

# Any Old Bush Will Do

by Major Ian Thomas

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*The key to spiritual usefulness is discovering our own limitations and availability, and recognizing that God can use anyone, regardless of their background or qualifications.*

**Duration:** 22:56

**Scripture:** Exodus 2:11, Exodus 3:4, 1 Corinthians 1:27, 1 Corinthians 9:26, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 2:12-13

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses how Moses lost his way and the lessons we can learn from his story. The speaker highlights the moment when Moses, moved by compassion, defended his Hebrew brother against an Egyptian oppressor. However, this act of righteousness ultimately led to Moses' downfall and 40 years of exile in the desert. The speaker emphasizes the importance of humility and avoiding the attitude of resignation and spiritual non-entity. The sermon also emphasizes the need for restful availability and prompt obedience to God's leading, rather than being caught up in the pressure to do more and be more.

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## Transcript

Chapter 5, Any Old Bush Will Do By God's miraculous intervention, Moses had been saved as a little baby out of the bulrushes. But Moses did not have any say in that. The best he could do at that stage in his career was to squeak.

God had foreshadowed these things. Over 400 years before, God had told Abraham that he was going to raise up a deliverer for his people and save them from the tyranny of a wicked Pharaoh. And now, God's hour had struck.

Preserved from death, Moses was introduced by God's divine providence into Pharaoh's household. Adopted by his daughter and nourished as her own son. With all the privileges of royalty, he received a magnificent education.

He was trained as a statesman, a soldier, and an administrator. And by the age of 40, he was a polished, scholarly man who could have taken his place in any society. In the words of Acts, chapter 7, verses 20 and 22, he was exceeding fair.

And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in words and deeds. This is the portrait that God gives us of the man in the prime of life. Highly qualified and filled with a sense of urgency.

Yet, in his humility, seemingly indifferent to his own intellectual stature. Poised, it would seem, upon the threshold of a brilliant career. In point of fact, he was a man only a few hours away from a tragic blunder that would bring to frustration all his noblest ambitions and make him useless to God or man for 40 years in the backside of the desert.

Acts, chapter 7, verse 23. And when he was full 40 years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him and avenged him that was oppressed and smote the Egyptian.

For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them. But they understood not. On the basis of what he was and on the basis of what he knew, Moses took it for granted that he would be accepted in the ministry for which he believed God had called him.

He supposed his brethren would have understood. But they understood not. With a strong sense of mission, he was baffled at his own impotence.

Maybe this is the dilemma into which you too have fallen. You have felt the surge of holy ambition. Your heart has burned within you.

You have dreamed dreams and seen visions, but only to awaken again and again to a dull sense of futility as one who beats the air or builds castles in the sky. We need to turn to the record itself to discover how Moses lost the way. Exodus chapter 2 and verse 11.

And it came to pass in those days when Moses was grown that he went out unto his brethren and looked on their burdens. And he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. You can imagine the natural impulse of a man moved with compassion for his own kith and kin.

There was nothing evil. There was nothing implicitly sinful or wrong in the thoughts that filled his mind. That natural feeling of resentment against a tyrannical people mercilessly whipping one of his own defenseless brethren.

But it was just at that stage that he allowed sincerity and genuine compassion to rob him of his true vocation. It says in the 12th verse, And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The enormity of the need knocked him off balance, and in a false sense of dedication he committed himself to the task instead of to God.

He looked this way and that way. The one way he did not look was up. And when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian.

In his sensitivity to the presence of man, Moses became strangely insensitive to the presence of God. How easy it is for us to do just that and relate our actions to the approval or disapproval of men. Are you man conscious or God conscious? Had Moses been overwhelmingly confident that his actions merited God's complete approval, he would have been indifferent to other men's reactions.

Their opinions would have been irrelevant. Spiritual pioneers, consciously in the center of God's will, can afford to be lonely in the face of public opinion. Whether it be Nehemiah building the wall, Peter taking the

gospel to the house of a Gentile, or Wilberforce and Livingstone campaigning for the abolition of slavery.

