveal about God, his plans and his role in history? God is in control of history and always has a plan even though it may not be evident or make sense to us. Unlike humans, he completely knows the past, the present and the future and knows the reasons behind actions and events. What personal application do you see? We don't always understand what is happening in our life or what God is doing – but God knows and has a plan that he is working out in each of our lives. Nothing is "random" with God. Our part is to trust him and his plans for us.
- ♥ In hindsight, can you think of some reasons why God "took so long" to deliver his people from slavery? Even in slavery, the Israelites were still blessed and multiplying. God was going to make a nation out of them that would bless the whole world. Their slavery made them ready and willing to follow God. It was also an opportunity for them to see the power of God in the

miracles he performed to rescue and deliver them. He was also getting Moses ready to lead them. What are some reasons why God might "take so long" to intervene in your difficult situations? Often, God is getting us ready to receive the blessings he has for us – blessings that might do us more harm than good if we are not mature and ready to receive them. God also knows what is in our future and his timing is always perfect.

2. From **Exodus 3:1-4**, list all the supernatural occurrences God used to get Moses' attention. (For background information on the *angel of the Lord (3:2)*, see box in **Lesson 3**.)

Out of nowhere, the Angel of the Lord (God) appeared to Moses as a blazing fire in a bush – but the bush did not burn up. This got Moses' attention, so that he went over to investigate. Then God spoke to Moses from the fire in the bush, calling Moses by name.

- ♥ Can you think of some reasons why God used this strategy to get Moses' attention? Why didn't God just start speaking to Moses? What value would these supernatural signs have later?

Before God began to speak to Moses and give him the call to lead the Israelites out of bondage, he first got his attention by causing the bush to burn but not be consumed. When Moses came closer (to God) to investigate – and God has his full attention, God then began to speak to Moses and deliver his very important message. The tangible sign of a bush burning by not burning up was something that Moses was able to see and experience – thus validating God's voice when he did speak. Later, even if Moses doubted that God had spoken to him, he would remember the physical experience of the burning bush that he saw with his own eyes – thus confirming that God really did speak to him and gave him the call to lead his people.

- ♥ What has served as God's "attention-getter" in your life? A personal experience with God? A near disaster? Frustrated plans? Special blessings? Personal crisis? An encounter with Scripture? A relationship? Something else? How was your response the *same as* or *different* from Moses' in 3:4?
- ♥ God's *presence* and *fire (3:2-3)* are often linked in Scripture. What do *God* and *fire* have in common? In Scripture, fire is often associated with God's Presence and his holiness. We are attracted to fire, yet we cannot get too close or it will burn us. 1 Tim. 6:16 tells us that God "lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him. Fire stands for God's complete "separateness" from humans in that he is completely different from us and is not on our level. Fire purifies impurities from substances that it burns. As we come close to God, his work in our lives will also purify us so that we become as "pure gold." Fire is a powerful word picture for God in Scripture. Spend some time with your small group thinking of different ways that God and fire are alike. (You may want to look "fire" up in a Bible dictionary if you have one.)

As we consider this story of Moses' encounter with *Yahweh*, it is very important to realize that Moses did not have any **history with God** or **personal knowledge of God** before this incident. Over 400 years had passed since God's interaction with **Abraham, Isaac** and **Jacob**. The only knowledge that the Hebrew people living in Egypt had of God was the **oral tradition** (stories) passed down from generation to generation – and Moses, growing up, had little interaction with his own people because he was raised as Pharaoh's grandson and was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians (**Acts 7:21-22**). The **Law** and the **Ten Commandments** had not yet been given; in fact, there were **no written Scriptures** at this time that would have revealed God's character and his acts in history. The **first five books of the Old Testament** were written *by Moses himself*, many years later! So, keep in mind that this encounter with God really did "come out of the blue" for Moses. This truly was his **first encounter** and **first impression** of God!

