

**Exodus 4:18-31 (1984 NIV)**  
***Transformed While in Transition***

**Introduction**

I recall the day when my older daughter (Vera) was born in the Mt Alvernia Hospital. My wife (Iris) was pushed into the theatre early in the morning for the Caesarean procedure. I was asked to wait at the lounge.

As the minutes went by, I became uneasy about the wait. I asked myself all kinds of silly questions:

- “Why is it taking so long? My friend told me his wife was super quick with the delivery of their baby.”
- “Has something happened to Iris?”
- “Has something gone wrong with the delivery?”
- “Is there something wrong with the baby?”

And on and on I went, striking fear and anxiety into myself with all these questions.

After what seemed like an agonizingly long wait, a nurse appeared along the corridor. She was pushing a cot and in it was a sleeping baby wrapped in a pink towel.

Immediately I told myself, “Yes! This is my baby girl!” But somehow instead of moving towards the baby, I stood rooted where I was.

And the nurse teased me with a big smile, “Mr Yuen, don’t just stand there. Come and say hello to your baby girl.”

The most anticipative moment that day was when Iris was pushed into the theatre. The most joyous moment that day was when I looked at Vera in the cot.

But what was the most agonizing period of that day? The period in-between the time Iris was pushed into the theatre and the time Vera was pushed out of the theatre.

It is the same with Moses in Ex 4:18-31. Here, we see Moses in a period of in-between—he was on his mission journey, moving out of Midian and making his way back to Egypt. This in-between period was an uneasy, suspenseful period for Moses. But God was preparing him for greater things to come, like a potter moulding a lump of clay into an instrument of great use.

Evangel Baptist Church is also in a period of in-between—we are transitioning from where we have been comfortably based for almost 20 years to the next place that the Lord will lead us somewhere and out there. That can be both uneasy and suspenseful. Yet what the Lord has to teach Moses here in Ex 4:18-31 will also serve us well if we learn them well today, allowing Him to transform and mould us into instruments for His use.

What does God want of us as we allow Him to transform and mould us in our time of transition?

**I. God wants us to serve according to His enabling, and not on our own terms (vv.18-20).**

18 Then Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Let me return to my own people in Egypt to see if any of them are still alive." Jethro said, "Go, and I wish you well."

19 Now the LORD had said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all those who wanted to kill you are dead."

20 So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt. And he took the staff of God in his hand.

Moses had a significant encounter with the Lord at the burning bush. He had been commissioned to go back to Egypt in order to lead the people of Israel out from there. His initial response was to raise all sorts of questions and to protest his unsuitability for the job. His final reply was to ask God to send someone else, at which the Lord's anger burned against him and He told Moses He would allow Aaron to help him.

When Moses spoke to Jethro (his father-in-law) in v. 18, he didn't mention anything about what the Lord had said, but simply said he wanted to go and see if his people were still alive.

This seems strange because if they weren't alive, why would the Lord be sending him back to them? Did he distrust what the Lord had said? What we can say is that Moses didn't come across as someone supremely sure of himself and his commission even at that point.

But the Lord hadn't given up on him. He had told him to go back to Egypt, that those who wanted to kill him were dead. And in response to that, Moses rather uncertainly spoke to Jethro and then set off with his family.

Verse 20 says this of Moses, "And he took the staff of God in his hand." That staff was a reminder of his commission and a symbol of the Lord's power. He might seem unsure but he's going; he might have all sorts of questions and concerns, but he's going ... and he's going with the staff of God in his hands.

I think what vv. 18-20 says about Moses is also a real commentary of us. Moses recalled all the mistakes he did as prince of Egypt, and he froze.

Setbacks can have a rather paralyzing effect on our sense of confidence. We give ourselves all kinds of reasons and excuses to quit, to stand still, and not to be involved. But God uses setbacks or mistakes not as a judge to condemn us for doing things wrong. Rather He uses these as a teacher to enlighten us about doing things right/better the next time around.

Moses' obedience was off and on. He's aware that this would be a challenging and demanding mission. Understandably, His obedience was hesitant—on-again; off-again. Hmm ... do you see yourself in him? I mean isn't that how we "obey" so often?

