

In Their Midst

Exodus: From Slavery to Covenant Presence

Session 2. I AM Has Sent Me

Reading: Exodus 2:11-4:17

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers how God reveals his holiness, his name, and his determination to act through a reluctant Moses.

Catholic Touchstone

This session touches divine revelation, reverence before God's holiness, and the grace by which God calls and equips free human agents.

Moses moves from failed intervention and exile to an encounter with the living God. At the burning bush, God reveals that he has seen Israel's affliction, identifies himself by his mysterious name, and commissions Moses to return to Egypt. Moses repeatedly objects, but God answers with his presence, promises, signs, and the help of Aaron. Help the group notice both sides of the call: God is the decisive deliverer, yet he truly chooses to work through a hesitant human mediator.

What You Need to Know

Moses between two peoples

Exodus 2 presents Moses as both connected to Israel and separated from it. He identifies the Hebrews as his kinsmen, but one of them rejects his attempted leadership. Pharaoh then seeks his life, and Moses becomes a sojourner in Midian. The text does not excuse or explicitly condemn every feature of Moses' killing of the Egyptian. Let the group observe the moral tension without forcing a verdict beyond what the passage says.

Horeb and the holy encounter

The mountain is called Horeb here and Sinai elsewhere in Exodus. The burning bush is not treated as a natural curiosity. The angel of the Lord appears in the flame, God speaks from the bush, and Moses is commanded to remove his sandals because the ground is holy. Holiness here is not merely good behavior. It is the weight and otherness of God's presence, which calls for reverence.

The divine name

God's answer, *I AM WHO I AM*, is connected in the passage with the name represented as YHWH and rendered LORD in English Catholic Bibles. The name is mysterious, but it is not empty. The surrounding promises show the God who is, who remains faithful to the patriarchs, who is present with Moses, and who acts to deliver. Avoid reducing the name to a philosophical definition, but also avoid treating it as an evasion.

Moses' objections

Moses raises a series of concerns: his inadequacy, God's identity, Israel's possible disbelief, his lack of eloquence, and finally his desire that someone else be sent. Some concerns are understandable, but the pattern eventually becomes resistance. God's anger in Exodus 4:14 shows that humility can become

disobedience when it refuses the help God supplies. Even then, God provides Aaron without withdrawing Moses' commission.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The God of the fathers keeps his promise

God identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The exodus therefore begins within the promises already made to the patriarchs. Israel's suffering has not erased the covenant, and God's remembering does not imply that he had forgotten. It signals that he is moving to act according to his promise.

Moses as mediator and type

Moses is rejected by his own people, sent back by God, and appointed to lead Israel from slavery. Deuteronomy 18:15 later promises a prophet like Moses. The New Testament presents Christ as the faithful Son who surpasses Moses, while still allowing Moses' mission to prepare us to recognize Christ's greater mediation in Hebrews 3:1-6.

The divine name and Christ

In John 8:54-59, Jesus speaks of Abraham and declares *I am* in a setting where his hearers take the words as an extraordinary claim and attempt to stone him. The Church receives this within the full biblical revelation of Christ's divine identity. Exodus 3 by itself does not articulate the doctrine of the Trinity, but the revelation of the divine name prepares language that the New Testament applies to Jesus.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Gregory of Nyssa, c. 335-c. 395

St. Gregory reads Moses' approach to the burning bush as a movement toward divine illumination that also requires purification. Removing the sandals signifies that a person cannot approach holy mystery carelessly or remain bound to merely earthly habits.

The Life of Moses, Book II, sections 19-26.

How this is cited. This is a summary of St. Gregory's spiritual interpretation. Section numbering varies slightly among editions, but the interpretation belongs to this portion of Book II.

For the group. Invite the group to ask whether familiarity with holy things has weakened their reverence.

St. Justin Martyr, d. c. 165

St. Justin identifies the divine messenger who speaks from the bush with the pre-existent Word of God. His reading sees the burning bush as part of the scriptural preparation for confessing the Son's divine identity.

First Apology 63.

How this is cited. This is a faithful summary of St. Justin's explicit argument in First Apology 63. His identification is a venerable patristic reading, not a definition that every Old Testament theophany must be explained in only this way.

For the group. The Old Testament should be read in its own setting and also within the fuller revelation of Christ.

St. Gregory Nazianzen, d. c. 390

Summary of his teaching: defending his flight from an ordination he had not sought, St. Gregory argues that the care of souls is the gravest of commissions, that dread of such an office is not the same thing as cowardice, and that a man does well to tremble before he consents.

Oration 2, In Defence of His Flight to Pontus.

How this is cited. Summary of the argument of the oration as a whole rather than a quotation. Its opening sections answer the charge of cowardice and its closing sections record St. Gregory's surrender to the office.