Paul loved to preface his epistles by introducing himself as an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead. Yes, by the will of God. That was his mandate.

That was all he needed to know. And so he could say, The Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

He had become invulnerable. He had a God-given sense of vocation. Moses lost his sense of God, and maybe you have lost your sense of God for the same reason.

You are not called upon to commit yourself to a need, or to a task, or to a field. You are called upon to commit yourself to God. It is He then who takes care of the consequences and commits you where He wants you.

He is the Lord of the harvest. He is the head of the body. And He is gloriously competent to assume His own responsibilities.

Man is not indispensable to God. God is indispensable to man. I sometimes have an uneasy feeling about certain missionary conventions and the missionary challenge to which we have become accustomed.

You hear one speaker after another committing you to the task, claiming your life for this mission field or for that. The need all too often, it is said, constitutes the call. There are a thousand needs, but you are not committed to these.

You are committed to Christ, and it is His business to commit you where He wants you. No man or woman on earth has the right to commit any member of the body of Jesus Christ to any task or to any field. That is to usurp the authority of the head of the body, Jesus Christ Himself.

But now hath God set the members, every one of them, in the body, as it hath pleased Him. The moment I claim the right to commit a man or a woman or a boy or a girl to some field of service, I blaspheme His sovereign place as Lord of the harvest. God is perfectly capable of taking care of His own affairs.

And the reason so little is being accomplished by the Church of Jesus Christ today is that we have all too often organized God out of business. Millions of man hours and countless millions of dollars are being misspent on man's promotional activity, unasked, on God's behalf. This is not to challenge the sincerity of those who are thus employed, but we so often confuse bustle for business and plant for power and perspiration for inspiration.

What an embarrassment it would be to you if you had a pair of hands that always tried to demonstrate how busy they were. Do you expect your fingers to tell you each morning what their program is for the day and then demonstrate their enthusiasm by a vigorous show of uncontrolled activity? Do you think you would be successful in playing the piano on that basis? I would not like to ask a barber who had hands like that to shave me. Surely, what the head demands of every member of the body is restful availability and prompt response to every impulse of the head in instant obedience, producing the coordinated activity of the whole and the orderly fulfillment of that purpose to which each, as a member of the team, has been

committed in particular.

The challenge we hear so often today in the name of consecration is do more, give more, be more, go, go, go. But God says, be still and know that I am God. In other words, quit the panic.

Just let God be God. Moses had not learned that lesson when he saw the Egyptian smiting one of his brethren. He rolled up his sleeves and said in so many words, If ever there was a time when I was on call, it is now.

And he blundered in like a bull in a china shop, smote the Egyptian and tried unsuccessfully to bury him. With the best intentions in the world, he became a murderer instead of a missionary. And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together.

And he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? Intendest thou to kill me as thou killest the Egyptian? And Moses feared and said, Surely this thing is known. Yes, the thing was known. When Moses tried to tackle the job, he could not even bury one Egyptian successfully.

Maybe he left his toes sticking out of the sand. When God tackled the job, he buried the whole lot of them in the Red Sea. That is how competent God is to deal with his own business.

Moses fled. For when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay him. And for forty years he was in the land of Midian, a man whom God had specifically raised up for a particular task, but who on the basis of his own sincerity and on the basis of his own enthusiasm, neutralized his usefulness because he committed himself to a need instead of to God.

He tried to do God's work, man's way, and he had to learn that it is not scholarship but relationship, not just his ability, but his availability that qualifies a man for God. One can imagine the awful sense of futility that must have overwhelmed Moses again and again during those forty years of uselessness, unrecognized and unknown in the backside of the desert. And maybe you too have found your Christian service unrewarding.

You are converted. You can look back to the day when you put your trust in Jesus Christ as your personal savior. But you imagine that the Christian life was just conforming to certain patterns of Christian conduct, patterns which had been projected upon you, and that your spirituality would be judged in terms of your conformity.

That is not spirituality, that is copyism. And Christian service that stems solely from conformity to the demands of an organizational machine will always be lacking in spiritual luster and characterized by the absence of divine unction. You will waste away with Moses in the wilderness of Midian.

