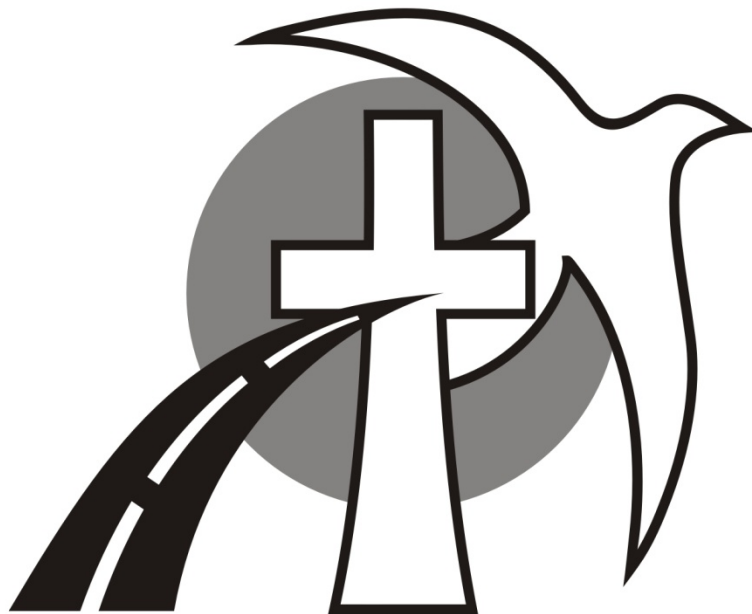


# Moses

*~ The Lord's Prophet ~*

*13 Home Group Studies on  
Exodus 2 - 20*

*Part 1 – Studies 1-6*



**Midrand Presbyterian Church**

**M P C @ S t S a v i o u r s**

**F A I T H • H O P E • L O V E**

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## **INTRODUCTION TO MOSES**

Moses is considered one of Israel's greatest spiritual leaders. Though raised as an Egyptian prince, he never forgot his Hebrew origins. With the Lord's guidance he led his people out of bondage in Egypt and into the wilderness in Sinai. It was there, in the desert, that a band of rebel slaves were forged into a zealous nation before crossing over to the Promised Land.

This study will take you through the life and times of Moses, from his birth up to the giving of the 10 Commandments by God on Mount Sinai.

The intention of this study is not only to learn more about what happened to Moses and through Moses, but more importantly to recognise that in God's dealings with Moses there are patterns and principles that still apply to our lives and to how God can work in us today.

It is my hope that as you walk in the footsteps of Moses, so to speak, you will discover that his journey is also your journey, and so be encouraged to follow God and trust in His faithfulness.

Chris

## Week 1

### The birth of Moses

#### From the word:

Read Exodus 2:1-14 out loud and as a group.

#### Going deeper:

At the time of Moses' birth, about 1350BC, the descendents of Joseph and Jacob had been living in Egypt for nearly 400 years. Most of those years had been good ones as the Hebrews lived peacefully, tending their flocks and raising their families, in the fertile Nile delta region referred to as Goshen in the Bible. Around 1580BC the indigenous Egyptian people revolted against their foreign rulers, the Semitic Hyksos, who had been friendly towards Joseph and his descendants. The Egyptians reunited their country under a native Pharaoh who ruled from Thebes in southern Egypt.

Around the time of Moses' birth, Egypt's Pharaoh decided to move his capital from Thebes to the north in the delta region. There Pharaoh Seti I and his successor, Rameses II – the Pharaoh of the Exodus – launched an ambitious building program. Using enormous numbers of slaves they set about reconstructing the old Hyksos capital (renamed Raamses) and other delta cities.

Every foreign captive, prisoner and foreigner living in Egypt was rounded up and forced to work hard labour for the Pharaoh, and among them were the Hebrews. Despite the hardships, the Hebrew population continued to grow until, in an attempt to bring under control the number of Hebrews, the Pharaoh ordered that every newborn son be thrown into the Nile – See Exodus 1:11-22.

Moses was born shortly after this decree was issued.

**Making it relevant – Life application:**

1. Moses was born into a situation he had no control over. He did not choose to be placed in the basket or to be taken by the Egyptian princess or to be raised by the oppressor of his own people. In other words, Moses had no control over what happened to him as a child.

What things in your life, as a child or as an adult, did you have no control over? (Note: The intention of this question is not to create a 'victim' mentality within any of us, but simply to recognise that we are often 'acted upon' due to no fault of our own and so feelings of self-blame or guilt are inappropriate.)

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2. Moses' mother's action of placing him in the bulrushes was her attempt to protect him from the wrath of the Pharaoh. Can you recall a time when someone protected you from danger, whether physical or otherwise, and/or have you had the opportunity to act as protector of another?
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3. Read Psalm 18:1-3 – In what way does God protect us? When have you experienced or recognised this protection in your life?
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4. At the age of 3, once he was weaned from his mother, Moses was taken to the Egyptian princess and raised as her own son, which means that he would have been educated and raised as a nobleman. What is the significance of this when you consider Moses' calling later in life to lead the Hebrews to freedom?

