

The Fire of God's Presence

The Burning Bush

Exodus 3:1-6

"Where can I go from Your Spirit?

Where can I flee from Your presence?

**If I go up to the heavens, You are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, You are there.**

**If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there Your hand will guide me,
Your right hand will hold me fast."**

Psalms 139:7-10

If God is truly and indivisibly present everywhere, why does His nearness so often feel distant? Why is it that the God who fills heaven and earth can still feel silent to our ears and hidden from our hearts? Scripture tells us we cannot escape His presence — yet experience tells us that we do not always encounter it.

That tension is not unique to us.

The Sons of Korah — Levitical singers, worship leaders, men whose lives revolved around the songs, sacrifices, and rhythms of the sanctuary — gave voice to a cry that still echoes in the soul of every believer:

**"As the deer pants for streams of water,
So my soul pants for you my God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go to meet God?"**

Psalms 42:1-2

These were not strangers to worship, nor outsiders looking in. Their calling was to lead others into the presence of God — and yet their words drip with longing, thirst, and ache. We might assume that those so close to the holy things would live in constant awareness of God's nearness. And yet they ask, "When shall I come and appear before God?"

Why would men who knew the songs, guarded the sanctuary, and served in the courts of the Lord still cry out this way? Why would they later confess, “Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?” (Psalm 42:11).

The answer forces us to confront a sobering truth:

God’s omnipresence does not guarantee intimacy.

Many believers today live content with occasional glimpses of God—a Sunday service, a hurried prayer, a passing thought of heaven—yet never truly draw near. We have learned how to remain comfortably lukewarm: close enough to maintain “a form of godliness,” yet distant from the nearness where God’s presence is felt and His grace transforms. And yet this raises an unavoidable question. Would the God who created us in His own image (Genesis 1:26), who placed eternity within the human heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11), and who gave His only begotten Son to atone for our sin (John 3:16), truly design a faith that keeps us at a distance? Scripture answers with a resounding no. God is not hiding from humanity. From Exodus to the Gospels, from the tabernacle to the cross, the invitation has always been the same: “Come near to God and He will come near to you” (James 4:8). The way has been opened — the question is whether we will respond.

This morning begins a new sermon series entitled *The Fire of God’s Presence*, a journey intended to confront spiritual complacency and awaken within us a holy dissatisfaction — an insatiable longing to draw nearer to the living God. In this first message, we turn to Moses at the burning bush, where we discover that God works through many seasons of our lives and that nothing in His economy is random or wasted. God’s desire has always been nearness, but nearness requires reverence. It is often in quiet, surrendered, holy moments before Him that our identity is clarified and our calling revealed. And it is through faithful obedience — not self-effort — that we come to know God, not merely in theory, but in living reality. If we desire to draw closer to God, we must first surrender the life we cannot keep, in order to receive the salvation and relationship we can never lose.

Moses Life Story – God Works Through Seasons

When a new king arose in Egypt “who knew nothing of Joseph” (Exodus 1:8), fear replaced gratitude. The Israelites had become “fruitful, they multiplied greatly, increased in number and became so numerous that the land was filled with them” (1:7), and Pharaoh viewed their growth not as blessing but as threat. What followed was ruthless oppression. They were enslaved and “worked them ruthlessly” (1:13), and when forced labor failed to curb their numbers, a chilling decree was issued: “Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile River” (1:22). It was into this moment of darkness that Moses was born. When his mother could no longer hide him, she took a papyrus basket, coated it with tar and pitch, placed the child in it, and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile (2:3–4). What Pharaoh intended for death, God turned into deliverance. The child was drawn from the waters and adopted by

Pharaoh's own daughter, raised and educated within the greatest empire on earth. Moses grew up with privilege, power, and preparation—trained in leadership, language, and governance.

But one day, Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. In anger, he struck the Egyptian and hid him in the sand (2:11–12). What Moses tried to bury could not remain hidden. When Pharaoh sought his life, Moses fled to Midian (2:15), leaving behind the palace for the pasture. From royal halls to desert hills. From influence to isolation. From prominence to obscurity.

Yet not one season was wasted.

For forty years, Moses tended sheep in silence—learning patience, humility, and dependence. The wilderness stripped him of self-confidence so that God could clothe him with divine calling. The palace trained his mind; the pasture shaped his heart. Only then was Moses ready to stand before Pharaoh—not in his own strength, but under God's authority—and boldly declare, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: Let my people go” (5:1).

What looked like detours were divine preparation. God was not absent in Moses' waiting—He was at work.

