

*Exodus 3:1–6 (NIV)*

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup>There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. <sup>3</sup>So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

<sup>4</sup>When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

<sup>5</sup>“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” <sup>6</sup>Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

*Leviticus 11:44–45 (NIV)*

<sup>44</sup>I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves along the ground. <sup>45</sup>I am the Lord, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.

*1 Peter 1:14–16 (NIV)*

<sup>14</sup>As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.

<sup>15</sup>But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; <sup>16</sup>for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

*An encounter with the Holy One of Israel. The beginning of Moses’ education.*

Moses had grown up with mighty Pharaoh, the God-King of Egypt. But now he was tending a flock in the Sinai wilderness, after having fled Egypt. Moses knew that he was a Hebrew and when he had seen an Egyptian overseer beating a Hebrew slave, Moses had lost control and struck the slave-master, killing him. So Moses had fled across the Red Sea, settled into a new life, and had married. But the flock he tended wasn’t even his own; the animals belonged to his father-in-law. Nonetheless, Moses looked after them as they walked in the shadow of mighty Mt. Horeb (also known as Mt. Sinai).

Then, Moses noticed a burning bush in the distance and went to check it out. As he approached the bush, he saw that even though flames licked upward, the bush wasn’t being consumed by fire. Then he heard a voice calling out “Moses, Moses!” And so began Moses’s education at the feet of God Almighty. Even from these first moments, it was clear that the god calling him was holy and that Moses was not. He was told to remove his sandals, for even the ground on which Moses stood was now holy ground. And as this god identified himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses hid his face in fear. Can a mortal, sinful man survive an encounter with the Holy One? An education by fire indeed. Terence Fretheim, a very helpful Old Testament scholar, takes us a little deeper into Moses’ education:

Moses hides his face, but certainly not for long. For the next few chapters, Moses and God engage in what can only be called a *face-to-face encounter* (cf. Num. 12:8), during which Moses is anything but deferential. God’s word to Moses is of such a character that it draws the other into a genuine conversation. The exchange with God moves from worshipful deference to animated dialogue (see above). Divine holiness does not inhibit human response, even on the part of one who is “slow of speech” (4:10). Moreover, the word of the holy God now articulated (vv. 7–10) bespeaks, not distance and judgment, but closeness and concern. The *holy* God enters into the suffering of the people and makes it his own (3:7). As in Hos. 11:9 and Isa. 12:6, God is “the Holy One *in your midst*.”

The emphasis throughout is on *the divine initiative*. It is God who confronts Moses and calls him to a task. Moses does not prepare for the encounter, nor does he seek it. He is surprised by what happens. . . . God's creative work in Moses' life to this point has shaped a human being with endowments suited for the tasks ahead. While the specific encounter with God brings new insights and a changed direction for life, an informed creation theology will affirm many continuities with Moses' past.

This ground is now holy because of God's appearance, not because it was already holy. There is no holiness inherent in the place as such, no natural sanctity, but that which is not holy now becomes so by virtue of the divine purpose for the place (not just the divine presence). That which is an ordinary part of the natural order is sanctified, set apart for special use by God. This setting apart was not only for this occasion but also for the future. God's appearance to Moses establishes Sinai/Horeb as a sacred place (cf. 3:12; Gen. 28:16–17). God draws a particular plot of ground, an aspect of the creative order, into a new sphere of relationship; nature too is affected by and serves as an instrument for the divine presence and purpose. Because of this change in the character of the place, Moses is asked to follow the custom of removing shoes to show respect (cf. Josh. 5:13–15).<sup>1</sup>

Like Moses, we too encounter this Holy God, though not in so dramatic a fashion. We are called to holiness ourselves, to be a holy nation, a people leading holy lives.

*Holy?*

Growing in holiness is no less and no more than growing in Christlikeness, having the "mind of Christ" (Philippians 2:5), walking as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6) . . . simply loving God and loving neighbor everyday and in every way.

Ask yourself this: How well would Jesus be weathering the storms of our lives? Would he be as anxious and fearful as we often are? I think not. What I'd like to be is more like Jesus. Yet, the pressures and anxieties that threaten to drive God from our lives, to squeeze out our commitments to the habits of Christlikeness, can only be pushed aside, as Peter puts it, by disciplining ourselves and setting all our hope on the grace of Jesus Christ. The world wants to force us into its ways of excess and panic, but we are not to allow ourselves to be conformed to such ways. Instead, we need to make a newly energized commitment to putting God first and learning the way of disciples. In other words, if we are to be holy, we have to learn the discipline that characterizes a disciple.

*What's a disciple?*

We toss the word "disciple" around a lot. Jesus charged his disciples with making more disciples. But what does "disciple" really mean? To call someone a "follower" of Jesus doesn't really get to the heart of it. Even "believer" doesn't convey the full sense of "disciple." "Disciple" translates the Greek word, *mathetes*, and it is all about learning. *Mathetes* might be translated "learner," "pupil," or "student." Disciples sit at the feet of the teacher so that they can learn. What do they learn? They learn to be like the teacher, the master. I prefer the word "apprentice" as a synonym for "disciple." "Apprentice" conveys the full sense of learning to become like our master, Jesus. Disciples of Jesus are apprentices seeking to become Christ-like.

