

MOSES

THE FRUSTRATED LEADER

re:form

ANCESTORS

PREPARE

KEY PASSAGES

Exodus 2 | Moses the Murderer

Exodus 3 | God Calls Moses to Lead

Exodus 32 | Moses Lays Down the Law

Numbers 20:1-13 | Moses Hits a Rock

Deuteronomy 34:1-12 | Moses Denied Promised Land Entry

WHAT'S BEHIND ALL THIS?

When you think of a great leader, many characteristics may come to mind. The Bible is full of people who demonstrate various aspects of leadership, from the prayerful and visionary Nehemiah to the doubt-ridden and dependent Gideon. One leader often rises above the rest—Moses. In fact, Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy testify to divine conversations, epic events, and an expansive set of laws that are foundational to the Judeo-Christian understanding of God. Central to all of these books is Moses. But upon closer reading we see a reluctant, frustrated, not-so-charismatic leader. Bible commentators have wondered: How could a law-breaker—a murderer—ever be qualified to be God's Law-giver and agent of God's redemption? This paradox seems to conflict with many heroic stereotypes regarding Moses.

It came as quite a surprise, even to Moses, that God would choose him to lead God's people. Moses' conversation with God before the burning bush in Exodus 3 was filled with questions and excuses, but divine assurances counteracted them all. We learn in Exodus 4 that God promised to provide support for Moses both by way of supernatural power and human assistance through siblings Aaron and Miriam, father-in-law Jethro, Joshua, and others. But not even these promises could keep Moses from letting his frustrations get the best of him at times.

Incidents like Moses' dramatic act that disobeyed God (Numbers 20:1-13) had serious consequences, in this case disqualifying Moses from entering the Promised Land. However, the skeletons in Moses' closet can offer us fresh insight. Moses, the leader, was full of frustrations, disappointments, and failures. But in Moses, we can discern the impassioned call to correct injustice and the freedom to interact with the divine. Moses' story



CONSIDER THIS

"It can be dangerous for a leader to see herself too much like Moses and her followers too much like the grumbling Israelites. It can feed megalomania and tale-bearing in its own right. Precisely then it is good that God leads his chosen through Exodus with a murderer as his proxy and a band of murderers as his people."

Jason Byassee, *Moses and Midrash*
(faithandleadership.com, 9:2009)

speaks to a flawed but active relationship with God where God walks alongside those who stumble through their positions of leadership.

WHERE ARE TEENS AT?

- In today's digitally-connected world, a person's mistakes can affect their future more than ever before. In Moses, teens see someone whose past doesn't limit his potential to lead.
- Moses exhibits teens' tendency to minimize their capabilities and focus instead on their weaknesses. But like many youth, Moses was surrounded by those who saw more in him than he could see in himself.

ENCOUNTER

15 MINUTES

Tear here for easy use!

Make sure you've got the obvious stuff for this session—re:form Ancestors video (DVD or download), Anti-Workbooks, Bibles, pens or pencils, paper, tape, etc.

VIDEO

1. SET UP

Our ancestor in the faith, Moses, went from being a reluctant, passive bystander to a passionately active leader. Sometimes his passions got the best of him, but he always seemed to be mindful of God's call.

Have youth share their recollection of the most significant phone call they ever received. What was it about? How did it make them feel? Did it change them in any way? Ask youth with cell phones to use them. Team up to see who can send the most texts in 45 seconds asking the question: "What's the strangest call you ever got?" Share answers during Respond.

2. WATCH

"Moses: The Frustrated Leader" video

3. UNPACK

- What surprised you about the video? Do you feel differently about Moses now than you did before?
- Does Moses remind you of yourself in any way? How?
- Would you have picked Moses to lead the Israelites? Why or why not?
- Do you believe God calls people today? If so, in what ways? How can we tell whether a call is actually from God?

WHAT ABOUT THE BIBLE?

Break into 2 to 4 groups. Give one or more of these Exodus chapters to each group: Exodus 2, 3, 4 and 32. Provide yellow and green sticky notes for each group. Then have them scan their passage and write scenes of frustration for Moses on yellow sticky notes and scenes of boldness on the green notes. After a few minutes, groups can report their findings by posting the notes on a large outline of Moses drawn on a whiteboard or chart paper.

QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- How did you feel about the Moses described in your passages?
- Do you relate to more the Moses of Exodus 2, 3, and 4 or the Moses of Exodus 32? Why?
- What changes do you see in Moses between the two passages? In the Israelites? In God?

GET THIS STUFF

Cell phones. Yellow and green sticky notes. White board or chart paper. Marker.

BACK IT UP

"Moses wondered if God had confused him with someone else... someone a bit more... qualified."

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CAPTURE IT

Invite youth to post recollections of their "significant call" under the "Words" tab at the re:form Gallery.

HERE'S A TIP

Have youth silence their phones so you don't hear text message alerts throughout the session.

ENGAGE

25-30 MINUTES

Choose 1, 2, or all 3 activities for your Engage time together.