Poor Moses, soldier, scholar, and statesman, born to be a leader, caring for a handful of sheep, his wife's husband with a job on her father's farm. Hope must have seemed to wither at the roots when the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. And he looked.

And behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. When Moses saw that bush, he was amazed. It was a phenomenon, something that immediately attracted his attention.

Here was a bush that burned and burned and burned and went on burning. As far as he could see, it could burn on for eternity. And he could not help but compare himself with that bush.

In his heart, he must have said something like this, I've never seen a bush like that before. I'm not like that bush. Forty years ago, I burned myself out in 24 hours, and I have been a heap of ashes for 40 years since.

There must be something very unusual about that bush, something very unique. It must be a very wonderful bush. And Moses said, I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.

Aroused within his heart, there was a holy curiosity. And he did a very wise thing. He made intelligent inquiry, and in consequence, he made a very wonderful discovery.

So often, there is aroused within us a holy curiosity, but it is unmatched by intelligent inquiry, and that is why we do not make the same wonderful discovery. We are tutored in these days to hero worship. In every walk of life, we become fans, and that is not less true in the area of Christian activity.

There are those in whose lives there is manifestly evident the mighty unction and power of God. They are transparently genuine. The hand of God is upon them.

They speak with an authority that God honors. Lives are transformed. Those spiritually dead are raised to life again.

Defeated, helpless, useless, barren Christians are transformed into useful vehicles of divine life. Wherever they go, it seems that there is a touch of glory about their path, and we admire them and applaud. But we stand back as though this were to be the monopoly of the few, as though they have a special call upon the grace of God, and as though this was something not for the common run of men.

We say in our hearts, there is a bush that burns. I would like to be a bush like that, but I am just a heap of ashes. And that is as far as it gets.

You discuss the burning bush with others. You admit that it is an amazing thing, and maybe you invite others to come and look at the phenomenon. But you have resigned yourself to be nothing more than what you are, a heap of ashes.

It has never dawned upon you that you could be anything different. So you have to make the best of a bad job in your own little desert. Resign to sit on the balcony among the spectators, just to be average, a spiritual non-entity.

This is the attitude that Paul sought above everything else to avoid in those of whom it had been his privilege to lead to the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the significance of his words to the Philippians when he wrote, Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

To the Philippians, who were tempted to lean upon Paul as their spiritual crutch, as though God had a particular interest in him that he did not have in them, he said in so many words, All that God has given to me, he has given to you. The Lord Jesus Christ who dwells in my humanity is the same Lord Jesus Christ who dwells in your humanity. What I have, you have.

What I can be by the grace of God, you can be by the grace of God. Work out your own salvation. It is yours as much as mine.

It is God, not Paul the Apostle, who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Recognize that all the illimitable resources that God has vested in me in the person of his own dear Son are the same illimitable resources that he has vested in you. This is the message of the Bible, that God has chosen the weak and the base and the nothing and the things that are not to confound the things that are.

And all God demands of a man is his availability to be what man was created to be, the human vehicle of the divine life inhabited by God for God. That God may be himself, his size in terms of what you are on earth in your availability to him. What you are is totally irrelevant, nationality-wise, money-wise, education-wise, personality-wise, and in any other wise.

If only you will recognize the principle that it is God that works in you to will and to do of his good pleasure. The only ultimate source of divine activity in all spiritual life is God himself, Christ in you, the hope of glory. The church is so slow to learn.

It admires and seeks to emulate the example of the mighty, but so seldom takes the trouble to turn aside and see the reason why. You read the lives of men like Hudson Taylor, George Muller, Dwight L. Moody, A. B. Simpson, men whose lives have made spiritual history. You would like to be like them and do the things they did, and yet maybe you have never taken the trouble to find out why it was they were what they were, nor how it was they did what they did.

Instead, you mobilize your own resources and seek to emulate the example they set and are constantly buffeted by a sense of frustration because of your own hopeless failure in the endeavor. As some have sought to introduce you to the principle that made these men what they were and enabled them to do what they did, you have been impatient and said, Don't interfere. I'm too busy trying to be like them, and I don't have time to listen to you.

