

YAHWEH (PART 1)

OUR GOD IS SELF-EXISTENT

FOR JUST AS THE FATHER HAS LIFE IN HIMSELF, EVEN SO HE GAVE TO THE SON ALSO TO HAVE LIFE IN HIMSELF. (JOHN 5:26)

SOMETHING GREATER THAN THE POLISH OF MAN

Have you ever been on a committee whose task was to find a new pastor for your church? I would like to invite you to join us on our pulpit search committee for about five minutes. We are looking over the resumes of two candidates and watching the videos of their preaching.

According to the resume of the first man, we read that he won a medal at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich. He served in the United States Army as a Green Beret from 1973 – 1976. He later attended seminary where he earned his doctorate in Old Testament languages in 1984. He is married with two grown children and three grandchildren. He has written three books on church growth. And he would be coming to us from a church with 1,200 members where he served as senior pastor.

As we watch this first candidate's video, his grammar and articulation are perfect. His delivery is flawless.

According to the resume of the second man, we read that he was born with a birth defect and, as a result, has lived his life confined to a wheelchair. He attended Bible College where he received a bachelor's degree in Bible in 1984. Since then, he has served as an assistant pastor in four churches, mostly smaller churches in the mid-west. He had been married; but his wife died suddenly when they were both in their early 30s. They had no children.

As we watch this second man's video, we notice that he stutters. His Biblical understanding is very good. But there is something else in this second man's preaching that was absent from the first man's preaching ... and that is what catches our attention.

The first man obviously believed what he was saying; we could tell from the tone of his voice. But there was more than mere emotion behind the second man's preaching. Although he was not an energetic speaker, there was something that permeated his words, something that drew us in to listen with absorbing interest.

The first man had credentials ... and zeal. But the second man had something more than credentials, something more than zeal. Saturating his words was power, a power generated by the Spirit of God.

How could a crippled man ... with only a little Bible training ... with limited exposure to large crowds ... and who spoke with a stutter ... how could this man possibly radiate more power than an Olympic medalist, a Green Beret, a Doctor of Theology, and a published author?

Perhaps the power behind his words has something to do with not having healthy legs, with not having the continued companionship of a beloved wife he greatly misses, with not having experience before large crowds, with not having clear speech. Perhaps weakness itself has prepared the second man to be and do what we as a church are about to ask our future pastor to be and do. Extended pain has cultivated within the heart of this broken man a deep and abiding dependence on almighty God. Crushing sorrows have prepared him well for the responsibilities of a caring shepherd.

We, as members of the pulpit search committee, choose the second man. Why? Because we decided that the pastor we call is going to need a lot more than the credentials of man to be what we need for him to be, and do what we need for him to do. We decided that

THE POWER OF GOD IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE POLISH OF MAN

We are about to watch this truth unfold through the life of Moses, an extraordinary life with three very distinct phases:

the exalted life of Moses between the ages of early childhood and 40 years,
the broken life of Moses between the ages of 40 and 80,
and the fruitful life of Moses between the ages of 80 and 120.

AN EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOL OF BROKENNESS

The first 40 years of Moses' life could not have been more blessed:

- Physically, Moses is described as being

BEAUTIFUL (EXODUS 2:2)

- Socially and politically, his profile in Egypt could not have been higher.

*PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER NURTURED HIM AS HER OWN SON (ACTS 7:21)
HE WAS A MAN OF POWER IN WORDS AND DEEDS (ACTS 7:22)*

- Intellectually, he earned at least one “PhD” in the best university in the world of his day.

MOSES WAS EDUCATED IN ALL THE LEARNING OF THE EGYPTIANS (ACTS 7:22)

- And spiritually, Moses is described as being

LOVELY IN THE SIGHT OF GOD (ACTS 7:20)

From very early childhood to the age of 40, Moses’ life flourished in the areas of physical strength, leadership expertise, legal knowledge and writing skills ... disciplines his future work would demand of him. But there was something else he would need in the future that all these advantages could not provide.

HE WAS GOING TO NEED A POWER THAT ONLY THE PAIN OF BROKENNESS CAN PRODUCE.

When Moses was 40 years old, his favored position was yanked out from under him by one impulsive act. While defending a fellow Hebrew, he murdered an Egyptian citizen. And in doing so, this alien prince – accustomed to the courts of Egyptian royalty – was forced to abandon his privileged status and flee the country as a wanted man. Few have collapsed so far and as fast as this man Moses. In one day he went from hero to zero ... from glory to obscurity. And although he did not know it, the second half of his education had just begun.