1. THE BURNING BUSH

Where's this going? Youth explore Moses' response to the burning bush and how others might react to an extraordinary experience.

Using the images running horizontally through the middle of the page, briefly review the events of Moses' life leading up to the burning bush experience. Then invite youth to pair up to create dialogue between Moses and his father-in-law Jethro after Moses returned from the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-20). When youth are done, invite pairs to act out their dialogues for the rest of the group.

QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- Who's the first person you would share an amazing experience like the burning bush with? Why?
- Name some characteristics that a person must have for you to be willing to confide in them. What characteristics make a person less than trustworthy?
- What's the most out-there story you've ever told someone? How did the listener respond?

2. IMPRESSIONS

Where's this going? Youth confront the contradictions Moses may have felt about his identity and capabilities as he followed God's call to lead the Hebrew people.

Moses didn't see himself as a leader for all kinds of reasons. He had a speech impediment, he grew up in Pharaoh's home, he was hot-tempered, and he murdered an Egyptian. But ultimately he was chosen by God and became a pivotal leader in the Israelites' history. In this activity, youth describe each other in a word or phrase, then compare how others see them with how they see themselves.

QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- What did it feel like to come up with descriptions about the other youth?
- Which things that were written about you line up with your opinion of yourself? Which ones surprised you most? Why?
- Which is easier—writing a description on another person's back or telling them face-to-face? Why?

HERE'S A TIP

If teens want to know more about Jethro, have them scan Exodus 2:15-3:1, Exodus 4:18-20, and Exodus 18.

GET THIS STUFF

Card stock. Tape.
Washable marker.

BACK IT UP

"As they made their way to the Promised Land, a majority of Moses' time was absorbed dealing with all of the people's complaining; God had never said this would be part of his job. Moses was beginning to see why God hadn't mentioned it..."

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3. BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT

Where's this going? Youth consider how Moses dealt with bitter disappointment.

Moses didn't get to enter the Promised Land. Bummer! His entire life goal—gone, because he struck a rock to find water (Numbers 20:1-13)? Youth have their own file of frustrations and disappointments, some quite profound. Begin by having one of the youth slowly read Deuteronomy 34:1-12. Ask other youth to close their eyes and picture themselves as Moses, standing on the summit of Mt. Nebo. Then encourage youth to write or draw about a disappointment they have experienced and what happened afterwards. Assuring safety and caring follow-up will encourage youth to more freely share their experiences.

QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- What comes to mind when you hear Deuteronomy 34?
- Describe something you put a lot of time, energy, or money into, only to have it fail or fall short of the goal. What did that feel like?
- Who do you turn to when you're really disappointed?
- Where was God in your moments of deep disappointment?

GET THIS STUFF

Colored pencils.

CAPTURE IT

If they're up to it, encourage youth to post their work about dealing with disappointment on the re:form Gallery.

BACK IT UP

"God would not allow Moses to enter because of a certain incident."

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CONSIDER THIS

A recent study on people's relationships with God reported that nearly two out of three people—including atheists!—report feeling angry at God, many because they hold God responsible for disappointments in their lives.

RESPOND

15-20 MINUTES

REGROUP

Give the youth rolls of fire-colored crepe paper to decorate your meeting space. Explain that you want to wrap up the session amidst the colors of the burning bush. After decorating, invite everyone to sit in a circle with their shoes off.

Despite a life that began and ended with separation from his family and his people, by the end we read that the Lord knew Moses “face to face” (Deuteronomy 34:10). That feeling may not have always been mutual, but Moses got the people to the place God wanted them to be. He fulfilled the call of God for his life. It was a rocky go of it at times, but in the weeping of the Israelites we see how Moses’ leadership was ultimately received and remembered (Deuteronomy 34:8).

SHARE

Close the session with an opportunity for youth to share what they have learned about the character and how that connects with their life. Identify aspects of their work and recall points of discussion that can serve to recap the session for youth.

QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- Name three things about leadership or being a leader that excites or scares you.
- Tell about a time when you had an opportunity to lead other people. What happened? Did it go well? Did you hit any obstacles? How did you handle them?
- If the youth got any texts in response to their question about “strange calls” invite them to share. How can you know if God is calling you to something?”

SEND

Invite youth to name specific areas of their life where they can show leadership. They can write them on crepe paper. Compile their responses, and then invite youth to hang the streamers in the room or take it home with them as reminders of God’s burning bush call to Moses. Close by reading Numbers 6:22-27.

GET THIS STUFF

Rolls of red, yellow and orange crepe paper. Tape. Staplers.

BACK IT UP

“The bush spoke to Moses, telling him that it was the Lord God and that Moses was to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt to the Promised Land of Canaan.”

re:form Ancestors DVD

CAPTURE IT

Use a camera, camcorder, scanner, web cam, or audio recorder to capture group conversation and individual pieces of work. Upload them to www.reformgallery.org or ask teens to do so.