

Who Are You?

Jonathan K. Dodson | Exodus 4:18-31 | May 15, 2021

Who are you? The answer to that question unfolds over time, often in the negative. In middle school I was a skater, but then I realized I really wasn't any good. In high school, a prep, but quickly found out I couldn't afford the lifestyle. In graduate school, a missionary to rural Thailand, but then I realized I didn't like the culture. I found out who I was by discovering who I wasn't. In a similar way, Moses discovers: *who he's not, who he is, and then acts like it!*

Who I'm Not

After his burning bush encounter in the desert, Moses returns home to tell his father-in-law, "[Please let me go back to my brothers in Egypt to see whether they are still alive.](#)"

Now, that's not at all what God told him to do. The reason God is sending him back is *because they're alive and enslaved*. So why lie about his mission? He's been estranged from his Hebrew parents since birth, married into Jethro's Midianite family four decades ago. For all intents and purposes, Jethro has become Moses' *father*. He regards him so highly he seeks his counsel when becomes overwhelmed with leading Israel (Ex 18). He's holding fibbing—why—he doesn't want to lose Jethro's approval. What if he doubts my call? You're going to take on Pharaoh? An idea Moses himself had a hard time embracing. You see, God's calling forces Moses to confront a question he's suppressed: ***Who am I?*** Jethro sends him off in peace. Moses is *not* a Midianite shepherd. Next, God tells him the Egyptians who were seeking his life for murdering one of their own are now dead, and so is his Egyptian father pharaoh. Who is he not? Moses is *not* a fugitive from the law, and certainly *not* an Egyptian prince. Moses is discovering *who he's not*. Have you been trying to be someone you're *not*?

Compromising to impress the other kids, moms, coworkers? Moses packs up his family and heads back to Egypt. Along the way, God reminds him of his **mission**: what to do and to say. Do the miracles I showed you; say the words I told you. But then God says, [But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will not let the people go.](#) Wait, what? I thought you were sending me so Pharaoh *will* let your people go? Why are would you *harden* Pharaoh's heart? Wouldn't softening it be better? It's repeated 15 times. There are layers. Today we'll peel back one. The word for harden actually means *to strengthen*. The idea is that God so

strengthens pharaoh's heart it reveals his truest, darkest self. He also does with humanity in Romans 1, gives them over to their desires. This is: *you do you*. Are you sure? *You be you?* Do you really want that? Let me show you what happens when you're true to your heart. Pharaoh *thinks* Israel is *his subject* and that Israel *serves him*. But God is going to show that: Israel is *his firstborn son*, and Israel *serves him*. Now firstborn sons were *everything* in the ancient world. They carried on the family name, preserved family honor, received the inheritance. *Firstborn were your future*. But the firstborns here are a mess. Moses' son isn't circumcised; Pharaoh's firstborn is facing a death sentence, and Israel is enslaved. No one's got a bright future. God is saying, Don't put stock in *your* firstborn, your biological family, in a nestegg, in what you'll leave behind—because you'll lose it all. What you need is a future, a family, in a status that never fades. Something you'll never lose. You need to be *my firstborn*. To carry my name, enjoy my status, receive my inheritance. You see, Moses, it's not enough to know who you aren't; *you have to know you are*. What defines you? You be you? Have you seen you on your worst days? What would happen if God strengthened your heart? I shudder to think. But what if it was possible to become God's firstborn? To have a life shaped by his character, power? In Colossians 1 it says Jesus is *the firstborn from the dead*. Do you know why? Because it requires his death and resurrection to get us into the family. And he did it! He's the first of the firstborn. Put your faith in him and you get his *name, status, inheritance*. Anything less will be taken away, but life in Christ never fades.

Who You Are

Who you aren't. Now who you are. Next we have a very bizarre, seemingly misplaced passage 24, At a lodging place on the way the LORD met him and sought to put him to death. First harden pharaoh's heart, next, put Moses to death? He's stacking the deck. What's going on? Apparently Moses had not circumcised his firstborn son. And he knew to do this because God initiated the rite when he told his forefather Abraham to circumcise his firstborn. And the thing about circumcision is that it was a covenant sign, an act that says I'm entering into a covenant relationship with you. That relationship is the highest possible, and it was formed between kings and vassals. Three basic elements: *Prologue / Stipulations / Blessings & Curses*, followed by a ratifying sign. Prologue: I will rescue you, love you, provide for you. Stipulations: You will keep these laws. Blessings of life if you keep them,

curses often of death if you don't. Now Moses is negligent, even named his son after his own identity crisis, and is rolling into God's mission in breach of God's covenant. So the curse—death—has to fall on him. The Lord sought to put him to death. He's effectively saying, Moses, is your firstborn son like Pharaoh's? Bound for death, or is he covenantally mine, like Israel? And while we're talking about it: whose son are you, Moses? It's time to make up your mind. Stop flirting with all these other identities: Egyptian, Midianite, Hebrew. What I want to know is, Who are you? Perhaps that's what he's saying to you. You've been mucking about with what your colleagues think, what your parents think, sulking in how you failed in the past, or scared about the future. You might have narrowed down who you're not but you're still not living like you know who you are. Moses' wife steps in, circumcises her son, and throws the skin at Moses' feet, declaring him a bridegroom of blood. Covenant kept. How? By blood. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins, Hebrews. Why? Because someone has to be cut, someone must bear the curse, somebody has to die. That's all very serious. Exactly. The only way to enter into God's love, and enjoy his blessings, is to cut a covenant with him. Now we may think that's archaic. But modern people do the same kind of thing in relationships. We commit to a friendship, but when our friend hurts us, we pull away. We say til death do us part, but comb the internet for lovers. We pick out a church and start attending, but someone disappoints us and we move on. Each of these—friend, spouse, church member—draws blood, squeezes life from others to find their worth, security, happiness. We take life to get worth. But there's only one life that can be taken and give you never-ending security—the life of Jesus Christ. He bore the covenant curse in our place, so we can enter into firstborn status. Who are you? Make up your mind. Put your faith in the Bridegroom of blood.

Act Like It

Moses has figured out *who he's not*: not what his family says, his culture says, or even his past says. He's recognized *who he is*—a covenant, firstborn son. And now, he learns to be who is, to *act like it*. I remember my Dad pulling me aside and saying to me, "You say you're a Christian—when are you going to act like it?" Be who you are. In this final passage Moses acts like it. He starts to settle into who he is. Moses finally meets his long estranged brother Aaron, who becomes a picture of God's love. He meets him out in the wilderness, where

Aaron does not shame Moses for being gone so long, for leaving them to suffer, he goes out to him and kisses him, where, at the mountain of God. Where God revealed who Moses is. The very place YHWH will make a new covenant with Israel. And there, under the waterfall of God's covenant love, Moses tells his brother all that God told him to do and all that God told him to say. Their hearts are united. They go together to gather and report to the elders of Israel. Aaron speaks; Moses does the miracles. [And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.](#) That's what happens when you find yourself in God. Worship. Moses acts *on who he is*. Do you see, the gospel settling into Moses, displacing what others think so he can enjoy firstborn status? God also sees your estate, knows where you've been, and he redeems you. Believe, and bow your head and worship.