

Session 3



When Your Actions Cause an Interruption

THE POINT

God can redeem our mistakes.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I'm fascinated with stories of "chance encounters." History is full of them, and so is your life.

- Ever made a left turn when you should've gone right?
- Ever knocked on the wrong door?
- Ever stood in a long line only to discover thirty minutes later you were in the wrong line?

We don't usually see these as life-changing encounters, but they could be. James Chadwick stood in the wrong line, and science is glad he did. James was only sixteen when he enrolled at Manchester University. This young upstart had his eye on studying mathematics—until he got in the wrong line.

Chadwick got in line to register for mathematics, but it turns out he was registering for physics. He decided to stay enrolled, though, because he liked the professor he talked with: Dr. Ernest Rutherford.

This wrong line and chance encounter led to a lifelong friendship and partnership. Was that a big deal? It turns out that Rutherford, who mapped out the atom, instilled in Chadwick a love for physics. Chadwick went on to discover the neutron, and he became a pioneer in nuclear science.

Your mistake could be an opportunity too. We sometimes wonder if God writes us off when we make rash or sinful decisions. But Moses shows us that God can use the mess we make of things to refine us if we let Him.

QUESTION 1:

What's a mistake you made that you still laugh about today?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

EXODUS 2:11-15

¹¹ Years later, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his own people and observed their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew, one of his people. ¹² Looking all around and seeing no one, he struck the Egyptian dead and hid him in the sand. ¹³ The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, “Why are you attacking your neighbor?” ¹⁴ “Who made you a commander and judge over us?” the man replied. “Are you planning to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses became afraid and thought, “What I did is certainly known.” ¹⁵ When Pharaoh heard about this, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well.

Orphaned since he was young, Moses was now an adult, highly educated, trained for Egyptian royalty, and “powerful in his speech and actions” (Acts 7:22-23). His was a life of luxury and privilege.

But there was an ache in his heart that only orphans understand. Moses wanted to know his roots. What he discovered in his search was far bigger than bloodlines. Moses learned about God the Creator, who called the Hebrew people His own—and this captured him. In time, Moses embraced his heritage: he was a son of Abraham, not the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.

Hebrews 11 tells us that Moses renounced his status in Pharaoh’s family to join the faith and the suffering of God’s people (v. 24). We’re told he “went out to *his own people*” to see their suffering up close, and spotted “an Egyptian striking a *Hebrew, one of his people*” (Ex. 2:11, emphasis added).

Why would anyone choose to go from riches to rags? The world pushes in the opposite direction. Why would Moses do this? Hebrews 11 explains.

“By faith, Moses . . . considered reproach for the sake of Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, since he was looking ahead to the reward” (vv. 24,26).

In other words:

- Moses *knew* what God had promised to Abraham regarding his descendants.
- He *understood* that God would bring the Messiah into the world through His people.
- Moses *believed* God’s promises.
- His complete confidence in God freed him from the temptations of “the good life” he had. He looked to greater things from God that were coming.

All of this compounded in Moses when he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave. Scholars differ over the details—did Moses already sense that God wanted him to liberate Israel? Was this murder or defense of a third party? On one point, they agree: Moses was reckless and sinful, and his actions sparked unintended repercussions.

This was wrong on several levels. It was unnecessary—he could have ordered the Egyptian to stop. It wasn't God's will, as He had not yet called Moses to free His people. And it wasn't God's way.

Moses's conscience was obviously warning him. Notice his efforts to make sure no one was watching. He worked hard to conceal the evidence, but the next day, he discovered that the news had leaked. The camaraderie with his kinsmen that he had hoped to generate had backfired (vv. 14; Acts 7:25). When Pharaoh heard of it, Moses had to run for his life.

He didn't anticipate any of this. He had good intentions, but one "secret" act had crashed his whole life. As this royal-turned-outlaw ran for the hills, he was probably stunned by what just happened.

Here's what I've learned from the backside of some bad decisions: you can keep hitting repeat on the "if onlys" and stay stuck, or you can receive the bitter harvest of what you sowed as a necessary part of your spiritual growth.

QUESTION 2:

How would you describe our culture's view of sin and consequences?

EXODUS 2:19-22

¹⁹ They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock." ²⁰ "So where is he?" he asked his daughters. "Why then did you leave the man behind? Invite him to eat dinner." ²¹ Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. ²² She gave birth to a son whom he named Gershom, for he said, "I have been a resident alien in a foreign land."

As Moses fled Egypt, he faced a hard reality. Everything he had known was gone. Alone, with only the clothes on his back, Moses was running on empty. God never wastes time or experiences in our lives. The question is, did Moses learn anything from his failure? God tests us in ways that reveal and refine us, depending on how we respond. Moses was now up to bat.

- **Test 1: Life in the Wilderness.** Moses traveled about 300 miles to a place where he could disappear: the remote wasteland of Midian. There, his life was reduced to the daily necessities of water, food, and shelter. The wilderness is synonymous with scarcity, isolation, and adversity—the kind of hard place that forces you to seek the Lord. Many have met Him there.