For the group. Moses' questions are not simply faithlessness. Ask where reverent fear of a task should rightly slow a person down, and where it hardens into refusal.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 203-204. God makes his name known to Israel, and the fundamental revelation of that name is given to Moses at the burning bush.

CCC 205-206. God reveals himself to Moses as the God of the fathers who has come down to deliver his people, and the name he gives is as mysterious as he is.

CCC 208. Before God's holy presence, a person discovers his smallness and responds with reverence, as Moses does by removing his sandals and hiding his face.

CCC 213. The revealed name expresses the mystery that God alone is in the fullest sense and is the source of all that exists.

CCC 2575, 2577. God takes the initiative and calls Moses from the burning bush, and from that intimacy Moses draws strength to intercede for the people.

CCC 128-130. The Church reads the unity of Scripture through typology, recognizing how persons and events of the Old Covenant prepare for fulfillment in Christ.

CCC 590. Jesus' use of the divine expression *I AM* belongs to the scriptural basis for the Church's confession of his divine identity.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

Why God brings Israel out (develop). Notice Exodus 3:12 and 3:18, where deliverance is directed toward worship and service at God's mountain. Do not resolve the thread yet.

Deliverance through water (hold). Moses' earlier deliverance through water remains in the background, but this session does not advance the thread.

Fear of God versus fear of rulers (develop). Contrast Moses' fear after Pharaoh learns what he has done with his reverent fear before God's holiness. Do not imply that all fear is identical.

God dwelling among his people (develop). Plant the connection between holy ground, God's promised presence with Moses, and the people's future worship at the mountain.

Mediators of deliverance (develop). God declares that he will deliver Israel and then sends Moses. Hold together divine initiative and genuine human participation.

The sealed guess (hold). Keep the participants' answers sealed. Exodus 3 gives an important clue, but the guesses remain unopened until Session 8.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

Does the narrative approve Moses' killing of the Egyptian?

The text shows that Moses acts in defense of a beaten Hebrew, but it does not explicitly declare the killing righteous. His hidden act becomes known, Pharaoh seeks his life, and Moses flees. Acts 7 remembers his desire to defend his kinsman, but neither passage gives the group permission to treat private lethal force as the model of deliverance. God's later mission will depend on God's word and power, not Moses' impulsive strength.

Is taking the Egyptians' silver, gold, and clothing simply theft?

Within Exodus, the goods are given by Egyptians after generations of oppressive slavery, and God grants Israel favor. Wisdom 10:17 later describes the righteous receiving the reward of their labors. The biblical presentation is one of divine judgment and recompense, not permission for private theft.

If Moses did not personally write Exodus, can the book still be trusted?

Scripture is inspired whether God worked through a single author or through a longer process within Israel; the Church has not defined which. Tradition has associated Exodus closely with Moses and his mission, and Catholics may discuss questions of composition while affirming the inspiration and human authorship of the canonical text. Dei Verbum 11 and 12 affirm that the human writers were true authors while God acted through them, and direct the reader to the forms of expression current in their time. The book's trustworthiness rests on God's inspiration and the Church's reception of it, not on a modern theory of single authorship.

Session Goals

1. Trace Moses' movement from rejected intervention and exile to divine commission.
2. Observe how God's holiness shapes Moses' response at the burning bush.
3. Examine what the divine name reveals within the immediate context.
4. Distinguish genuine humility from resistance to a vocation God has supplied with grace.
5. Recognize Moses as a real human mediator whose mission depends on God's initiative and presence.

Time Note

Planned for 75-90 Minutes

Allow 8 to 10 minutes for prayer and Win, 12 to 15 minutes for the reading, 45 to 50 minutes for Build, and 10 to 15 minutes for Send, practices, and closing prayer.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut the Dig Deeper discussion under Question 8 first.
2. Shorten Question 2 to a single observation about the four verbs.
3. Combine Questions 9 and 10 by asking only how God answers Moses' final two objections.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you see the suffering of your people and call ordinary people into your work. Give us reverence before your holiness, honesty about our weakness, and trust in your presence. Open the Scriptures to us and teach us to listen before we answer. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. When have you felt unprepared for something important that someone trusted you to do?

W2. What helps you treat a place, moment, or relationship with genuine reverence?

Keep this warm and brief. Do not turn the first question into pressure to disclose a painful vocation story.

Read

Read aloud

Use three readers. Read Exodus 2:11-25, Exodus 3:1-22, and Exodus 4:1-17 aloud. Ask everyone else to mark repeated words, Moses' objections, and God's answers.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

Moses in exile

1. In Exodus 2:11-22, what does Moses do, how do others respond, and what changes in his life?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses identifies the Hebrews as his kinsmen, sees their burdens, kills an Egyptian who is beating a Hebrew, and tries to intervene in a dispute between Hebrews. His authority is rejected, Pharaoh seeks his life, and he flees to Midian. There he again defends vulnerable people, receives a home, marries Zipporah, and names his son in recognition that he has become a sojourner in a foreign land.