Now, is that not stupid? Why was Hudson Taylor what he was? And how could he do what he did? Why was A. B. Simpson what he was? And how could he do what he did? Were they God's favorites? Of course they were not. They were simply men who had qualified in the school of failure and despair. They were men who came to the end of themselves and discovered that what they were, apart from God, was nothing.

Moses began by being a failure. That was the school from which he qualified. Abraham began by being a failure.

That was the school from which he qualified. Jacob was a hopeless failure. David was a hopeless failure.

Elijah was a hopeless failure. Isaiah was a hopeless failure. And a man of unclean lips.

But it is in the school of destitution, the bitter school of self-discovery, that finally you graduate into usefulness. When at last you discover the total bankruptcy of what you are, apart from what God is. These men made this discovery and were blessed.

Moses had to discover this, and you will have to discover it. He had to discover that a fine physique and noble ambitions, royal breeding, and Egyptian scholarship could never be a substitute for that for which man was created. God himself.

Moses said, I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush and said, Moses, Moses. God called him by name.

When did God call him? While he stood admiring at a distance? No. God never said a word then, but when he turned aside to see, God called. Maybe you are wondering why it is that you have never had an urgent sense of call, why in your Christian life there is no real driving sense of direction, why you do not have a deep spirit-born conviction of the purpose for which you have been redeemed, why it is you drift and live with no target in view.

Maybe it is because you never took time out to find the reason why. When Moses turned aside to see, God called him by name. Judged by purely human standards, you may be highly qualified for Christian service and yet go out into the oblivion of spiritual uselessness.

No matter to what distinction you may attain in this world, no matter how much you may be acclaimed by your fellow men, no matter how gifted you may be, it is tragically possible for you to go down in the annals of spiritual history as one of those who did not count, either for God or man. And do you know why? Because you never took time out to find the reason why God uses men. You have been too busy, and you never turned aside to see, and God was silent.

He never called you by your name. And as God called, Moses said, Here am I. And God said, Draw not nigh hither, put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover, he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.

And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. God had something to say to Moses, and I think that it must have been something like this. Moses, you have done a wise thing in making intelligent inquiry, for you thought that this was a very remarkable bush.

You thought that there must be something about it at once peculiar and wonderful, something unique, that it could burn and burn and burn and go on burning, and yet not burn itself out. But you are wrong. You are quite wrong.

Do you see that bush over there, that scruffy, scraggy looking thing? That bush would have done. Do you see this beautiful looking bush, so shapely and fine? This bush would have done. For you see, Moses, any old bush will do.

Any old bush, if only God is in the bush. The trouble with you, Moses, is this. Forty years ago, learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, mighty in word and deed, you admired your own foliage.

You thought you were some bush, but you burned yourself out in twenty-four hours, and you have been a heap of ashes for forty years. If this bush that you have admired were depending upon its own substance to sustain the flame, it too would have burnt itself out in twenty-four hours. It too would be a heap of ashes, like you.

But it is not the bush that sustains the flame. It is God in the bush, and any old bush will do. Did you ever make this discovery? Have you ever come to the place where you realize that all you can produce at your best is ashes? Did you ever come to the place where you presented yourself for what you are, nothing, to be filled with what He is, everything, and to step out into every new day conscious that the eternal I Am is all you need for all His will? This is the forgotten tense of the Church of Jesus Christ today.

We live either in the past tense or in the future tense. We say either Ebenezer, hitherto hath the Lord helped us, or we comfort ourselves with Maranatha, behold the Lord cometh. But we forget that He is the eternal I Am, the eternal present tense, adequate right now for every need.

If you are born again, all you need is what you have, and what you have is what He is. He does not give you strength. He is your strength.

He does not give you victory. He is your victory. Do you understand the principle? Christ in you, nothing less than that.

You cannot have more, and you do not need to have less. And every day can be the glorious fulfillment of the divine end, proving what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God as you present your body a living sacrifice, wholly unacceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. Only remember this, any old bush will do.

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