Here are some things we can do to let God transform and mould us from reluctance in us to confidence in Him:

1. Stop trying to be perfect. A big hindrance to serving God is our past misdoings and indiscretions. We think we can't serve God because we haven't been good enough. But do you realize that God delights in using flawed, imperfect people? Moses himself is an example. However, this does not mean that we go to the other extreme—that we stubbornly refuse to clean up our acts and yet expect God to use us for His glory.

2. Rely on God's power. The staff that Moses was bringing with him was originally his own shepherding staff. But it became the Lord's staff. When we give to the Lord what we consider to be our symbol of competence and talent, the Lord will take it and transform it into something to be used by Him.

"'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6 NKJV). Yes, we must work diligently ... but in the final analysis, we must trust the Lord.

The "Taipei Times" carried this story in its 11 May 2002 edition.

In 1972, Hu Jen Chuan was barely two years old when he fell from a table and went into a coma for six days. Since then, he has been unable to either talk or move.

However, he had continued to grow over the past 30 years.

His mother, Liu Kuei Lan, had not sent her son to any nursing home because she could not afford it.

Now, the 65-year-old Liu Kuei Lan in the northern city of Keelung had carried her 32-year-old mentally challenged son around for 30 years to ensure that he did not suffer the scourge of bedsores.

Liu said she prayed on a daily basis for a miracle that would turn her son into a normal and healthy human being, so that she need not carry him any longer.

She also hoped that some day—maybe even on Mother's Day—her son would open his mouth and call her "mom" ... just for once.

Despite her seemingly superhuman strength, Liu had suffered several bone fractures as a result of falls when she had been unable to bear her son's weight.

When asked how she who was only 40 kg could carry her 82 kg son on her back, she simply answered, "He ain't heavy, he's my son."

This is an example of serving and loving someone not on our own terms, but according to the well-being of that someone.

When we say to God, "This ain't my business, send someone else," we are in danger of serving on our own terms.

On the other hand, when we say to God, "This ain't a burden, God is my enabler," we are learning to serve according to His enabling.

*A possible reason why we are not doing the needful is because we want to do things on our own terms.*

## **II. God wants us now to correct our past negligence/delay in obedience as He prepares us for future things (vv.21-26).**

21 The LORD said to Moses, "When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.

22 Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son,

23 and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me."

But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son."

24 At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met Moses and was about to kill him.

25 But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it. "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me," she said.

26 So the LORD let him alone. (At that time she said "bridegroom of blood," referring to circumcision.)

Moses is on the way back to Egypt. When he gets there, he is to perform the various signs not just before his own people but before Pharaoh.

But we hear some very troubling words in v. 21 as Moses began his journey: "Pharaoh will not let the people go, AND the Lord Himself will harden Pharaoh's heart!"

Why did God send Moses to deliver the people, AND at the same time, declare that He would harden Pharaoh's heart?

No easy answers. But only to keep in mind that although God indicated to Moses that He would harden Pharaoh's heart, the actual working out of this is a bit more complex. We see in the first five plagues that it is Pharaoh who hardened his own heart (Ex 7:13; 7:22; 8:11; 8:28; 9:7). It is only after this repeated hardening by Pharaoh of his own heart that the Exodus text speaks of God as the one who hardens (Ex 9:12; 9:34; 10:1; 10:20; 10:27). Hence the hardening here is not without Pharaoh's repeated demonstration of his own hardening. God "seals the deal" as a kind of sovereign judgment on Pharaoh. This is to demonstrate God's power over evil; that no evil can thwart the way and will of God.

But there is an even more troubling statement in v. 24—i.e. God was about to kill Moses! Why did God seek to kill Moses if He had sent him back to Egypt to do His will?

This is indeed strange. Yet it is extremely important and calls our attention to God's covenant promises in an impactful way.

Remember, Moses was forced to flee Egypt and found a place where he would be safe when Pharaoh was seeking his life for killing an Egyptian. He found this place in the home of Jethro. There he stayed for forty years tending Jethro's sheep. During this period, he married Zipporah, Jethro's daughter, and they had their first-born son (Ex. 2:16-22). But now the time had come when God would send Moses back to Egypt to deliver His people.

