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Living Life Together through a Growing Knowledge of Our God

- If I said the word “apple” this morning, what’s the first thought that would come into your mind?...
 - for some of you – it would be this [**pic of a literal apple**]
 - but for a growing number of people here, that’s not what you thought of at all...in your case, when I said apple, you thought of this [**pic of an I-phone**] or this [**pic of an I-pad**] or this man [**Steve Jobs**]...
 - that tells you something about how powerful a name can become...where it actually hijacks the name of a fruit even though the fruit has possessed the name all the way back to the garden of Eden...
 - names, and what those names represent...can be incredibly powerful...
 - and in Apple’s case – it’s not just an individual product that comes to mind...but that company’s reputation for products that are cutting edge, or trendy, or well-designed---or whatever it is you think when you hear the word...
- marketing experts would tell you that what we’re talking about right now is branding...how is your name, and your logo, and your products or services perceived by other people?...
 - what are you known for?...what is the strength of your brand?...the consistency of your brand?...
 - that is a very important topic in this culture...
- did you know churches even have brands?...we may not like that or we may like it a lot...but it’s a fact none the less...
 - a church’s name communicates something...
 - as soon as you say Faith in this community...people start thinking certain things...or some other church’s name...
 - everyone has a reputation...their brand has a certain strength---there’s no way around that...
 - in fact, if you look at our strategic ministry plan...our congregation decided 3 years ago that this year we would actually consider changing the name of our church...
 - that’s not my thing...it’s not any one particular person’s hobby horse...
 - but our church family decided we needed to do some concentrated thinking about that...
 - not that we intend to change anything that we believe – we’re not talking about adjusting our doctrinal statement at all...
 - but the hard reality is that what the word Baptist means today and what it meant 50 years ago is dramatically different...
 - and we can put our heads in the sand or we can face the facts on that one...
 - if you understand Baptist history, you know that Baptists have stood for things historically that are very valuable, and very important...like biblical authority...and the autonomy of the local church...and individual soul liberty...
 - all of those things and more are very important...
- but when you have local churches that are self-governing – they can become whatever they want to become over time...

- and when you believe in individual soul liberty...the notion that every person has the right/responsibility to decide what he/she believes the Bible teaches and then live by that interpretation...over time you're going to have a significant variety of what people who use the same name believe and how they act accordingly...
- so the challenge is – the name Baptist today conjures up all sorts of things that don't help us accomplish our mission to the people/culture we're trying to reach...
 - some people immediately think of the so-called church that pickets funerals of soldiers and even wanted to protest at the funeral of the 9 year old girl who lost her life in Arizona when she was shot while trying to meet Congresswoman Giffords...
 - and of course everyone knows---that church is named Westboro Baptist Church...
 - and so, our name...wrongly but definitely associates us with that in the minds of many unchurched people who assume all Baptist churches are the same...
- there are Baptist churches even in this community that are extremely liberal both theologically and culturally...I'm not trying to be mean – I'm just pointing out that cultural fact...
 - that's one of the ironies here – our conservative stand on theological and cultural issues actually is more closely aligned to many non-Baptist churches in our town than some of the Baptist ones...
- then there's the issue of some Baptist churches in our town being very separated in their approach to community issues...so they don't want to collaborate with other Christians and they don't want to penetrate the culture or community---they want to separate from it...
- and I'm not here to see how many cans of worms I can open in one introduction...
 - I'm simply trying to point out – names are powerful...there is such a thing as our brand whether we like that or not...
 - and it shouldn't be threatening to us...Jesus even said...
 - **Matthew 5:16 - Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.**
 - every church has to decide – what light are we talking about?...what message?...what reputation?...
 - and is our name helping or hurting us?
 - that's why our congregation voted to at least think that through this year – and we're not going to make it a major issue because we have a lot larger fish to fry...but it is an issue that has to be addressed...
- now, let's come back to the major premise...names can be powerful...your brand matters...
- which is why well-run companies pay tens of thousands of dollars to have brand analyses done...to have an outside entity critically evaluate the strength of their brand...
- and this is such a significant issue...if it's done right...you can eventually remove the word from the logo – and people will still remember the name...
- is there any question about that?...
 - **show a picture of Nike's swoosh...**
 - **Starbucks's new wordless logo...**
- so, are we all on board – names are powerful?...no doubt about it...
- now let me ask you this – is that also true...of the name of God?...and what does He want us to remember about the name He has chosen for Himself?
- with that question in mind, please open your Bible to Exodus chapter 3...page 42 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...

