

# MOSES

## *A Man of Selfless Dedication*

### STUDY SIX

## Burning Bushes and Second Chances

*Exodus 3:1–10*

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*God specializes in using broken failures. That's His preferred plan.*  
—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**H**EZEKIAH BUTTERWORTH meant well, but he had it wrong.

To warn people about the consequences of sin, he wrote a hymn in the late 1800s, titled, “The Bird with a Broken Pinion.” In the opening verse, he described nursing back to health a bird with a broken wing. Then he lamented,

But the bird with a broken pinion  
Never soared as high again.<sup>1</sup>

What was Mr. Butterworth’s message? *Failure limits you.* Broken people may heal, but they’ll never be who they once were, and they’ll never soar as high as they once could.

And yet, Scripture spotlights plenty of failures who soared again. Abraham lied more than once to save his own skin. He passed the vice to his son Isaac, who passed it to his son Jacob, the biggest deceiver of them all. Still, God entrusted these flawed men with His covenant, and from their seed came the Savior of the world.

Whom did Christ choose as an apostle of His church? Paul—who once tried to destroy the church. Mark went AWOL on a missionary journey, and Paul refused to give him a second chance. But God did. Mark returned to ministry and went on to write the gospel that bears his name. The examples of failures who soared again, and even higher, could go on and on.

Yes, God uses broken failures . . . just ask Moses. He flapped around for forty years before God sent him soaring again, and it all happened on a day he never expected and in a way he never thought possible.



# Burning Bushes and Second Chances

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Do you need encouragement today? Invite the Holy Spirit to uplift you through the Scriptures as you open your study with prayer.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Moses was now eighty years old. As a shepherd, his routine was as predictable as the sun rising on another cloudless day, and just as monotonous. *Exodus 3:1* marks one more day in which Moses led sheep, only this time he took them “far into the wilderness and came to Sinai”—familiar territory for Moses but not for most of us. Find on your Bible map or the online map, “*Exodus from Egypt*,” at [insight.org](http://insight.org) the location of Mount Sinai or “Horeb, the mountain of God” (*Exodus 3:1* NASB). The traditional site for Mount Sinai bears the Arabic name, Jebel Musa, which is near the bottom of the Sinai peninsula.

What is significant about this location in biblical history (*19:1–3; 31:18; 1 Kings 19:8–9*)?

The events that occurred at this sacred place involve four elements: a day, a bush, a need, and a call. Let’s take a closer look at what these four elements can teach us about how God uses our broken failures.

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## Observation: A Day, a Bush, a Need, and a Call

*Observation* lays the groundwork for interpreting the passage, seeing how it relates to other Scriptures, and knowing how to apply it.<sup>2</sup> Look carefully at the following verses. Each detail helps paint a clearer picture of the truth.

### The Day—Exodus 3:1

What details do you observe in [Exodus 3:1](#)?

The author described the location as the “west side of the wilderness” (Exodus 3:1 NASB), literally, the “back side.” He “came to Horeb” (3:1 NASB)—which means “Desolation.”<sup>3</sup> Moses went to a place as remote and desolate as a person could go. Here, in *nowhere*, Moses encountered God.

Nothing about that day prepared Moses for his encounter. It began as just another day. What does this fact say about when, where, and how God chooses to interact with His people?

*We have no record of God speaking to Moses during his forty years in the desert. The day that God broke His silence was like every other day in Moses' life. It was a common, ordinary day. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

### The Bush—Exodus 3:2–3

On this unremarkable day, something remarkable happened. Moses saw a bush “engulfed in flames,” but “it didn’t burn up” (Exodus 3:2). What specifics does [Exodus 3:2–3](#) give to explain this phenomenon and Moses’ response?

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The bush was no different than the countless other brambles dotting the rocky terrain. It was the blaze that didn't consume the bush that sparked Moses' curiosity and drew him closer.

What does the burning bush illustrate about how God sometimes gets our attention?

*In the ordinary, everyday events of life, God occasionally does something strange. He ignites a bush that doesn't burn up. When you come across unusual events, you should ask, "What might God be saying to me now?"*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

## The Need—Exodus 3:4–9

What happened in [Exodus 3:4–6](#)? What did God say? How did Moses respond?

Don't skip past the first word in 3:4: "When." (This is a good example of the importance of observing every detail.) It was only *when* Moses stopped what he was doing and sought answers that God spoke. What's the significance?

In His message to Moses in [3:7–9](#), what did the Lord reveal about Himself? What did the Lord see? What did He hear? What did the Lord intend to do about it?