From the age of 40 to the age of 80, this adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter herded sheep for his father-in-law. Forty years! Imagine what it must have been like to sit on a rock ... in the middle of a sweltering wilderness ... making sure these “stupid, dirty, stinkin’ sheep” did not wander off ... while in his mind, he was back in Egypt, strolling through the splendid halls of Pharaoh’s courts. And this went on day after day after day ... for 40 years! How often he must have replayed that murder in his mind! How often waves of failure and regret must have flooded the heart of the one who had held such promise in the palm of his hand! A bright future, forfeited by one rash decision.

The second 40 years of Moses’ life were as humble as the first 40 years had been exalted. But all of that was about to change. Moses was about to learn that not one minute of those last 40 years as a shepherd in the wilderness had been wasted but, instead, had prepared him for one of the most illustrious careers in Biblical history.

As he was out in the field one day, he noticed a bush that was burning but that was not being consumed. Having approached this extraordinary scene, he heard the voice of God coming from the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-5). And when Moses asked Him for His Name, the LORD answered, “My Name is ‘I AM.’ ”

BEHOLD, I AM GOING TO THE SONS OF ISRAEL, AND I WILL SAY TO THEM, "THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS HAS SENT ME TO YOU." NOW THEY MAY SAY TO ME, "WHAT IS HIS NAME?" WHAT SHALL I SAY TO THEM? GOD SAID TO MOSES, "I AM WHO I AM"; AND HE SAID, "THUS YOU SHALL SAY TO THE SONS OF ISRAEL, 'I AM HAS SENT ME TO YOU ... THIS IS MY NAME FOREVER, AND THIS IS MY MEMORIAL-NAME TO ALL GENERATIONS.'" (EXODUS 3:13-15)

We will return to Moses a little later. But before we can fully appreciate this extraordinary encounter with God, we must first understand the significance of this extraordinary Name, "I AM."

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAME "I AM"

"I AM" is the English translation of the Hebrew verb (hayah) meaning "to exist," "to be," "to become." It is from this verb that the Name Yahweh ¹ (or Jehovah) comes. Occurring 6,823 times in the Old Testament, this Name highlights the perfection of God's self-existence.

But what does that mean, that Yahweh is self-existent?

To be self-existent means that God was not created. No one or no thing brought "I AM" into existence. Yahweh was not dependent on anyone or anything else outside Himself for His being.

But how can anything exist without the aid of something else? With this kind of question, it is best to just be honest. The fact is, some of God's perfections are easier to grasp than others. Although none of us have been perfect in keeping our word, we can at least comprehend what it is like for someone to be "faithful." But how does one get his mind around the attribute of self-existence! To comprehend this Divine perfection is like trying to wrap a 2" piece of string around the planet Jupiter!

6-year-old child: "Daddy, who made God?"

Daddy: "No one made God. He has always been in existence."

6-year-old child: (A confused look appears on his face.)

Daddy: (A confused look appears on his face, too.)

26-year-old doctoral student of theology: "Professor, who made God?"

Professor of theology: "No one made God. He has always been in existence."

26-year-old doctoral student of theology: (A confused look appears on his face.)

Professor of theology: (A confused look appears on his face, too.)

No one made God. This means that God did not create Himself either. God made you and me. And He made the trees and the stars. But God did not make God. He is not self-created; He is self-existent. Nothing can create itself.

We are indebted to R. C. Sproul for the following help:

“To create itself, something ... would have to be before it is. It would have to exist and not exist at the same time. To create itself, it would have to pull itself into existence before it had anything to pull with. The very concept of self-creation is irrational. God could not have ‘made Himself.’ ”

“In a word, God is not a creature. He is not dependent ... Rather, God is the Creator. He is independent ... God, and God alone, has the power of ‘being’ within Himself.” ²

Perhaps this attribute is unsettling because we cannot relate to it. We can define it; and we can describe it. But we cannot “connect” with it as we can with some of God’s other attributes such as faithfulness.

Self-existence is a Biblical truth our finite minds will simply have to accept. But is that really so bad ... not being able to fully grasp the magnitude of our God! Let’s be careful not to miss something here. If we could fully understand everything about God, He would not be much of a God. He would be just as finite as are our minds. Should we not want a God that is so far beyond our comprehension that we are willing to feel “small” when we stand next to Him?