- ♥ What do you remember about your first "personal" encounter with God? What was your first impression? Have you ever "heard" God call you by name (3:4)? Why was this important for Moses? **God calling Moses by name let Moses know that God knew who he was. Calling Moses by name made this a very personal encounter.**

3. Put yourself in Moses' "sandals" and imagine you are encountering God for the first time. From the interaction recorded in 3:5-10, what conclusions do you come to about who *Yahweh* is? Be specific. **Below are some suggestions of conclusions we can come to about God:**

3:5-6 - Yahweh is holy – set apart and different from humans – and humans cannot go unaided into God's presence. We approach God with reverent awe and not flippantly. There should be a natural and healthy fear when we come into God's presence.

3:6 - God knows who we are and our history. Even if we don't know him very well, he knows us completely – where we have come from and he sees all that we are doing. God always knows where to find us.

3:7 - God is not indifferent to the suffering in the world and of his people. God's inaction does not mean he is ignorant or indifferent to our suffering. God is concerned and cares.

3:8 - God, at the right time and the right way, will come to intervene in our situations and circumstances. He can and will act in history. He does cause things to happen.

God's ultimate plans for us are for good. **Jeremiah 29:11** For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

3:9 – God sees and knows all – but waits for the right time to act.

3:10 – God uses people to work his will in the world – to intervene in history and to further his plans.

♥ God is *holy*. What does *holy* mean to you? (Holiness is related to glory, to separateness, to purity and brightness. The very brilliance of the light surrounding God reveals he is awesomely "other.") Does God's holiness make him inapproachable? God can be approached – but on his terms, not ours. Why or why not? Why was Moses afraid to look at God? Moses, no doubt sensed God's awesome power and presence and knew he was nothing and no one compared to God. When have you been reluctant to come close to God?

♥ Describe an event in your life when you felt like you were "standing on holy ground." What was sacred about that moment? What affect did it have on your relationship with God?

♥ What do God's statements in **3:5-10** reveal about what is in the heart of God regarding his people? (see **Question 3**) Do you feel God has a personal and committed concern for you? Why or why not? If so, how does he show it? How do you wish he would show it?

4. Use the chart below to record the task God gave to Moses, Moses' objections and God's solutions.

Task (3:10) God is going to send Moses to Pharaoh so that Moses can lead God's people, the Israelites out of Egypt and out of bondage.	
Objection #1 (3:11) Who am I? Why would you chose me? (Moses is insinuating that he is not qualified and does not understand why God would choose him for this task.)	Objection # 2 (3:13) If I go to the Israelites and tell them I am sent to them by God, I'm sure they won't believe me! They will ask me, "Which God sent you? What is his name?" (Moses was not sure of who God really was.)
God's Solution (3:12) God told Moses that he would be with him. The implication is that Moses doesn't need "qualifications." He will have everything he needs because God is with him – leading, guiding and giving strength and wisdom.	God's Solution (3:14-15) I AM WHO I AM. I AM has sent me to you. The God of your ancestors has sent me. This is my name. (God reveals his name and character to Moses, a name he will be known by forever. He also lets Moses know that he is the same God who spoke to Abraham.)

- ♥ Remembering that this was Moses' first personal encounter with God, would you have trusted *Yahweh* if you were him? Why or why not? Would you have obeyed? Why or why not? What misgivings would you have had? Would God's solutions have assured you? Why or why not?
 - ♥ When has God asked you to do something that you did not want to do or you thought was impossible for you to do? What happened? How did the whole experience affect your relationship with God?
 - ♥ What do you think are some reasons that Moses saw himself as inadequate for the job? **Moses was a long way (and a long time) from Egypt where he was raised. He had done nothing but tend sheep for 40 years – years he may have seen as "wasted time." He did not see himself as a "qualified" leader.** When do you feel inadequate for what God has called you to do? What is God's solution?
5. Compare Moses' reply to God in **3:11** to **Acts 7:22**. What is the disconnect? What do you think changed Moses? Were the changes in Moses positive or negative? How so?