God's Central Design – Nothing is Random

“No trial comes to us by chance; all things are governed by the wise counsel of God”

John Chrysostom

It would be easy to look at the apparent yo-yo pattern of Moses' life and conclude that what happens to us is random — rising one moment, falling the next, blessed today and broken tomorrow. When King Solomon observed that “time and chance happen to them all,” (Ecclesiastes 9:11), one wonders if he had in mind the ebb and flow of human life itself: the mountaintops of falling in love, marriage, children, and new beginnings, set against the valleys of loss — the death of a loved one, miscarriage, broken relationships, chronic pain, mental health struggles, and sudden job loss. From our perspective, life often feels chaotic, unpredictable, even unfair.

But Scripture invites us to see beyond what is visible. What we interpret as chaos, God sees as design.

Apostle Paul reminds us that Christ stands at the center of all things:

“For in Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him.”

Colossians 1:16

Nothing exists independently of Christ, and nothing unfolds outside His sustaining hand. This includes not only creation but calling. Paul continues:

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Ephesians 2:10

Notice the order: God prepares the work — we walk in it. Ministry, then, is not about inventing our own greatness or forcing outcomes. It is about discerning and faithfully walking the path God has already laid before us. As Scripture says,

In their hearts humans plan their course,
but the LORD establishes their steps.

Proverbs 16:9

When we insist on our own way, we struggle. When we submit to God’s way, even ordinary steps take on eternal significance. The spectacular is not produced by striving, but by surrender. What looks like delay is often preparation. What feels like loss may be alignment. And what appears random is frequently the careful work of a sovereign God shaping His servants for His purposes.

In God’s economy, nothing is wasted.

Nothing is accidental.

Nothing is beyond redemption.

What feels like chaos to us is often God quietly bringing order – one surrendered step at a time.

Made for His Presence – Nearness is the Goal

**As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for You, my God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?**

Psalms 42:1-2

“Silence is the mystery of the age to come”

Basil the Great

Psalms 139 reminds us that we can never escape the presence of God. He is everywhere — in heaven above, in the depths below, and in every hidden place of the earth. Yet Scripture also makes clear that omnipresence does not automatically equal intimacy. God may be everywhere, and still not be approached humbly, reverently, or attentively. There is a vast difference between God being present and God being encountered. This tension is seen clearly in the life of Moses. Though Moses was told, “you cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live” (Exodus 33:20), Scripture also tells us that “the LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (33:11). God is infinitely holy — and yet He chooses relational nearness. Holiness does not eliminate relationship; it demands reverence within it.

Isaiah reminds us why these matters. “All our righteous acts are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). The gap between human goodness and divine holiness is immeasurable. When men in Scripture glimpse God’s glory, they often collapse in fear — “Woe to me! for I am ruined” (Isaiah 6:5); “I fell at his feet as though dead” (Revelation 1:17). And yet, astonishingly, this holiness does not result in rejection — it results in invitation.

The author of Hebrews declares:

“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Hebrews 4:16

The throne remains — but it is now a throne of grace. Access is not denied; it is granted through Christ. And Christ Himself makes the invitation deeply personal:

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with Me.”

Revelation 3:20

There can be no doubt: the One who is the Good Shepherd, who “lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11), desires not distant followers, but intimate fellowship.

So, if Christ longs for closeness, what prevents us from walking with Him as humanity once did in the Garden of Eden? Are the blessings of nearness withheld from those who approach God casually rather than reverently? Scripture answers with sobering clarity. Nearness is invited — but it is not casual. Apostle James writes:

“Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.”

James 4:8-10

Silence Prepares Us – Wilderness Training

**You, God, are my God,
earnestly I seek you;
I thirst for you,
my whole being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land
where there is no water.**

Psalms 63:1-2

Before Moses ever saw the fire of the burning bush, he spent forty long years in the wilderness. Scripture tells us that “Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action” (Acts 7:22). By every earthly measure, Moses was exceptionally accomplished. He possessed education, influence, and opportunity far beyond that of the average man. Trained by the greatest minds of the most powerful empire on earth, he appeared destined for prominence. And yet, it was not Egypt’s classrooms that prepared Moses to lead God’s people — it was the school of silence.¹ Removed from the noise of the palace and the chaos of ambition, Moses was placed in obscurity, tending sheep beneath open skies. What Egypt could not teach him, the wilderness taught him. Over those forty years, God patiently stripped Moses of Egypt — its pride, its power, its false wisdom — and replaced it with

¹ Taken from the Book *The Fire of God’s Presence: Drawing Near to a Holy God* by A. W. Tozer.

humility, dependence, and reverence. In the quiet places, Moses learned what Egypt never taught: “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalms 46:10).

It was there, surrounded by God’s creation, that Moses began to understand who he truly was. He could not fully know himself until he came to know his Creator — the One who had “formed [his] inward parts” and “covered [him] in [his] mother’s womb” (Psalms 139:13). As Moses’ awareness of God deepened, so did his listening. As his listening increased, his love grew. And as his love grew, obedience followed. Before God would speak to Moses from the fire, He taught Moses to hear Him in the silence. What emerged from the wilderness was not merely a capable man, but a surrendered servant — one ready to stand on holy ground and obey the voice of the living God.