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*The enemy of our souls wants us to think that God doesn't care about our suffering. God knows exactly where we are. He sees our situation. He knows it, and He is touched by it. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

## The Call—Exodus 3:10

God saw His people's suffering. He heard their cries. He was coming "to rescue" and to "lead [the Hebrews] out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land" (Exodus 3:8). What did the Lord call Moses to do in [Exodus 3:10](#)?

Preview our next *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study by peeking at Moses' reaction in [3:11](#). What did Moses say?

*Moses told God, "You've got the wrong fellow. I'm a loser. I failed. I'm broken." But God said, "That's why you qualify!" God wanted to know, "Are you available?" —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Interpretation: Fire in the Bush

God commonly manifests His glorious and holy presence in fire. Later, the Lord would guide the Hebrews through the wilderness as "a pillar of fire" (Exodus 13:21) and descend upon Mount Sinai "in the form of fire" (19:18).

Why do you think God appeared as fire? What does the nature of fire communicate about God's nature?

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The Lord warned Moses not to “come any closer” to the bush and to take off his sandals (Exodus 3:5). The ground around the bush was as holy as the foot of God’s heavenly throne. “Holy,” means “separate.” The ground was set apart and sacred from all other ground because of its proximity to God’s presence. In reverence, Moses removed his soiled sandals and “covered his face because he was afraid to look at God” (3:6).

Why was it a natural response for Moses to cover his face? What about himself was he hiding?

God appeared in an ordinary bush for a reason. What point do you think God was illustrating to Moses by inhabiting a *bush*?

A burning bush that doesn’t burn up is amazing, but it’s more amazing that God chooses brittle, thorny, ordinary people to do His work and even fills them with His presence. How is this possible? Let’s look forward in time from Moses’ day and find out.

*What does it take to qualify as a bush? You gotta be thorny. You gotta be dirty. You gotta be ordinary. That’s us! Any old bush will do, as long as God is in the bush. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Correlation: Fire in the Soul**

God’s flame in the bush reminds us of a later phenomenon in [Acts 2:1–4](#). What similarities do you see with the Holy Spirit filling the believers on the day of Pentecost?

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The Lord calls us, like Moses, to lead people out of their bondage into His presence—not by our authority but in the name of Jesus. What does Jesus’ intercession allow us to do that Moses couldn’t do, according to [Hebrews 4:14–16](#)?

*All God wants to hear from you when He speaks is “Here I am.” He’s impressed with your availability. He’s looking for ordinary bushes, so to speak, to ignite.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## Application: Our Response to God’s Call

The sands of time had long covered Moses’ glory days in Egypt. Like one of Egypt’s pyramids, his infamous failure stood as a monument—not to his greatness but to his foolishness. When Moses murdered the Egyptian taskmaster, he put to death any aspiration of being the hero of the Hebrews. He was finished. Set aside. Forgotten. That’s what Moses thought.

Like Moses, most people see their past failures as limitations. After all, broken-winged birds can never soar again, right? God, however, sees our failure not as a dead-end but as a gateway to growth. He uses failure to strip away our pride, infuse us with humility, strengthen our character, and fit us with qualities He can use.

Moses was far from perfect, and God still called him. The question isn’t, “Are you perfect?” It’s, “Are you willing?”

Are past failures holding you back from thinking God could use you? What might your limitations be?

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God doesn't need to ignite a bush to communicate with us. If we have Christ, we have His Spirit. "The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you" (Romans 8:11). Through His Word and His Spirit, *is God calling you for a certain purpose?* If you're not certain of the answer, use the space below to offer yourself as a willing vessel.

If God only used perfect people, He wouldn't have used Moses—or any of the other men and women in the Bible. Tune out the voice of failure reminding you of your limitations and hear God's voice in His Word calling your name.



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, the burning bush reminds me of Your mercy. You could have left Moses in his guilt, but You spoke to him and offered him a second chance. You are the Lord of ordinary things. You appear to those who think they are nobody living nowhere, and You call them. Thank You for calling my name and giving me purpose through Your Son. In His name, amen.*

## ENDNOTES

1. Hezekiah Butterworth, "The Bird with the Broken Pinion," [hymnary.org](https://hymnary.org/text/i_walked_through_the_woodland_meadows?extended=true), [https://hymnary.org/text/i\\_walked\\_through\\_the\\_woodland\\_meadows?extended=true](https://hymnary.org/text/i_walked_through_the_woodland_meadows?extended=true).
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"
3. Ronald F. Youngblood, *Exodus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 32.

For the 2024–2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1975, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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