(The original lesson had 3:12 instead of 3:11 in this question. The correct reference is 3:11.) Moses first response to God is "Who am I that I should be the one you pick for this job." He did not see that he was qualified and perhaps even saw himself as a failure after having to run away from Egypt 40 years before. In Egypt, he had been ready to help his people and even thought God was using him to do this (**Acts 7:23-25**). After 40 years on the "backside" of civilization, he did not see that he was qualified to be used of God in such a daring plan. Even though he was once described as "educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, powerful in speech and action", which would have made him a very good candidate for the job, Moses probably felt that he had blown it and that his past life gave him no advantage.

We might see the changes in Moses as negative – but from God's perspective they were positive. Moses still had his background and training, but he no longer was brash and impetuous, acting on his own to help his people. The Apostle Paul tells us that when we are weak, we are strong (2 Cor. 12:10). Moses now saw himself as weak instead of strong. This means that he was ready to depend on God's power and wisdom and not his own. We always need to be emptied of our own self-sufficiency before God can use us. We cannot be independent and dependent on God at the same time.

- ♥ What experiences have changed you most over the years? Do you see the changes in yourself as positive or negative? How so? What, if any, involvement of God do you see in these changes?
- ♥ Considering **Exodus 4:19** and **Psalms 77:20**, how did God use Moses' 40 years in the wilderness? Moses' time in the wilderness tending sheep was not wasted time after all. First, he needed to be away from Egypt until all those who knew him and wanted to kill him were dead. God was protecting Moses. Also, Moses' shepherding of flocks of sheep for 40 years taught him much about living in the wilderness and how to lead. His leading the Israelites out of Egypt and through the desert (were they ended up wandering for 40 years) was not so much different than leading sheep! Considering Moses' experiences of growing up in the Egyptian palace and then his sheep-herding experience, we see that he was uniquely qualified for what God called him to do. God knew all along what he was doing! Nothing is wasted in God' economy. What does this teach you about God's timing, provision and purposes? How will you apply it to your life?
- ♥ In hindsight, how are you *assured and know that all things work together [God being a partner in their labor] and are [fitting into a plan] for good to and for those who love God . . . (Romans 8:28 Amplified)*? How will this help you in the future when you are tempted to see something as "wasted time and effort?"

Moses anticipates that the Israelites will not believe him if tells them that "God" has sent him. He assumes they will want some proof and will ask, *Which "god"? What is his name?* Moses asks God what he should say if these questions are asked. It is important to see that Moses was not just asking God his "proper name." The verb tense in the Hebrew indicates that Moses was also asking God *what his name meant* or what *character* stood behind this name for God.

The four-letter Hebrew name **YHWH** can be translated into English either as *Yahweh* (how the name sounds in Hebrew) or as *I AM* (expressing the Hebrew verb "to be", "to exist", "to become"). Most English translations of the Bible translate **YHWH** just as **LORD** (all caps) which does little to convey its true meaning. Even the translation of the name *I AM* that *I AM* or *I AM* is much more, of course, than what the English words convey. Just as Moses wanted to know *who* was behind this name for God – we, too, need to discover *what God is revealing about himself* in the name *Yahweh*. (*Yahweh* is sometimes translated as *Jehovah* in some English translations of the Bible because the four Hebrew letters **YHWH** translate as **JHVH** in the early German translations. When vowels were added, the name became *Jehovah*, but today most Bible scholars do not see this as an accurate translation; *Yahweh* is preferred.)

6. Below are some phrases that Bible scholars have written to try and capture the *essence* the name *Yahweh – I AM THAT I AM*. Underline the phrase that is most helpful to you in understanding what **Yahweh** means. Share with your small group why you chose the phrase you did.

