

## **Week 2**      **The Moses Paradox: *The God who is far away, so close.***

- 1) Who do you relate to most – Oprah Winfrey or Stephen Fry?    OR  
Have you ever been close to someone famous?    Did you “connect”?

*We may feel like Yuri Gagarin to struggle to believe in a God we cannot see from our viewpoint – an ever present God who seems so far away?!*

- 2) What is the biggest sense of awe you have felt in a particular place?
- 3) When do you struggle to sense God’s presence – when in company or solitude? In busy or quiet times? In a big building or outside?

The Bible tells us of an ever present (Psalm 139 v 7-10) cosmic God (Colossians 1 v 14-18) who is close by (Acts 17 v 27-28). Jesus promised His presence with his followers (Matthew 28 v 20). Yet we also read of his hiddenness (Psalm 10) and that he cannot be boxed in (Acts 17 v 24) or reduced to our ways (Isaiah 55 v 8-9). Even Jesus cried for God’s presence (Matthew 27 v 46 / Psalm 22).

Moses had unique encounters with God (Deuteronomy 34 v 10) yet went from crisis to crisis without knowing what God would do next or who else would. Moses was born into the slavery of Abraham’s covenanted Hebrew people under the Egyptian’s who desperately called out to God (Exodus 2 v 24-25). Moses escaped death through the heroines of his mother, sister & midwives and entered into the royal court as an Egyptian prince. After fleeing a crime Moses encountered God in the desert.

*Read Exodus 3 v 1-15*

1. Why does God call and then direct Moses as He does in verses 4-5?
2. Who does God call Himself? Verses 14-15
3. How would this make you feel, being Moses?

God calls His people into freedom to worship, but to a particular place (Mount Horeb=Sinai) with particular limits in closeness and ways to worship Him. God is in the detail of the (mobile tent of the) Tabernacle construction plans with particular zones, including a calendar for the Holy of Holies, only to be entered by one man (the chief priest) once a year on the Day of Atonement (Hebrews 9 v 6-8).

- 4) So where is God exactly!?    When God is in the Tabernacle, is he absent from everywhere else?

Two words help signal God’s presence – Immanence & Transcendence

Immanence = close, present, real, intimate

Transcendence = big, other, holy, special

Even Solomon's grand Tabernacle was not supposed to contain God (1 Kings 8 v 27). If we lose one of these God will blend with our surroundings, or become sentimentalised, or misunderstood. Our created world should reveal our Creator, leading us to worship Him distinctly as holy, without becoming wrapped up in new age spirituality deifying nature, such as in Buddhist & Hindu concepts of God. Neither should we forget our God-given vocation to care *for nature* (Genesis 1 v 28). The many ways God cares for us is a great reassurance and gives us encouragement to reciprocate in devotional worship on Sunday and every day! But to reduce worship to "Jesus is my Girlfriend" because we romanticise or over-sentimentalise our personal connection with God will narrow our gaze from all that God is and what He cares about beyond me!

- 5) What worship songs or other means help you to appreciate God's close-ness + vast-ness?
- 6) Is God responsible for everything on Earth if He is all good, all powerful & all seeing?

God can be seen as the distant "Force" unable or unwilling to change human events, a *Deist* sees the world as a watch, created perfect and then set to run by the watchmaker, so the flaws or gaps are not God's fault or concern. It is common to separate out the everyday life of work, leisure, politics and spending for ourselves. Then we might give special times to God in holidays, rites of passage or crisis... like separating the secular from the sacred. We might not trust God to pray for particular needs, or be so ashamed of our lowliness we can't bear to be in his presence. Worshipping God cannot be just luvvy-duvvy or straight-jacketed. Jesus ultimately bridged this vast gap to know us and yet be known to embrace sinners, to find the lost and the distant.

We are more than the chemical reactions in our brain, so God is more than his universe. He draws near to us personally, but warns us from being too cosy with the Lord of all creation. In Exodus the people are cynical, impatient, moaning and rose-tinted (Exodus 16 v 3) despite God's great provision.

- 7) Have you felt you've been like that this week? Or for a season?
- 8) Why are we left longing to know where God is, where to find him, how to see him?

Our sinfulness that should be burnt up by God's holy fire was consumed by Jesus (Ephesians 2 v 18), giving an intimacy that ripped the Holy of Holies curtain down the middle as a symbol of the Holy Spirit's work.