It was on his way back to Egypt that the event described in Ex 4:24-26 took place. Ex 4:24 states emphatically that God sought to kill Moses. By Zipporah's intervention, God spared Moses' life (vv. 25-26). She circumcised their first-born (Gershom) after God had declared that He would kill the first-born of Pharaoh.

Remember that back in Gen 17:7-14, God had given Abraham the sign of circumcision when God established His covenant with Abraham. Notice in that passage God told Abraham that any of his descendants who did not circumcise their sons had broken God's covenant and had to be cut off from Israel.

I believe Moses knew God's command of circumcision to Abraham, but had nevertheless failed to do that on his first-born. That means Moses had broken God's covenant! Circumcision is not crucial merely because it is a sign of the covenant, but because it is a mark of obedience to what God has commanded.

How could one who had broken God's covenant be the leader to deliver God's covenant people from the bondage of Egypt? Moses was responsible to

perform his covenantal obligation before he could be a proper instrument in God's hand to lead His covenant people.

In spite of this oversight, Moses was on his way. He's finally obeying the call of God. He's being faithful; he's doing the right thing. Somewhere along the way he stopped at a lodging place and there he met God. But when God met him this time he was about to kill Moses! Moses was going in obedience to God's call in his life and suddenly, abruptly, without warning he found himself facing the wrath of God. What on earth was going on?

Zipporah, his Midianite wife, certainly seemed to know—Moses' first-born was uncircumcised—the sign of God's covenant in the Old Testament could not be found on him. The sign of belonging to the people of God was missing on him.

Infant circumcision was really not a Midianite practice. And so, you know, "when in Rome, you do what the Romans do ... or don't do". Moses' first-born did not bear the sign of the covenant promises of God. Maybe Moses said to himself, "Let's not create unnecessary family conflict here. I can always deal with that issue at a later time." Right? Wrong! Moses now was left in no doubt about just how intolerable in the sight of God his oversight and negligence had been. Now he realized with terror just how unacceptable it was to treat what God had commanded with indifference. It is like saying, "I want to be a servant of God but I do not want to obey what He has commanded."

Moses here is being taught, and so are we, about the danger of negligence/delayed obedience. Surprisingly, it was Zipporah who did the necessary to avert the danger. She circumcised her son and touched Moses' feet with the blood. This seems to be a way to identify Moses with her action; Zipporah's vicarious act—"I want this to be considered as though Moses had done it, this to be the fulfilment of Moses' obligation so that he might live."

So it is clear that her action had saved Moses' life. Their first-born son received the sign of the covenant. The blood placed upon Moses saved his life as well.

There's a later incident in Ex 12 that happened on the terrible night of the Passover when the angel of the Lord came and the threat of death loomed large throughout Egypt. The same word describing Zipporah touching Moses' feet with blood here is used in Ex12:7 for the daubing of blood on the doorposts and on the lintel. Blood was shed and those upon whom that blood was applied were spared the wrath and curse of God. The only means of escape from judgment for disobedience to the commands of God is through the shedding of blood—this points to Jesus' shed blood when He died on the Cross.

So, we have this important lesson in vv. 24-26: *When God begins to use you, He often wants to clean you up and deal with the negligent/disobedient areas in your life.*

That is exactly what He did to Moses in this strange passage from verses 24 to 26.

### **III. God wants us to complement one another as He prepares us to move on (vv.27-31).**

27 The LORD said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he met Moses at the mountain of God and kissed him.  
 28 Then Moses told Aaron everything the LORD had sent him to say, and also about all the signs he had commanded him to perform.  
 29 Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites,  
 30 and Aaron told them everything the LORD had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people,  
 31 and they believed. And when they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.

The focus thus far has been very much on Moses and his mission to deliver God's people out of Egypt. But the Lord also allowed Aaron (Moses' brother) to be Moses' mouthpiece.