WHY LORD? WHY DID YOU DO THIS TO ME?

This is all well and good. “I AM” is self-existent. But what does that have to do with us? We cannot even relate to it. What can we possibly take away from this lesson that will do us any good?

Because God is self-existent, He is in a very unique position. The One Who was not brought into existence brought everything else into existence. He spoke and everything came into being. That is, the self-existent One is the Creator of all things. He did not need us to exist; but we needed Him to exist.

And because God is the One Who “stitched us together,” He is in the best possible position to be a wise Provider. He knows exactly what each individual believer needs to be all that he can be. And dear friends, He also knows what each individual believer does not need to be all that he can be.

TO BE ALL THAT YOU CAN BE SOMETIMES MEANS THE LORD WITHHOLDING FROM YOU
SOMETHING HE GIVES TO EVERYONE ELSE.

Have you ever been dissatisfied over what God has not given you? What you lack is not your fault. It was beyond your control. But here you are, not having something that most everyone else seems to have.

Why can't I have the looks that others seem to have?
I'm not as attractive as they are.

Why can't I have the health others seem to have?
I'm not as strong as they are.

Why can't I have the IQ others seem to have?
I'm not as smart as they are.

Why can't I have the personality others seem to have?
I'm not as likeable as they are.

Why can't I have a certain ability others seem to have?
I'm not as gifted as they are.

Why couldn't I have had the opportunities others had?
I feel deprived.

Have you ever felt slighted by God? I have.

Does He have the right to do that ... to withhold from us something He has given to most everybody else? Yes, He does. Why? Because His Name is "I AM," the self-existent One. Yahweh is the Creator of all things – including you and me. And as Creator He has the right to make us have and be and do whatever He wants us to have and be and do.

OR DOES NOT THE POTTER HAVE A RIGHT OVER THE CLAY, TO MAKE FROM THE SAME LUMP ONE VESSEL FOR HONORABLE USE AND ANOTHER FOR COMMON USE? (ROMANS 9:21)

Our self-existent Creator has the right to sculpture our lives anyway He wants to. He has the right to call the shots. And He does not have to get our permission to do so. Nor does He owe us an explanation as to why He did what He did. But we can be certain of this very thing:

Not only does Yahweh have the right to do with us as He pleases, He also has a very good reason for doing what He does. In fact, He has two very good reasons:

First, He makes us weak for our own sake:

BECAUSE OF THE SURPASSING GREATNESS OF THE REVELATIONS, FOR THIS REASON, TO KEEP ME FROM EXALTING MYSELF, THERE WAS GIVEN ME A THORN IN THE FLESH, A MESSENGER OF SATAN TO TORMENT ME – TO KEEP ME FROM EXALTING MYSELF! CONCERNING THIS I IMPLORED THE LORD THREE TIMES THAT IT MIGHT LEAVE ME. AND HE HAS SAID TO ME, “MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU, FOR POWER IS PERFECTED IN WEAKNESS.” (2ND CORINTHIANS 12:7-9)

But more importantly, He makes us weak for His Own sake:

MOST GLADLY, THEREFORE, I WILL RATHER BOAST ABOUT MY WEAKNESSES, SO THAT THE POWER OF CHRIST MAY DWELL IN ME. (2ND CORINTHIANS 12:9)

Yahweh, the self-existent Creator, has every right to intervene in the lives of His creatures anyway He chooses. And when He decides to crumble the self-assurance of an individual,

the weakened one is made more dependent on the power of God ...

so that, by that power, his life would conform more to the image of Christ ...

so that he might represent the Savior more accurately to a world groping in darkness ...

so that he might share more fully in the radiant glory of the Son of God throughout eternity ...

so that he might glorify the Father, both now and throughout eternity.

We are not weak because God failed to keep us strong. We are weak for the sake of glory ... the eternal glory that God deserves and that, by His grace, we will share with Him.

