

MOSES' DISRUPTION**EXODUS 2:11-22; ACTS 7:20-29; HEBREWS 11:24-26**

Dwight Moody, a great evangelist back in the 1800s, summed up the life of Moses in a memorable way. You might already know Moses' life can be separated into three forty year periods of time. The first forty years he lived as a privileged prince in Egypt. The next forty years he lived as a lowly shepherd in exile. The final forty years he was the leader of the nation of Israel, God's people in the Old Testament. Moody put it like this, "Moses spent forty years thinking he was somebody. He spent his second forty years learning he was a nobody. He spent his third forty years discovering what God can do with a nobody." And it was the experience of personal disruption that provided much of the platform for Moses' learning.

Disruption. We're all experiencing it going through this pandemic together. There's nothing enjoyable about disruption. It can cause anxiety and fear to well up within us. Last week I started a new message series I'm calling "The God of Disruption." The more I read and study the Bible, the more I run into the fact that God is very comfortable with disruption. We aren't, but He is. Disruption doesn't somehow prove God is not in control. Instead, God often uses disruption of many kinds to accomplish His will. He either creates disruption of many kinds or allows it frequently. You can observe that fact in the lives of key people in the Bible and in its key events. In other words, God's plan and purposes included the experience of significant, uncomfortable disruption.

Now Moses was born to godly parents in a time of incredible disruption. The Egyptian Pharaoh had forced the Jewish people to become his slaves. Then, because their birthrate was so high, he instituted one of the cruelest, most inhumane government policies in human history. He demanded the drowning of every newborn, male Jewish baby as a means of population control. I'd take living through a pandemic over that situation, yes? But instead of drowning Moses, his parents made a little watertight raft for him and set him adrift on the Nile River. Baby Moses was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter who adopted him and raised him as a prince of Egypt. Somewhere along the way, Moses discovered he was Jewish not Egyptian. He began to sense God had preserved his life in order to help deliver the Jewish people out of slavery. But it was right at that very point Moses made a tragic mistake. He decided to try and do God's will his own way. The result was disaster and more disruption. Let's consider three Scripture passages today. By killing the Egyptian, Moses created his own disruption. Disruptions of many kinds can happen to any of us. Was God able to salvage Moses' self-made disruption? Yes! Can God do the same for you and me? Yes!

WHAT CAUSES A SELF-MADE DISRUPTION?

There are at least four reasons why Moses got it wrong and failed. Like Moses, we have no control when it comes to some disruptions in life. Bad things can happen to us through no fault of our own. Like a pandemic! Today, I want us to think, however, about the disruptions we bring upon ourselves. For example, a self-made disruption can be the result of trusting in your own sincerity. Consider Moses. He sincerely believed God has called him to deliver the Jewish people out of their cruel slavery.

Moses was exactly right about that! God had indeed saved his life as a baby and put him in a unique position to help the Jews. Moses realized he was called by God to do something special even before he murdered that Egyptian. That passage I just read in Hebrews 11 reveals while Moses was a prince, he'd already rejected his Egyptian heritage with all of its privileges so he could better identify with God's people.

Moses' heart was in the right place. After all, he was a mature man at the time – 40 years of age. He knew exactly what he was giving up. Some scholars believe Moses was actually in line to become the next Pharaoh of Egypt. He was on the threshold of unbelievable power, prestige, wealth, and luxury. He was willing to forfeit all of that because he sincerely wanted to do God's will. Is sincerity a good thing? Of course! Being sincere is great, but it's not enough. Moses was very sincere in wanting to help his suffering fellow Jews, but he was very wrong to kill the Egyptian.

Matt Emmons had the Olympic gold medal in his sights. Literally. He was just one shot away from victory in the 2004 Olympic 50 meter three position rifle event. He didn't even need to hit the bull's eye to win. His final, gold-medal winning shot just needed to hit the target somewhere, anywhere. Normally, the shot he made that day would have received a score of 8.1 – more than enough to take the gold. But Matt Emmons aimed and shot at the wrong target by mistake. Standing in lane two, he fired at the target in lane three. What kind of score do you get for a great shot at the wrong target? 0. Instead of a gold medal or any medal, Matt ended up in eighth place. It doesn't matter how sincere you are – or even how accurate you are – if you're aiming at the wrong goal. Being sincere doesn't prevent failure or disruption. You can be very sincere, but be sincerely wrong. That's one lesson that emerges out of Moses' life experience. Sincerity alone isn't enough to prevent a self-made disruption in your life.