Dig Deeper

Compare Moses' two interventions. What seems consistent in his character, and what is different about the consequences?

2. What four actions are attributed to God in Exodus 2:23-25, and what do they tell you before God speaks a single word to Moses?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God hears Israel's groaning, remembers his covenant, sees the people, and knows their condition. The language establishes that the coming mission begins with God's covenant faithfulness and attention to suffering, not with Moses' initiative. God's remembering signals action according to his promise, not recovery from forgetfulness.

Holy ground

3. In Exodus 3:1-6, what first attracts Moses, what stops him from approaching casually, and how does he respond?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Name what Moses sees and what he is told to do.

Ground. Ask what the removal of the sandals communicates about the ground and the God who speaks from it.

Depth. Consider what it means that curiosity must give way to reverence before understanding is given.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The bush burns without being consumed, attracting Moses to turn aside and look. God calls him by name, tells him not to come near, and commands him to remove his sandals because the ground is holy. When God identifies himself as the God of the patriarchs, Moses hides his face because he is afraid to look at God. Curiosity gives way to reverence before a personal and holy presence.

Dig Deeper

The ground is holy because God is present there. Ask what this suggests about holiness before discussing moral behavior.

4. List the verbs God uses in Exodus 3:7-10 to describe what he has seen and what he intends to do. Then identify the surprising command at the end.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God has seen Israel's affliction, heard their cry, knows their sufferings, has come down to deliver them, and intends to bring them into a good land. The surprise is that after declaring what he will do, God sends Moses to Pharaoh. God's action and Moses' mission are not rivals. Moses becomes an instrument of the deliverance God initiates.

5. Compare Moses' question in Exodus 3:11 with God's answer in 3:12. Does God answer by listing Moses' qualifications?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses asks who he is to confront Pharaoh and bring Israel out. God does not build Moses' confidence by praising his abilities. He promises, in substance, to be with him and gives a sign directed toward future worship at the mountain. Moses' adequacy rests first on God's presence and promise.

The name

6. Read Exodus 3:13-15 closely. What does Moses ask, what names or descriptions does God give, and what connections does God make to Israel's past and future?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Write down each name or description God gives.

Ground. Ask what the name reveals and what it deliberately withholds.

Depth. Discuss why a name that resists definition can still be a real and sufficient answer.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses asks what he should say if Israel asks for the name of the God who sent him. God answers *I AM WHO I AM*, tells Moses to say that *I AM* sent him, and then identifies himself as the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The mysterious name is joined to covenant continuity, personal presence, and the mission to deliver Israel.

Live discovery

Have pairs find and read the passage without announcing its conclusion. Ask them to underline what Jesus says about Abraham and circle the crowd's response.

Let them find it. John 8:54-59

7. The divine name continues to matter later in Scripture. Find the assigned passage and look for Jesus' claim, its setting, and the crowd's reaction. What do those details lead you to ask about Jesus' identity?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Jesus speaks of Abraham rejoicing to see his day and then declares *I am* in contrast to Abraham's coming into being. The crowd responds by taking up stones. The wording, claim of precedence over Abraham, and violent reaction point beyond a statement about age. Within John's Gospel, the scene contributes to the revelation of Jesus' divine identity.

8. First build the strongest case from the immediate context: is God's answer in Exodus 3 merely evasive, or does it reveal something real? Then press the skeptical reading below.

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. A careful skeptic can argue that *I AM WHO I AM* is deliberately ambiguous rather than a clear revelation. The Hebrew can carry more than one nuance, and ordinary Greek speakers can use the words translated *I am* without claiming divinity. Therefore, connecting Exodus 3 to Jesus' divine identity may seem like later theology being read back into two ambiguous phrases.

Answering from the text. The objection rightly warns against building the whole doctrine of Christ's divinity on an isolated phrase or pretending that the divine name removes all mystery. Yet Exodus does not present the answer as empty. God connects the name to his presence with Moses, his covenant with the patriarchs, and his promised saving action. In John's scene, the case also rests on more than the two words *I am*: Jesus contrasts his existence with Abraham's beginning, places Abraham in relation to his own day, and provokes an attempted stoning. The Catholic reading arises from the combined context and the wider biblical witness, not from a bare grammatical shortcut.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God's answer remains mysterious but is not evasive. The passage reveals the living God who is present, faithful across generations, and free to act. The later Christian confession of Jesus' divinity depends on the whole scriptural witness, while recognizing that the language of the divine name helps prepare for that confession.

Dig Deeper

Ask why a truly transcendent God might reveal himself truthfully without becoming fully comprehensible to us.