There was a reason Yahweh chose Moses to lead over 2 million slaves out of Egypt. But it was

not because Moses “*WAS BEAUTIFUL*” (EXODUS 2:2) ...

not because “*PHARAOH’S DAUGHTER NURTURED HIM AS HER OWN SON*” (ACTS 7:21) ...

not because “*HE WAS A MAN OF POWER IN WORDS AND DEEDS*” (ACTS 7:22) ...

not because “*MOSES WAS EDUCATED IN ALL THE LEARNING OF THE EGYPTIANS*” (ACTS 7:22) ...

and not because *“HE WAS LOVELY IN THE SIGHT OF GOD” (ACTS 7:20) ...*

because when he was all of this, Moses

SUPPOSED THAT HIS BRETHREN UNDERSTOOD THAT GOD WAS GRANTING THEM DELIVERANCE THROUGH HIM. (ACTS 7:25)

Before he had been broken, Moses assumed that his status in Pharaoh’s court qualified him to deliver Israel from bondage. He also supposed that the people of Israel would listen to him because of his political clout. It was because of this self-assured attitude that he failed. He was not fit to be used by God. There was too much of Moses in the way for God’s power to be manifested.

Yahweh had to invest the second 40 years of Moses’ life humbling this man from thinking he was really something to thinking he was really nothing. For this man to be qualified for effective spiritual leadership, God had to get him out of the way. It was only after Moses had come to this conclusion about himself that he was ready to be used:

WHO AM I, THAT I SHOULD GO TO PHARAOH, AND THAT I SHOULD BRING THE SONS OF ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPT? (EXODUS 3:11)

and

PLEASE, LORD, I HAVE NEVER BEEN ELOQUENT, NEITHER RECENTLY NOR IN TIME PAST, NOR SINCE YOU HAVE SPOKEN TO YOUR SERVANT; FOR I AM SLOW OF SPEECH AND SLOW OF TONGUE. (EXODUS 4:10)

Moses did not realize it but, by using these excuses, he was actually giving the LORD reasons why he should be used to lead His people to the Promised Land, not reasons why He shouldn’t. Moses went from being a self-assured

“MAN OF POWER IN WORDS AND DEEDS”

to being a man who has, in his own estimation,

“NEVER BEEN ELOQUENT ... SLOW OF SPEECH AND SLOW OF TONGUE.”

Why would this broken man now be qualified for effective spiritual leadership? Because now the “polish” is gone. Now the power of God can be magnified:

WHO HAS MADE MAN’S MOUTH? OR WHO MAKES HIM MUTE OR DEAF, OR SEEING OR BLIND? IS IT NOT I, THE LORD? NOW THEN GO, AND I, EVEN I, WILL BE WITH YOUR MOUTH, AND TEACH YOU WHAT YOU ARE TO SAY. (EXODUS 4:11-12)

THE PRICELESS GIFT OF WEAKNESS

It is one of the paradoxes of the spiritual life. When we think we are strong, we are actually quite weak. And when we think we are weak, we are in a position to be quite strong ... in the Lord. Contrary to the world's value system,

THE LORD WILL NOT USE US BECAUSE WE ARE MIGHTY IN ABILITY.

There is just too much of us that will get in His way.

NOR WILL THE LORD USE US IN SPITE OF OUR WEAKNESSES.

This sounds good; but that is not completely true. The LORD does not use us in spite of our weaknesses.

THE LORD WILL USE US BECAUSE OF OUR WEAKNESSES.

FOR CONSIDER YOUR CALLING, BRETHREN, THAT THERE WERE NOT MANY WISE ACCORDING TO THE FLESH, NOT MANY MIGHTY, NOT MANY NOBLE; BUT GOD HAS CHOSEN THE FOOLISH THINGS OF THE WORLD TO SHAME THE WISE, AND GOD HAS CHOSEN THE WEAK THINGS OF THE WORLD TO SHAME THE THINGS WHICH ARE STRONG, AND THE BASE THINGS OF THE WORLD AND THE DESPISED GOD HAS CHOSEN, THE THINGS THAT ARE NOT, SO THAT HE MAY NULLIFY THE THINGS THAT ARE, SO THAT NO MAN MAY BOAST BEFORE GOD. BUT BY HIS DOING YOU ARE IN CHRIST JESUS, WHO BECAME TO US WISDOM FROM GOD, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SANCTIFICATION, AND REDEMPTION, SO THAT, JUST AS IT IS WRITTEN, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD." (1ST CORINTHIANS 1:26-31)

So, do you ever feel that God has slighted you ... that He did not give you a strength He seems to have given everyone else (or perhaps took from you a strength you once had)? That is by Divine design. Why? Because

THE POWER OF GOD IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE POLISH OF MAN

It does not feel very good, but the fact is, our weaknesses are a priceless gift, intended to force us to our knees so that the power of almighty God might be displayed through us.