- our theme this year is **Living Life Together**...we're talking about it means to be a church where it is easy for men and women to feel/be connected...and what steps every person needs to take to be more a part of the family of God that he is raising up here...
 - what does living "together with all the saints" as Paul said in Ephesians chapter 3 really look like?
- now, last week we launched a new series in the book of Exodus...because here's a great book where God is doing exactly what we're talking here...calling out and then building a group of people who can be His visible representatives on His earth...
- last Sunday we left Moses as a baby who had been divinely protected as a result of the faith of his mother, his sister, and some very godly midwives...
- this morning we're going to pick up the story at Moses' call to the ministry God gave him...so that tells you a little bit about this series – our goal isn't so much to cover every historical detail...but to observe and learn all we can about the way God was building His people – what did Living Life Together look like for them?
- with that in mind, let's pick up the story in Exodus 3:1 – read 3:1–15, 4:1-17
- we're talking this morning about **Living Life Together Through a Growing Knowledge of Our God**
- from this great passage, let's think about **three lessons from the call of Moses about knowing our God.**

I. Be Encouraged that God Wants You to Know Him Personally.

- that's one of the unique aspects of the character of the God of the Bible...you can have a real relationship with Him truly makes a difference in the way you live everyday...
- it's personal – it's relational – it's real...that's what this passage of Scripture is all about...
- and you can trace that theme throughout the Bible – that men and women can know God personally...

A. Descendants of Seth.

- **Genesis 4:26 - To Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then *men* began to call upon the name of the LORD.**
- even this early in human history, there were people whose life stories could be summarized by those words...
- wouldn't you like that to be the one-sentence summary of the way you lived?...
 - what was your dad like – well, more than anything else – he called on the name of the Lord...he knew God personally...
 - what was your grandma like – what do you remember about that teacher...he/she called upon the name of the Lord.

B. Enoch

- **Genesis 5:24 - Enoch walked with God...**
- there's another way of saying the same basic thing...
- wouldn't you love it if that was your legacy...he walked with God...

C. Noah

- **Genesis 6:9 - These are *the records of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.***
- there's that same phrase – God wants people to know Him like that...

D. Abraham

- **Genesis 12:8 - ...there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.**
- and remember, at this point in history, they would not have had near the amount of revelation about God's character...but they had enough to motivate them to walk with God, and worship Him, and call upon Him...

- and it's also important to see that this was the kind of personal knowledge that translated into action...
- they let their knowledge of God be the framework through which they interpreted the events of everyday life...
- if you're reading through the Bible this year using the schedule we provided, you read the Joseph story this week..and here's what he said to his brothers who had sold him into slavery in Egypt...

E. Joseph

- **Genesis 45:7-8 - God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.**
- see, his knowledge of God was real – so much so that it dramatically impacted his interpretation of an incredible trial...[you meant it for evil, but God...]
- we saw the same things last week when the faith of a group of women was tested...

F. Midwives

- **Exodus 1:17 - But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live.**
- they risked their lives because they really knew their God...
- now, let's forward that to the NT for a moment – there are all sorts of examples—but here's a powerful one...

G. Paul

- **Philippians 3:8 - More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,**
- see, there it is again...the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...
- and here's the point of all of this...when God was going to take His people to the next step of their journey, He wanted to be sure that everyone involved knew Him personally...

H. Moses

- **Exodus 3:5-6 - Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.**
- now you might say – but why did God reveal Himself to Moses first, instead of to the entire nation?...
- God often works through eyewitnesses...
- remember, there had not been any direct contact from God with His people, at least that we know of in Scripture, for at least 500 years...think about that...
- now God is going to raise up a man who will not only be used to lead His people to the very brink of the promised land...but also to write, humanly speaking, the first five books of the OT...
- you and I then have the opportunity, not only of knowing God through what we can remember about an experience we might have had...but through written revelation that we can review over and over to be sure we understand all there is to know...
- that's why the writer of Hebrews would later say...

Hebrews 2:1-4 - For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it*. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

- see, how does a person grow in their knowledge of God today?...after trusting Christ as Savior and Lord, the answer is...
 - **Romans 10:17 - So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.**
- well, where does Living Life Together fit into that?...the church is to be...
 - **1 Timothy 3:15 - but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.**
- our job is to teach the Word of God so that men and women can come to know God better...and that's one of the big intended outcomes of everything we do around here...
- there are people here who have just started attending an ABF – that's a new step for you...
 - and hopefully over time, you are becoming more like the descendants of Seth, and more like Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Joseph, and the midwives, and the apostle Paul...
 - you could honestly say that you are walking with God...you're calling out to God...you're worshipping God...
 - you're thankful that He wants to know you personally...
 - [illustration comparing the way we treat our Bibles to the way we treat our cell phones]

- now, here's a second lesson from this text...

II. Be Amazed that God is Patient With Us as We Learn.

- here's another great example of how the Word of God is inspired...it's because bad things that the people of God did [in this case, even the eventual author of the book] are not airbrushed out the story...
- God's people are presented with all their warts and imperfections...and many times that's when you can especially learn something new about the character of God...
- so we have a series of 5 objections on the part of Moses...reasons why the plan that God has just revealed is really not a very good idea...