Promise, resistance, and provision

9. In Exodus 3:16-22, what outcomes does God tell Moses to expect from Israel's elders, Pharaoh, God's mighty action, and the Egyptians?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God says Israel's elders will listen, while Pharaoh will initially refuse unless compelled by a mighty hand. God promises to strike Egypt with wonders, after which Pharaoh will release Israel. God will also give Israel favor so that they do not leave empty-handed. Moses is therefore warned about resistance without being left uncertain about the final outcome.

Dig Deeper

If the taking of Egyptian goods troubles the group, read Wisdom 10:17. The biblical tradition understands these goods as reward or recompense after oppression, not as permission for private theft.

10. What concern does Moses raise in Exodus 4:1, and how do the three signs answer that concern?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses fears that Israel will not believe that the LORD appeared to him. God gives signs involving the staff, Moses' hand, and water from the Nile. The signs authenticate the commission and show God's authority over what Moses holds, over bodily affliction and restoration, and over the river associated with Egypt's power and Israel's suffering.

11. Trace Moses' objections from Exodus 3:11 through 4:13. Where does an understandable concern become a refusal, and how does God respond in 4:14-17?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. List Moses' objections in the order he raises them.

Ground. Identify what each objection is actually asking God to supply.

Depth. Ask where honest inadequacy becomes refusal, and how God's answer changes at that point.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses moves from asking who he is, to asking God's name, to fearing disbelief, to protesting his lack of eloquence, and finally to asking God to send someone else. The final request exposes reluctance as refusal rather than simple humility. God becomes angry, yet he still provides Aaron as spokesman, promises to teach them what to do, and keeps Moses in the central commission with the staff in his hand.

12. Looking back across the whole reading, what belongs to God alone, and what is Moses actually required to do?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God sees, hears, remembers, reveals his name, promises his presence, foretells the outcome, supplies signs, teaches speech, and accomplishes deliverance. Moses must listen, return, speak, perform the signs, face Pharaoh, gather the elders, and accept Aaron's help. Grace takes the initiative and supplies what is needed, but it does not make Moses' cooperation unreal or unnecessary.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Which of Moses' objections sounds most familiar in your own attempts to follow God, and what part of God's response do you need to hear?

S2. What would reverence before God's holiness look like in one ordinary part of your week?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Choose one time of prayer this week to begin in deliberate silence. Put away your phone, make the Sign of the Cross slowly, and spend one minute acknowledging that you are in God's presence before speaking.
2. Write one task you believe God is asking of you and one objection you keep raising. Beside it, write the help God has already provided, such as grace, truth, a skill, a friend, or the Church.
3. Accept one concrete form of help instead of insisting that you must serve alone. Ask a trusted Catholic friend to pray with you, advise you, or share a needed task.
4. Read Exodus 3:14 aloud on three days this week. Afterward, pray simply: Lord, you are God, and you are with me.

Scripture Memory

Exodus 3:14

"I AM WHO I AM."

Exodus 3:14

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Holy God, you are the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, faithful across every generation. You see suffering, hear the cry of your people, and act with saving power. Forgive us when humility becomes an excuse to refuse you. Teach us reverence, give us courage, and make us willing instruments of your mercy. Through Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Exodus 2:11-4:17** Moses' exile, the burning bush, the divine name, and Moses' objections

Moses and fulfillment

- **Deuteronomy 18:15** The promised prophet like Moses
- **Hebrews 3:1-6** Christ the Son surpasses Moses the faithful servant
- **John 8:54-59** Jesus, Abraham, and the divine expression
- **Acts 7:30-35** The rejected Moses is sent as ruler and deliverer

Difficult detail

- **Wisdom 10:17** The righteous receive the reward of their labors

Terms

- **I AM WHO I AM.** God's mysterious self-revelation to Moses, joined to his presence, covenant faithfulness, and saving action
- **YHWH.** The revealed divine name commonly rendered LORD in English Catholic Bibles
- **theophany.** A manifestation by which God makes his presence known
- **typology.** Reading persons and events in God's earlier saving work as preparation for their fuller realization in Christ

Catechism

- CCC 203-204. God makes his name known to Israel, and the fundamental revelation of that name is given to Moses at the burning bush.
- CCC 205-206. God reveals himself to Moses as the God of the fathers who has come down to deliver his people, and the name he gives is as mysterious as he is.
- CCC 208. God's holiness calls forth reverence.
- CCC 213. God alone is in the fullest sense.
- CCC 2575, 2577. God takes the initiative and calls Moses from the burning bush, and from that intimacy Moses draws strength to intercede for the people.
- CCC 128-130. The Church reads the unity of Scripture through typology.
- CCC 590. Jesus' use of *I AM* belongs to the revelation of his divine identity.