DO YOU NOT KNOW? HAVE YOU NOT HEARD? THE EVERLASTING GOD, YAHWEH, THE CREATOR OF THE ENDS OF THE EARTH DOES NOT BECOME WEARY OR TIRED. HIS UNDERSTANDING IS INSCRUTABLE.

HE GIVES STRENGTH TO THE WEARY, AND TO HIM WHO LACKS MIGHT HE INCREASES POWER. THOUGH YOUTHS GROW WEARY AND TIRED, AND VIGOROUS YOUNG MEN STUMBLE BADLY,

YET THOSE WHO WAIT FOR YAHWEH WILL GAIN NEW STRENGTH; THEY WILL MOUNT UP WITH WINGS LIKE EAGLES, THEY WILL RUN AND NOT GET TIRED, THEY WILL WALK AND NOT BECOME WEARY. (ISAIAH 40:28-31)

Yahweh took the exalted man Moses – who thought highly of himself – and humbled him. Then when he was 80, He took the broken man Moses – who thought little of himself – and used him mightily to change history. God had every right to do this to Moses. And He has every right to do this to us. He is our self-existent Creator. He “stitched us together” in our mother’s womb (and, therefore, intimately knows our frame). Yahweh knows exactly what to give us to be all that we can be for His glory ... and He knows exactly what to withhold from us to be all that we can be for His glory.

If we respond properly (in faith) to these gaps in our lives, we will find ourselves more dependent upon Him to fill each gap with more of Himself.

And when He does, then we will begin to understand the priceless value of weakness as we observe His resurrection power in our lives.

And then we will rejoice for being given the privilege of participating in the exaltation of our God.

And then we will rest, with deep satisfaction, in knowing that we will share in that glory – His glory – throughout eternity.

And then we will wonder why we ever considered our weakness to have been a problem to begin with.

And then we will marvel at the wisdom of God.

THEREFORE I AM WELL CONTENT WITH WEAKNESSES, WITH INSULTS, WITH DISTRESSES, WITH PERSECUTIONS, WITH DIFFICULTIES, FOR CHRIST’S SAKE; FOR WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN I AM STRONG. (2ND CORINTHIANS 12:10)

His Name is Yahweh.

He is our self-existent Creator. And He knows what He is doing.

GOD, FURTHERMORE, SAID TO MOSES, “THUS YOU SHALL SAY TO THE SONS OF ISRAEL, ‘YAHWEH – THE GOD WHO IS NOT DEPENDENT ON ANYONE OR ANYTHING ELSE OUTSIDE HIMSELF FOR HIS EXISTENCE – HAS SENT ME TO YOU. THIS IS MY NAME FOREVER, AND THIS IS MY MEMORIAL-NAME TO ALL GENERATIONS.’” (EXODUS 3:15)

- ¹ Translated “LORD” [all capital letters] in the NASV, the KJV, and the NIV
Translated “Jehovah” in the American Standard Bible and the Living Bible
- ² Sproul, R. C., *One Holy Passion*, Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987, page 19.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR LESSON # 1

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAME “I AM”

We learned that the Name Yahweh highlights the self-existence of God.

What does that mean, that God is “self-existent”?

Just because our finite minds are unable to fully grasp (and explain) an infinite God does not mean we should somehow feel dissatisfied with our faith. To the contrary, our inability to comprehend His perfections should produce within us a sense of joyful security and reverent fear.

How can our limited ability to comprehend the perfections of our God actually strengthen us in our faith?

WHY LORD? WHY DID YOU DO THIS TO ME?

When God places you in a helpless situation, why does He do that? Is He not supposed to be making you happy?

THE PRICELESS GIFT OF WEAKNESS

God is our Creator. And as Creator, He has the right to “sculptor” our lives as He sees fit: to withhold, to give, and to remove what He deems best for both His Name and our wellbeing. Our responsibility, as creatures, is to gladly submit to His good – but sometimes difficult-to-accept – will by faith.

Has there ever been a time in your life when you had trouble accepting God's will for yourself – or someone else you care about – because it did not make any sense? If so, what did you do (or what should you have done) to set unbelief aside and submit to His purposes?

What do you think it takes to grow in your trust of God over your life?

APPENDIX A

ISRAEL'S USE OF THE NAME YAHWEH

The reason the Jews stopped pronouncing the Name "Yahweh" is because of an overreaction to their fear of blasphemy. This, however, may be the lesser of two evils. It is also possible to be too casual in our use of God's Name.

In what ways is the Christian community sometimes careless in our use of God's Name?