Moses' speech handicap in Ex 4:10 is probably self-described as an excuse for refusing to be Israel's deliverer. God therefore allowed Aaron to be his brother's mouthpiece. And Aaron remained at Moses' side as the two heaped threats and plagues upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

But there are some disturbing questions: Why didn't God simply remove the apparent speech handicap of Moses? Why did God offer Aaron as a "crutch" for Moses instead?

I believe Aaron's role as spokesman for Moses was critical to the success of Moses' mission. Aaron's role as spokesman would bridge the huge gap between Moses and the slaves of Israel.

You see, Moses was raised as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, grew up in privilege. He had not suffered the hardship and horror of slavery. Yes, he could feel rage for the injustices done to the Hebrew slaves, but their burdens had never been his. Their pain was not his desperation. He had simply never been a slave.

Aaron, by contrast, was not raised in Pharaoh's palace. He was raised as a slave.

Moses' reliance upon Aaron served as a means for Moses to reach the Hebrew slaves beyond his own personal experience. Aaron could speak directly from the experience of oppression, and his role would help Moses narrow the huge gap between the deliverer and those to be delivered.

Each time Moses sought the use of his brother's lips, he would be humbly reminded that while he could speak to God face-to-face, speaking to and for Israel was a different matter. He needed Aaron to work with him and speak for him.

Notice what vv. 27-28 says about Aaron. He heard God calling him to meet Moses in the desert, and he went. There he met Moses and heard from him what God had said and commanded, and how God would want to use him as Moses' spokesman.

So while Moses heard God directly from the burning bush, he was reluctant though he finally agreed to obey with hesitant faith. On the other hand, Aaron heard God and went to meet Moses in the wilderness with boldness (like sneaking out of prison under the noses of his Egyptian masters). He heard what God had to say not directly from Him, but through Moses. Then he agreed to work with Moses in confident faith.

The hesitant faith of Moses was complemented by the confident faith of Aaron. So they returned to Egypt not merely in unity, but unity in the Shalom peace of God—the peace that reassured them that in spite of the circumstances and the fact that not all things were clear to them, they were to work together and trust God to bring down all obstacles.

In v. 29, God brought down the first obstacle to affirm them—i.e. the distrust of the people towards Moses. Remember, Moses was a former Egyptian prince and how he was once challenged in v. 2:14 - “Who made you a prince and a judge over us?” Now in v. 29, Aaron told the leaders of the people of Israel what the Lord had said to Moses, he performed the signs, and the people believed. Not only that. They also bowed down in worship, knowing that the Lord had seen them and heard their cries, and that Moses was indeed the one sent by God to lead them out of Egypt.

Now, the unity among Moses, Aaron and the people was one reinforced by a sense of Shalom peace that went beyond the circumstances and clarity they could see by sight and understand by reason. This moved them to act in faith; not faith with haste, but faith with patience.

James 1:2-4 (NKJV) reads – “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

And the faith of Moses, Aaron and the people of Israel was tested indeed. They needed much patience—it took 10 devastating plagues to finally break the resistance of Pharaoh before he would grant freedom to the people of Israel. They also needed much patience as they wandered in the wilderness with various hardships along the way.



Evangel is seeking the Lord about getting a new property for ministry. We need to pray much for what had happened to Moses, Aaron and the people of Israel to happen to us as well—i.e. the unity that's reinforced by a sense of Shalom peace that goes beyond the circumstances and clarity we can see by sight and understand by reason. Also, we pray for the faith to act not in haste, but with patience.

Someone once said: "Trust in God's timing. It's better to wait a while and have things fall into place, than to rush and have things fall apart."

So here is an important lesson no matter how gifted or inadequate we as individuals and as a church may think of ourselves: *God wants us to put aside our individualism and work together as partners with Him and with one another.*

Before we begin to do God's work, we must first learn to work with one another among ourselves. If you are a Moses, who is that Aaron that God has called to help you? If you are an Aaron, who is that Moses that God has called you to support?

## **Conclusion**

Transition can be a time of uncertainty and anxiety, especially when we fix our eyes on our circumstances instead of on Christ.

May the Lord help and prepare us by His grace in our transition so that we will not be transfixed in our old ways, but be transformed as we seek and obey Him to do His work in new ways. Amen!