Moses would later lead Israel through this very terrain, forty years down the road. But first, he had to follow the Lord through his own personal exodus:

1. *Away from idols*, like “the good life” in Egypt and his own self-sufficiency,
2. *To wholehearted trust in the Lord and full identification with His people*, Israel.

By the time his first child was born, something profound had shifted in Moses. He named his son Gershom, which is a play on Moses’s life story: “I have been a resident alien in a foreign land” (v. 22). When Moses looked back to his early years in Egypt, he recognized that as a prince, he was a resident alien in a foreign land. Now, living in Midian, he was once again an alien in a foreign land. Little did Moses know that his status as a resident alien was preparation for his leadership as the shepherd of the Israelites through forty years of wandering.

- **Test 2: Starting a Family.** While in Midian, Moses paused at a well. Soon, seven sisters came to fill the watering troughs for their father’s flock. While watering their flock,

a group of shepherds arrived and pushed them and their flock out of the way (v. 17). The sisters’ work was delayed and their flock were forced to wait.

Moses intervened by coming to their rescue. He watered their flock. This display of bold, tempered compassion impressed the girls and their father, Reuel (also called Jethro), the priest of Midian. Moses was invited to dinner and eventually into their family. He became a husband and a father, building servant-leadership and self-denial deeper into his character.

Moses’s experiences show us that God can use the unintended consequences we bring upon ourselves to forge something new. God works in our hardships to clarify our allegiances and accelerate our spiritual maturity.

QUESTION 3:

How does seeing God’s provision for Moses give us hope in spite of our mistakes?

EXODUS 3:7-10

⁷ Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people in Egypt, and have heard them crying out because of their oppressors. I know about their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring them from that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the territory of the Canaanites, Hethites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. ⁹ So because the Israelites’ cry for help has come to me, and I have also seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them, ¹⁰ therefore, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh so that you may lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

Engage

REDEEMED MISTAKES

Use the acrostic below to give examples of when God has redeemed mistakes in your life. [An example is given.] Then write a prayer of thanks.

M -

I -

S -

T - *Tasks left undone*

A -

K -

E -

S -

QUESTION 4:

What obstacles must we overcome to allow God to use our past mistakes to enhance others' lives?

The providence of God is a profound and comforting conviction that is woven throughout the Bible. It teaches us that God is personally and powerfully upholding and directing the universe and everything in it according to His purposes, all the time. God's providential work in the minutiae and the massive means nothing happens by chance and that everything happens for a reason.

Look at how this plays out in Moses's story. Forty years pass between Exodus 2:22 and Exodus 3:1. During this time, seemingly disconnected things converged into God's call in Moses's life.

- There was a change of leadership in Egypt, opening the way for Moses to return (Ex. 2:23-25).
- The prophesied time of God's deliverance arrived (Gen. 13:14-16).
- God heard the groans of His people and remembered His covenant with Abraham to make his descendants a great nation with their own land.
- Meanwhile, Moses grazed the flocks further west than normal, and he saw something that made no sense.

Maybe Moses noticed the flaming bush in the distance but went on with his work. Then

he looked again and saw that the bush was unchanged. Moses's curiosity turned to awe as he realized that the flame, like God Himself, wasn't dependent upon anything else. An unearthly source was at work here, displaying perpetual power, light, and glory.

Adding to the wonder, Moses then heard his name called. ("He knows me?!") God cautioned him to keep his distance, then introduced Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God had heard Israel's groaning. He saw their sorrows. Then, as Moses cowered in the sand, God said something astonishing:

"I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring them . . . to a land flowing with milk and honey . . . **therefore, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh** so that you may lead My people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" (vv. 8,10).

God was saying, "Moses, Israel has prayed for deliverance, and you are My answer. I will lead them out through you." Moses balked at God's interruption. Yet, in the end, Moses returned to Egypt with God's mighty hand upon him and Aaron by his side. Midian probably felt like the end of the line for Moses. But with God, wilderness time is only a detour, not a dead end. God redeemed Moses's self-inflicted consequences, blessing millions of people, then and now.

QUESTION 5:

What circumstances in someone else's life has God used to do a work in your own?

LIVE IT OUT

God can redeem our mistakes. Choose one of the following applications:

- **Ask God's forgiveness.** If sin put you in the wilderness, confess your sin and receive God's forgiveness. Read Psalm 103:10-14; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; and 1 John 1:9.
- **Recall wilderness times from your past.** Reflect on the wilderness seasons of your life. Look back at times of unexplained waiting and try to determine if God used those times to refine you, from the inside out. In God's hands, consequences aren't just for correcting, but for cultivating.
- **Follow God's call.** Moses felt disqualified, just like we do. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you seek to be obedient to His call. Following Him is always what is best at every stage of life.


