



Knowing God by Name

Lesson 8 ~ Yahweh – The Self-Existent One Exodus 3:1-17

♥ Heart Talk

When you meet with your small group, share something about your continued experience of **being silent for 5 minutes before God** or share something about the **Heart Therapy Exercise** from **Lesson 7 – serving God by serving others**. What did you learn about **God, others** and **yourself** as you practiced the "one another" verses? If you haven't done this **Heart Therapy Exercise**, it's never too late!

♥ Heart Preparation

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him (Psalm 37:7). Before you begin this lesson – and to prepare your heart to receive what God has for you – **sit quietly before God, in silence, for 5 minutes.** (It might be helpful to set a timer so you can focus on God and not the passing of time.) During this time, don't try to accomplish anything other than just being quiet with God. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to focus on God, saying something like, *Here I am, Lord or I belong to you, God.* By being intentionally silent before God, we are able to hear his words spoken to our hearts in spite of the noise and distractions of life.

Introduction

Yahweh (YAH-weh) is the most personal, intimate name of God given us in Scripture. God revealed this name to Moses at the "burning bush" by naming himself **I AM**. In the original language, **I AM** is written with four Hebrew letters, **YHWH**, so it is sometimes called the "four-lettered name." Historically, as the sacred, personal name of God, it was spoken aloud only by priests worshipping in the Jerusalem temple. After the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, the name was not said aloud and its original pronunciation was lost because **Adonai** (Lord) or phrases like "the holy name" or "the unutterable name" were substituted for **YHWH** whenever it appeared in the Hebrew text.

Yahweh, translated **I AM WHO I AM** in Exodus, is derived from the Hebrew verb meaning **to be, to become, to live or to have life** and implies *continuing, unfinished action*. This name stresses existence: **I AM the One who always is**. All **life** is contained in God and comes from God, so we call him "the self-existent one." He always **was** what he **is** – and what he **is**, he always **was** – and he will always **be** what he **was** and **is**! Because he **"is," Yahweh** is the God who is **always present** and **always near**. He is not a God that is **far off** or a God of **past history**. He is a God who is present and acts in the **"now."** Whatever our situation, whatever our need, **Yahweh** is the God who **always is** and who is **always present**.

Jesus' Encouraging Words to You . . .

*Leave **outcomes** up to Me. Follow Me wherever I lead, without worrying about how it will turn out. Think of your life as an adventure, with Me as your Guide and Companion. Live in the **now**, concentrating on staying in step with Me. When our path leads to a cliff, be willing to climb it with My help. When we come to a resting place, take time to be refreshed in My Presence. Enjoy the rhythm of life lived close to Me.*

Jesus Calling (November 19) by Sarah Young

A Prayer to Help Prepare Your Heart

*Write your blessed Name, O Lord, upon my heart,
there to remain so indelibly engraved,
that no prosperity, no adversity shall ever move me from Your Love.
Be to me a Strong Tower of defense, a Comforter in tribulation,
a Deliverer in distress, a Very Present Help in trouble,
and a Guide to heaven through the many temptations and dangers of this life.*

Thomas á Kempis

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 descendents 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.
 - ♥ 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? How long had he been there (**Acts 7:20-32**)?
 - ♥ Why do you think God led the Hebrew people to Egypt if they were eventually going to become slaves? What does this reveal about God, his plans and his role in history? What personal application do you see?
 - ♥ In hindsight, can you think of some reasons why God "took so long" to deliver his people from slavery? What are some reasons why God might "take so long" to intervene in your difficult situations?
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**).
 - ♥ 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?
 - ♥ 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?

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?

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.

- ♥ God is *holy*. What does *holy* mean to you? Does God's holiness make him inapproachable? Why or why not? Why was Moses afraid to look at 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? 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)	
Objection #1 (3:11)	Objection # 2 (3:13)
God's Solution (3:12)	God's Solution (3:14-15)

- ♥ 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? 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?

- ♥ 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? 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?

- ♥ 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?
- ♥ 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?

♥ 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!