Second, a self-made disruption can be the result of trusting in your own strengths. I imagine at this point in his life, Moses was one very capable, self-confident man. As a prince of Egypt, Moses would have received the best education the ancient world had to offer. He studied mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, music, and art. We read in Acts 7:22 (NLT), "Moses was taught all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was powerful in both speech and action." Moses probably graduated *summa cum laude*. He likely possessed a charismatic personality, a gift for persuasive speech, and innate leadership abilities. Historians tell us that Moses was likely a military hero. Some suggest Moses had earlier led a successful counter-attack on the Ethiopian army which had invaded Egypt. He'd likely earned his country's praise and recognition as a result. Moses probably had a type A personality: size up the problem, charge in, take care of business, and if necessary, ask for forgiveness rather than permission!

God gives us strengths and abilities. Some people have more than others – that's just a fact of life. Self-confidence can be a virtue. There's nothing good or God-honoring about an inferiority complex. But there can be a very thin line between healthy self-confidence and unhealthy pride. Moses crossed that line when he killed the Egyptian. At this point in Moses' life, he was just too strong for God. In other words, he trusted too much in his own strengths and not enough in God's strength. He was too confident

in himself, but not confident enough in God to lead and direct his steps. Moses was too self-sufficient, and didn't yet know how to find his sufficiency in God alone.

The great Christian leader, Paul, learned a similar lesson. He told us about something in his own life he called "a thorn in the flesh." No one knows what it was exactly. But God taught Paul a great deal through his disruption. In 2 Cor. 12:8-10 (NLT), we read, "Three times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, 'My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.' So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong." Moses has yet to learn the same lesson. Every genuine disciple of Jesus learns that lesson sooner or later.

Third, a self-made disruption can be the result of trusting in your own strategies. Moses was a problem solver. He knew how to get things done. What he didn't know yet was how to wait on God or how to seek God's guidance and direction. Obviously, Moses never stopped long enough to ask God for wisdom. He decided to get a closer look at what was happening to his fellow Jews. When he saw this Egyptian overseer mistreating one of them, Moses took matters into his own hands. Literally. He killed the Egyptian where he stood. He never consulted God about that strategy.

Have you ever come up with a plan or a strategy to do something and then asked God to bless it after the fact? I have. Consciously or subconsciously, you say, "Look, Lord, here's this really great thing I'd like to do. Could you bless it, please, and help it turn out OK?" That usually results in failure and disruption. You might fall in love with a non-Christian and marry him or her. Even though God's Word makes it clear that marrying someone who doesn't follow Jesus is a huge mistake, you go ahead, get married, and then ask God to convert your spouse. Yes, sometimes that prayer gets answered, but I can tell you as a pastor that scenario usually ends up as a painful disruption. Here's another example. You have your eye on a nice promotion at work. You beg God to give you the promotion, but all the time you're pulling strings behind the scenes and manipulating the situation so you get the job anyway. Don't blame God, then, when you find out the job turns out to be disruption rather than a blessing. It's not that God doesn't want us to plan or strategize. He's given us that ability. It's simply that God wants us to fulfill His plans, not our plans; His strategy, not our strategy; His purpose, not our purpose. He wants you to learn how to approach Him in prayer, how to seek out His direction, and how to listen for His leading. More than once, this Bible verse from Prov. 19:21 (NLT) has gotten my attention, "You can make many plans, but the Lord's purpose will prevail." Moses had to learn that lesson. So might some of us.

Fourth, a self-made disruption can be the result of trusting in your own sense of timing. Sensing what God wants you to do is one thing; knowing when to actually go and do it is another. Moses was absolutely right about the fact God wanted to use Him to deliver the Jewish people out of slavery. He was dead wrong, however, about both the how and the when of that deliverance. The timing of an action is just as important as the action itself. Have there been times in your life when you did the right things at the

wrong time? The result was likely a self-made disruption. Moses' attempt to save his fellow Jews was premature to say the least. God wasn't in Moses' plan – the strategy – or the timing of it either. That's why it became a massive disruption.