- *I am truly he who exists and who will be dynamically present then and there, in every situation . . .*
- *The God who is ever-present, ever active; the one who intervenes for good . . .*
- *I am he who is present, was present, and will be present, doing what I said I would do . . .*
- *In every place, at every point of time, in every circumstance or need, I Am actively present . . .*
- *God doesn't just exist but he is a **living force, vital and personal** in every situation; he is the **key active ingredient** . . .*
- *He is the infinite and personal God who is behind everything and to whom everything must finally be traced . . .*
- ***I Am Who I Am** reveals the truth that nothing else defines who God is but God Himself. What he **says** and what he **does** is who he **is** . . .*

♥ Read **3:15b**. In what situations in your life right now do you especially need to know that *I Am – Yahweh* – is actively present, intervening for good? Do you trust that God is? (*Trust* means that *we live as if something is true*.) How will you live trusting that God is actively present in your situation, intervening for good?

7. Three times in this encounter with Moses, God identifies himself as "*the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and The God of Jacob*" (**3:6, 15, 16**). Why was this important information for Moses and for the Israelites? What was God reminding them of and revealing about himself?

Even though God has been "silent" for 400 years since he had interacted with Abraham, God had not forgotten the promises and covenant he made with Abraham. God was letting his people know that he was the same God who spoke to their ancestor Abraham and that he was still active and present. God was now revealing that he was ready to act on the behalf of his people and that he would keep all his promises that he made in the past.

It is also interesting to note that God uses the present tense when he speaks the phrase, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." These three men had been physically dead for hundreds of years, yet God is still their God because they still exist. Otherwise, God would have said, "I was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob . . ." After physical death we continue to exist and God continues to be our God.

♥ How does God's statement of **3:12** relate to the meaning of his name *I Am*? Should we expect to *sense* God's presence with us in some way or do we just accept and believe it is so? How so? *God's presence with us is real and it is not unusual to sense it in some way – even asking God to be able to sense his presence. We might sense the Holy Spirit thinking through us, giving us thoughts and ideas that we know are not ours. We also might have a physical sense of God's presence where our body reacts in some way to his nearness (trembling, heat, calmness, etc.). We can have an emotional sense of God's presence when he fills us with love, joy, peace, etc., in spite of our circumstances.*

♥ How can God's *active presence (I AM)* with you make up for your inadequacy and/or fear that you might feel when God asks you to do something that seems impossible for you to do?

God is **with us** and **in us** – acting on our behalf. We can actually do things in his strength and wisdom and not our own. God can actually put his thoughts into our minds and give us his strength to help us physically, mentally and emotionally.

♥ Heart Therapy

Read **John 8:54-58**. What was Jesus saying about himself in **8:58** and why did his listeners try to stone him?

Read and jot down what Jesus said about himself, using *I Am*, in each of the following verses: **John 6:35; 8:12; 10:9; 10:14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:5**. Jesus' statements are declarations of truth that are not dependent in any way on our reaction or belief. Jesus *always has been* these things, *is now* these things and *always will be* these things. Jesus is a *living person, vital and personal in every situation – the key active ingredient*.

Which of Jesus' *I Am* statements do you need most right now in your life? *In every place, at every point of time, in every circumstance or need, I Am (Jesus) is actively present*. See yourself sitting in a quiet place with Jesus. Ask him a question or tell him what you need. Quiet your heart to hear what he will say to you. Write down the thoughts or images that come to your mind. *I Am* is speaking; we need only to listen!

BELOW IS THE SUPPLEMENTARY SCRIPTURE FOR THIS LESSON THAT CAN BE PRINTED OUT FOR SMALL GROUP TIME.

Exodus 1:8-22 Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. **9** “Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. **10** Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.”

11 So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. **12** But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites **13** and worked them ruthlessly. **14** They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.

15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, **16** “When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.” **17** The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. **18** Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, “Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?” **19** The midwives answered Pharaoh, “Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.” **20** So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. **21** And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. **22** Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: “Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.”

Exodus 4:19 Now the LORD had said to Moses in Midian, “Go back to Egypt, for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead.”

Psalms 77:20 You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

John 8:54 Jesus replied, “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. **55** Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do

know him and keep his word. **56** Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”

57 “You are not yet fifty years old,” the Jews said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!”

58 “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”

John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

John 10:9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.

John 10:14 “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies;

John 14:6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 15:5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.