*How do we learn?*

How does a child learn to stay away from a hot stove? Mother's instruction might work . . . or not. But, certainly, if the child touches the hot stove, he'll learn quickly not to do it again. Much of what we learn, and often the most important things we learn, we learn by experience. And learning by experience is a process. The child observes the stove, touches it and assesses the result (ouch!), designs a new approach to dealing with hot stoves (stay away!), and then implements what he learned. It is a circle of learning,

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<sup>1</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991), 56–57.

a nearly infinitely repeated process that makes us who we are. In a letter to Timothy, Paul wrote about Scripture's unending cycle of teaching. Scripture not only teaches us (shows us the way forward), it rebukes us (points out when we've messed up), corrects us (shows us how to get back on the path), and trains us in righteousness (shows us how to do a better job of staying on the path) (2 Tim. 3:16).

In *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard helps us to see that this training is not about so much about doing as it is about being. Our goal is to *be* evermore Christlike. In our training and our trying, our aim is not just to control our behavior, but to be transformed. My goal is to *be* a patient person, not just to behave patiently. We want to *be* joyful. We want to *be* faithful. We want to *be* kind. It is transformation we seek, not merely better performance. We can never live Sermon-on-the-Mount lives by reducing Jesus' teachings to a list of rules. The life we seek is a transformed life; we need a metamorphosis.

As we grow in Christlikeness, we are becoming the persons God created us to be. Spiritual disciplines are practices that change the inner-self, that help us toward the inner transformation of heart and soul. Thus, these disciplines are the training tools that Christians have found to be necessary: the disciplines of celebration, prayer, Bible study, servanthood, confession, and more. There are many different lists of disciplines, but they all share a commitment to training for God's kingdom, not merely striving. They are the practices that create the life we seek.

#### *Exiles in a foreign land*

Peter helps us to remember who we truly are. We have been "born anew . . . through the loving and enduring word of God" (v. 23). And the truth is that we do live as "exiles" (v. 17) in this world. We know that we are to be the light of the world, the city on the hill (Matthew 5:14), yet we are more than a bit like strangers in a strange land. Becoming more like Jesus necessarily means that we will fit less well into a world that does not know him.

#### The Holiness of God

*Holy* is one of those Bible/church words that I suspect most of us use without ever being sure exactly what we mean. The truth is that even theologians struggle to convey the breadth and depth of its meaning.

In the simplest sense, holiness is what makes God, God – and makes us not God. Gerhard Vos writes, "He is holy in everything that characterizes Him and reveals Him, holy in His goodness and grace, no less in His righteousness and wrath." Aulen writes, "Holiness is the foundation on which the whole conception of God rests. . . Every statement about God, whether in reference to his love, power, righteousness . . . ceases to be an affirmation about God when it is not projected against the background of his holiness."

In other words, God's righteousness is his *holy* righteousness. His mercy is *holy* mercy. God's wrath is his *holy* wrath. But even this still doesn't get us very close to what we mean by holy.

Allen Coppedge helps us to see that just as it takes many differing portraits to adequately portray God (say, Good Shepherd and Loving Father, to name two), so it takes several ideas to try to capture what we mean by God's holiness. Coppedge suggests that holiness has six major components: separation, brilliance, righteousness, love, power, and goodness. I find this to be as good a working list as any. For example, the biblical portrait of God as creator tends to emphasize the separateness of God as a key aspect of his holiness, while the portrait of God as a shepherd emphasizes holiness as goodness.

Through it all, we need to remember that God is holy (Lev 11:45; 1 Peter 1:15-16) and the holiness of any creature, such as you or me, or any place, or any building is derived from God. Our own holiness (in which we are to grow) has meaning only in relationship to God.

Peter, like the rest of the New Testament writers, wants us to grasp the larger vision of God's work in this world and our place in his work. Disciplined and holy living are how we can live the glorious new life God has given us, how we can truly be evermore Christlike. It is how we learn to be faithful; even better . . . how we become faithful to the God who loves us. It is our own fire education.

## Daily Bible Readings

*More on holiness*

**Monday, Leviticus 19** "Love your neighbor" is found in this chapter.

**Tuesday, Isaiah 40** This prophet is certainly a bringer of good news to an exiled people.

**Wednesday, 2 Timothy 1:6-14** Paul too issues a call for holy living in the midst of his own suffering.

**Thursday, 1 John 3:11-23** Living a life of love. More on what such a life looks like.

**Friday, 2 Peter 1:5-8** More on disciplined living. Read all the first chapter and you'll probably agree that how we live really does matter!

**Saturday, Revelation 4** The heavenly worship of our Holy God

## Scott Engle's Bible Classes

### Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Ruth.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

### Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of Kings (1&2). Next up are Jesus' parables.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

*About the weekday classes:*

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) to make sure the class is meeting.

### Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Video of each week's class is posted here: [vimeo.com/groups/scottsbiblestudy](https://vimeo.com/groups/scottsbiblestudy)

Beginning this week, June 30: A new series: *Amazing Stories*