Here's a spiritual principle that makes a whole lot of sense to me. "When God's in it, it flows. When you're in it, it's forced." Perhaps you've been trying to solve a problem or resolve an issue be it at home, at work, in your neighborhood, wherever. The more you try, the worse it gets. Why not call a time out and check in with your Heavenly Father? When God is in something, it has a way of flowing. You don't have to push it, force it, or make it happen by your sheer determination. God had already made up His mind to deliver His people out of Egypt. But He was going to do in His way, in His time, and not before. God can do anything in and through your life, but He will do it in His time.

Moses suffered a major self-made disruption. He was right about God's will for his life, but dead wrong about whose strength was needed, what strategy was best, and when it needed to happen. Moses could have written Frank Sinatra's old classic song, "I Did It My Way." How did that work out for Moses? He discovered doing it Moses' way had a very high cost indeed. He murdered a man. The Jewish people didn't come running to rescue him. Instead of revering Moses, they resented him. Apparently, Pharaoh was less than understanding. Upon getting news of the murder of his overseer, Pharaoh likely suspected Moses was a traitor and ordered his assassination. Moses had to flee for his life and ended up in the desert wasteland of Midian – as barren a place as there is anywhere on the planet. There, he got taken in by a kindly shepherd and married one of his daughters. For the next forty years, this privileged prince of Egypt lived and worked as a lowly shepherd out in the middle of nowhere. Did you know being a shepherd was considered the lowliest job or occupation you could have according to the Egyptians? How humbling for Moses! But here's the good news. Despite this major self-made disruption, God was not finished with Moses. Not by a long shot.

James Dobson was once considered the most influential Christian leader in America, although in recent years his influence has waned considerably. But he's shared an interesting story from his earlier days. He wrote a book entitled "Dare to Discipline" that was highly popular but also controversial. At the time, Dobson was a little known psychologist and university professor. Dobson and his book caught the eye of TV talk show host, Phil Donahue, who invited Dobson to appear on his show in 1978. Donahue made Dobson look bad. Dobson readily admits his performance that day was his worst ever. He left the TV set feeling like a colossal failure. But his despair didn't last long. The next day he sought out a Christian advertising agent to discuss the possibility of a national radio program. Before he left town, he had recorded the pilot broadcast of "Focus on the Family." What eventually developed from that disastrous TV appearance was nothing short of mind boggling. The "Focus on the Family" radio program, at its height of influence, was heard on 7,000 radio stations and heard by more than 220 million people in 164 countries every day. It was later inducted into the radio hall of fame. A self-made disruption might finish off some people, but it doesn't finish us off with God. In fact, that might be the very place where God begins to do His greatest work in and through us. Think with me about the answer to this question.

HOW DOES GOD USE A SELF-MADE DISRUPTION?

God's children learn something very soon after becoming followers of Jesus. Becoming a disciple of Jesus doesn't mean living happily ever after. God has this "school" He enrolls His children into that teaches us about God, about life, about other people, and about ourselves. All His children get enrolled in this "school." In this school, you take classes in disruptions, disappointments, and trials of different kinds. If and when you pass, you get enrolled in other classes on subjects like rejection, misunderstanding, and discouragement. If you fail, you get to repeat the class again. Am I making it sound worse than it is? Probably. Of course, God also gives us many joyful moments, holidays, vacations, and long periods of time when things in our lives go pretty well.

When it comes to knowing God and becoming like Jesus, there's no such thing as instant maturity. God never mass produces His children. He works on and in each of us individually. His molding and shaping always takes longer than we expect. Moses spent forty years out in the desert – from age 40 to 80. The Bible tells us very little about those forty years in Moses' life, but it was God's "school." Moses was probably unaware of that fact. He likely thought God was finished with him and he was just content to live out what remained of his disrupted life. But over those forty years, God did a work inside of Moses. All that time, all that solitude, all that discomfort gave God the opportunity to prepare Moses for what God wanted to do in and through him.