A. Moses' first objection – Who am I?

- **Exodus 3:11 - But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?”**
- and on the one hand I suppose you could say...well, he's being appropriately humble...
- probably not...when God tells you to do something (in our case of course, through His Word)...looking at our own resources apart from Him and then politely refusing to obey is not humility, it's disobedience and unbelief...

- but how does God respond?... **Exodus 3:12 - And He said, “Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.”**
- God assures Moses that He will be with him...and then He makes an incredible promise that would only ever occur if He was who He said He was...
- the thought that a nation of people who were enslaved in Egypt could ever be freed to worship at that mountain was outlandish...
- but that’s exactly what God does for us...
- if the Lord chose to judge us immediately and absolutely every time we disobeyed His commands...we could hold this service in a far smaller venue and we’d have to find someone else to speak...
- but what does God do?...many times He meets our doubting hearts with outrageous promises...
- so what does Moses do next?...he’s seen the sign of the burning bush...he’s received the information about what God plans to do and how He intends to use Moses in the accomplishment of that plan...and regrettably, he responds to all of that with...

B. Moses’ second objection – What if your people ask your name?

- **Exodus 3:13 - ...Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?”**
- isn’t it amazing how frequently we speak in a condescending way to God?...
 - as if He hadn’t thought this one through?
- and yet again – what do you see?...incredible patience and even additional revelation...
 - **Exodus 3:14 - God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ”**
 - This is the first place in the Bible where the name YaHWeH, or Jehovah is found...
 - and because it’s such a critical passage in the Bible, it’s not surprising that scholars disagree a bit on some of the nuances of all of this...
 - but we know this for sure – YaHWeH is the noun form of the verb “to be”...
 - at this critical point in the history of God’s people...the Lord chooses to reveal Himself through a name that emphasizes His self-existence which is the foundation of His previous promise to be with Him...
 - the Egyptians worshipped a large system of man-made gods...
 - all of that will be put on center display during the 10 plagues...
- but the Lord is explaining to Moses – I’m revealing myself to you, not the other way around...
- the mistake most people make is crafting their own god on their own terms...which is why so many people end up with a god who is amazingly (and disappointing) just like them...people make God in their own image...
- not the God of the Bible...He wanted Moses to know that He is Holy, and He is self-existent – I am that I am – and He therefore has the power to keep His promise to be with Moses when he leads the people out of Egypt...

- what would you have expected Moses to say next?...isn't it about time for a "yes sir"...not for Moses...it was time for another...

C. Moses' third objection – What if our enemies will not believe me?

- **Exodus 4:1** - Then Moses said, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.' "
- which tells us that Moses is still looking where?...at his own resources...they won't believe me...which tells us that Moses wasn't believing God...who had just said He would be with Him...
- and how does the Lord respond?...
- **Exodus 4:2-3** - The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff." Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it.
- all of this is intended to add to Moses' knowledge of God...he's the Creator...the one who made snakes, and the wood for staffs for that matter...

- what Moses says next is incredible...

D. Moses' fourth objection – I am not eloquent.

- **Exodus 4:10** - Then Moses said to the LORD, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."
- that's especially offensive in light of what God just said...He's the creator of everything...
- **Exodus 4:11-12** - The LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes *him* mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? "Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say."

- surely that will be enough...

E. Moses' fifth objection – Please send someone else.

- **(ESV) Exodus 4:13** - But he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else."
- Isn't it amazing how deceived our hearts can become...we can directly disobey what God has said, and still have the audacity to address Him as....Lord...

Exodus 4:14-15 - Then the anger of the LORD burned against Moses, and He said, "Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. "You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do.

- there are lessons squirting out everywhere – but one of the big ones is – the Lord is incredibly patient with His people...
- **Psalm 103:8** - The LORD is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.
- now, we've talked about a lot of content...but remember, this book isn't just about God molding Moses...but about Him molding His people....

III. Be Instructed that God Expects Us to Act on What We've Learned

- what are some of the take-aways from this passage?

A. Be sure that you've taken the first step to knowing God personally.

- why was it that God told Moses to take off his shoes?...
- because He was a holy God...
- much of Moses ministry and the subsequent revelation He'll receive will be the development of a sacrificial system intended to teach God's people that sin demands a sacrifice...sin demands a sacrifice...
- all of that points to the death of God's Son Jesus Christ...the perfect Lamb of God...
- **Romans 5:12 - Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—**
- **Romans 5:15 - But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.**
- you cannot walk with a holy God until you've first been cleansed of your sin
[develop]

B. Make knowing Him personally a priority this year.

- see, how was Joseph able to see God in his trial?...because He was looking for His hand...knowing his God was a high value...

C. Rejoice in God's promised personal presence.

- **Hebrews 13:5 - *Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"***

D. Be as patient with God's people as He is.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:14 - We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.**

E. Be much quicker to obey God's commands than Moses was.

- 3 John 4 - I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.**