The greatest loss of our age is not the loss of a home—tragic as that may be—nor the loss of relationships, finances, or even health. The greatest loss is the loss of intimacy with our Creator. Too often it is the winds of chaos that fill our sails, consume our attention, and quietly enslave us in a life preoccupied with self. There is always another hill to climb, another achievement to conquer, and with sheer grit we strive for treasures that are, as Jesus warned, here today and gone tomorrow (Matthew 6:19–21). Apostle James reminds us that life itself is but a vapour that appears for a little while and then vanishes (James 4:14). And yet only a precious few ever discover that the greatest treasure of life is not wealth, fame, or power, but being still before God—listening to the One who gave us breath.

It is in the presence of God that we come to understand His holiness, our true identity, and the purpose He has ordained for our lives. Chaos teaches us our frailty and our limitations; God’s presence teaches us our value and calling. For though we may not be wise by human standards, nor mighty, nor noble (1 Corinthians 1:26–29), we have been invited, by grace, to become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), and we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works prepared beforehand (Ephesians 2:10). How tragic, then, that so many believers must discipline themselves to be still before God—rather than delight in it—bowing reluctantly instead of reverently before the One who sustains their lives and fills them with eternal purpose.

The Burning Bush – Identity and Calling Revealed

One ordinary day, while Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God (Exodus 3:1). It was a day like countless others—marked by routine, silence, and obscurity—yet on this day the ordinary was interrupted by the holy. Moses saw a bush that was on fire but was not burned up (3:2). What arrested his attention was not destruction, but preservation—fire without consumption, power without loss. As Moses went over to investigate this strange sight, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” (3:4). Before revealing His plan, God called His servant by name. And before revealing Moses’ calling, God demanded reverence: “Do not come any closer... Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy

ground” (3:5). Identity and calling are never revealed casually. They are disclosed only on holy ground.

It was here that God revealed His identity—not merely as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but as the eternal, self-existent One: “I AM WHO I AM” (3:14). Flowing directly from that revelation came Moses’ commission. God declared that He had seen the misery of His people in Egypt, heard their cries, and was concerned about their suffering. And then God spoke the words that would forever redefine Moses’ life: “So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt” (3:7–10).

Moses responded with hesitation, fear, and a series of objections, questioning his worthiness and ability. Yet God did not withdraw the call. Instead, He assured Moses of His presence. What began as an ordinary day of shepherding became a decisive moment of transformation. Fear slowly gave way to faith, uncertainty to obedience, and obscurity to divine purpose. Through Moses’ willingness to obey, God would perform mighty signs and wonders, confront the power of Egypt, secure the freedom of His people, and shape the character of a servant who would later be described as one with whom “the LORD would speak... as one speaks to a friend” (Exodus 33:11).

The burning bush teaches us this enduring truth: when God reveals who He is, He also reveals who we are—and what we are called to do. Calling is not discovered by looking inward, but by standing reverently before the great “I AM.”

The Fire – Experiencing the Living God

“Familiarity breeds contempt, and in religion it breeds irreverence.”

A.W. Tozer

God revealed Himself as fire—yet He was not the fire. The flame pointed beyond itself to a reality infinitely greater. God is wholly other, eternal and uncreated, and He must never be reduced to something our minds can manage or contain. As A. W. Tozer so rightly warned, the danger is not that we think wrongly about God, but that we think too lightly of Him. If we are to worship Him rightly, we must remove the sandals of pride, familiarity, and religious self-confidence. Holy ground demands reverence. This includes even our handling of Scripture. We are called to meditate on God’s Word day and night—but we must never forget that while His words are holy, they can become hollow when detached from awe of the One who speaks them. Scripture read without reverence can harden the heart rather than humble it; truth handled without worship can subtly become a Pharisaic idol—accurate in content, yet empty of encounter.

If we long for our own burning bush moments, we must rediscover the discipline of holy silence. God is not revealed through noise, haste, or clever analysis, but through yielded stillness. We study God, debate God, and analyze God—but too rarely do we kneel before Him. Too

rarely do we pause long enough to feel the vast gulf between our righteousness, which Scripture calls filthy rags, and His consuming holiness. And here is the sobering truth: revival will never be born from information alone. If our churches desire renewal, it will not come by settling for knowledge about God while avoiding the cost of standing reverently before Him. Revival begins when God's people stop managing Him and start submitting to Him—when they seek not merely to understand His ways, but to encounter His presence and obey His call.

God does not reveal Himself to be studied from a distance, but to be worshiped on holy ground.

Conclusion

The story ends with sandals removed. Bare feet on sacred soil. For you cannot stand casually before a holy God. This morning the question is simple: Will you keep walking past the bush... or will you turn aside? Will you stay satisfied with glimpses... or step onto holy ground? God still calls. God still reveals. God still sends. But first... He invites you near!