First, God's "school" teaches us lessons in obedience. When we've failed, we often have a new, fresh desire to walk more closely with the Lord. Why? Once you taste the bitter fruit of not doing something God's way, it often makes you long to do it His way. Part of being obedient is becoming surrendered and teachable. What does God teach us when we've emerging from a self-made disruption? Well, consider Moses. He learned you can't achieve godly results by using ungodly methods to get there. God refuses to bless something He's never designed. Moses also learned you can't hide your sins; you can only postpone their discovery. Moses tried to hide the body of the man he murdered, but the next day his crime was known. Is there a lesson there we need to learn? Probably. Are you ever tempted to deny, to excuse, or to rationalize away your own sins? Have you learned the importance of calling your sin what it is – sin? Moses learned sincerity wasn't good enough. He learned trusting in his own abilities, developing his own strategies, or taking action on his own sense of timing was wrong. Are those lessons you and I need to learn as we follow Jesus? Oh, yes.

Second, God's "school" teaches us lessons in being a servant. Moses learned how to be a nobody out there in the desert. Moses learned how to be obscure. Nobody knew his background. Nobody cared about his degrees, accomplishments, or credentials. God began teaching Moses to be a servant on his very first day out there in the desert. He probably had never watered sheep before, but he did for his future father-in-law's flocks that day. He drove away some men who were harassing these daughters. Moses had been trained to do far more prestigious stuff. But he was learning part of being a servant is just being available to God to do whatever He wants or needs done at the time. A servant stops trying to discern between what's important and unimportant or

what's big and what's little. You just serve. Someone has rightly observed there are no big people or little people as far as God is concerned – just dedicated people or undedicated people. In other words, there are servants and there are those who never become servants. So, if you sense God is somehow shaping and molding you into being more of a servant, you're undoubtedly correct. Self-made disruptions have a way of making us more open and willing to receive that shaping and molding by God.

Finally, God's "school" teaches us lesson in trusting God. Perhaps the single greatest lesson Moses learned from his self-made disruption was that without God you can do nothing. Yeah, talent! Yeah, education! Yeah, spiritual gifts in abundance! But without God we can do precisely nothing of eternal value. Jesus put it like this in John 15:5 (NLT), "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing." V. Raymond Edman was the president of Wheaton College outside of Chicago for many years. In one of his books, he described how God had been molding and sharing him through some kind of personal disruption. He wrote, "Something painful happened to me. This is how I met it. I was quiet for a while with the Lord, and then I wrote these words to myself. First, He brought me here. It is by His will I am in this [difficult] place; in that fact, I will rest. Next, He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends me to learn, and working in me the grace He needs to bestow. Last, in His good time, He can bring me out again – how and when only He knows. Let me say that I am here, first, by God's appointment; second, in His keeping; third, under His training; fourth, for His time." That's a great perspective, isn't it? As I continue to take my own classes in God's "school," may I respond in the same way. How about you?

Do you know what causes the most anxiety for airline passengers? Turbulence. So much about it seems dangerous. But from the perspective of the pilot, turbulence is a mere blip. Why? Pilots know a plane can't be flipped upside-down, thrown into a tailspin, or otherwise flung from the sky by even the mightiest gust or air pocket. Yes, turbulence might be annoying and uncomfortable for a pilot, but he or she knows the plane is not going to crash. Turbulence is an aggravating nuisance for everybody, including the crew, but it's also, for lack of a better term, normal. From the pilot's perspective, it's ordinarily seen as a convenience issue, not a safety issue. When a flight changes altitude in search of smoother conditions, this is usually in the interest of passenger comfort not airline safety. The pilot isn't worried about the wings falling off, but instead trying to keep his or her customers relaxed. If you've ever been through bad turbulence, have you imagined your pilot to be in a sweaty lather, barking orders, hands tight on the wheel as the airliner lists from one side to another? Nothing could be further from the truth. The pilots are probably just having a casual conversation with one another up there in the cockpit over their morning coffee.

Life can have its very turbulent moments. Disruption happens to all of us. It can cause anxiety and aggravation. But turbulence doesn't bother the Pilot of the life of a Jesus follower. The Pilot – Jesus Himself – has it all under control. He has a plan and a purpose for disruption – even the kind we create for ourselves. So, let's learn to trust the Pilot of our lives with every bit of turbulence, every bit of disruption.