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5. Moses was a murderer! How do you respond to that?

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6. The fact that the Pharaoh was willing to kill Moses over this incident seems to indicate that Moses may never have been fully accepted in the court of the Pharaoh. What impact do you think this would have had on Moses, i.e. never being truly accepted by his adopted household?

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7. Read verse 14 again – what consequences of sin are highlighted in this verse?

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8. Can you see the irony in the first sentence of verse 14? Explain.

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## Week 2

### Moses in Midian

#### From the word:

Read Exodus 2:15-25 out loud in the group.

#### Going deeper:

When Moses learned that someone had seen him kill the Egyptian, he fled from Egypt to take refuge among the mountains at the southern apex of the Sinai Peninsula. The likelihood is that there may have been a number of foreigners there seeking copper and turquoise in the sandstone rocks. Here an Egyptian fugitive could lose his identity, not as an Egyptian but as one fleeing the law, among the various groups of people working the mines for, most likely, the Egyptians.

You can imagine that for a man who had never been outside the lush Nile River delta that the journey across the deserts of Sinai must have been gruelling. It was a stark and forbidding landscape. Since his upbringing had not prepared him for this lifestyle and environment he may have had some doubts as to his survival, but he then met with a tribe of Midianites.

The Midianite people had long survived under these conditions. Like Moses' ancestors, the Midianites were semi nomads who lived in goat-hair tents. They fed their flocks of sheep and goats on thorny desert plants and dug their wells in porous limestone rocks beneath the brittle soil.

The priest of Midian is named Reuel, which means 'friend of God'. He is more popularly known by his other name, Jethro (see Ex 3:1), which probably means 'his Excellency'.

## **Making it relevant – Life application:**

1. This question is just for fun – We read in this passage how Moses meets his wife, Zipporah. If you are married or have a significant other in your life, share with the group how you met? Which ‘third party’ helped bring you together?
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2. Moses was fleeing for his life. He left everything he knew behind and went off into a new life. Have you ever found yourself fearful in having to start over or start something new – whether a job or a move to a new town or a new relationship etc.? Just like Moses experienced the grace of God in his new surroundings, how did you experience God’s grace and provision when you were starting a new chapter in your life?
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3. When the daughters of Reuel (Jethro) report to their father about the kindness of the man who helped them water their flocks, they say that he is an Egyptian. Because of the distinct way an Egyptian nobleman dressed and wore his hair etc, Moses could not escape being identified as an Egyptian, even though he was a Hebrew. As Christians we are set apart for God and though we may dress similarly to others, the fact is that we are different and our identity lies in being children of God. Do people find it easy to identify you as a follower of Christ (Christian) when you are in ‘non-Christian’ circles or are you OK with your identity remaining a secret?



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4. Moses has a son, Gershom, which sounds similar to the Hebrew for 'an alien there'. Does your name have a meaning, and do you think that a name has any bearing on how a person sees themselves as they grow up or is it simply a means of identification and nothing more?

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5. We never hear of Gershom again. This is not a judgment on Gershom's character or life, but it does tell us something about God's calling on Moses. Discuss.

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6. In this passage God is described in very personal and human terms, i.e. he 'forgets' his covenant and is moved by the groaning of his people. What does this tell us about God's character and heart and how do you feel about God 'feeling'?

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7. In verse 23 we are told that a long period passed. In other words, Moses got on with his life and living unaware that God had a greater purpose for his life. What does this say about God's plans and how we should approach the 'ordinary' and everyday routine of living?

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## Week 3

### A voice in the wilderness

#### From the word:

Read Exodus 3:1-22 out loud in the group.

#### Going Deeper:

We are told in the previous chapter that a long period passed from the time when Moses fled Egypt, found a wife and had children to the time when he has this encounter with God in the burning bush. Over the course of the years that passed Moses would have assumed a new identity, as a nomadic shepherd, that ironically was actually his true identity, as a Hebrew. He would no longer have looked like an Egyptian. He would probably have learnt to speak Aramaic or a similar Semitic language, as opposed to the language of the Egyptians. Jethro would have taught him how to care for the flocks and how to look for pastureland. He would have learned how to survive in the rather arid surroundings of the land of Midian, growing in experience and knowledge of places to find water and food.

#### Making it relevant - Life application:

1. Horeb means desert or desolation. God meets Moses in a place of desolation. How do you respond to the observation that people often experience God most profoundly in moments of despair and brokenness?

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2. Discuss God's use of fire to show his presence. In what ways does the mystery of fire and its characteristics illustrate God's character and our relationship with him?
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3. Where is fire used in the New Testament to show God's presence? What is the significance of the fact that in Exodus the fire only appears to Moses, but in the New Testament it is to many?
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4. Moses is told that the ground he is standing on is holy. The ground has not changed in any way and is the same as the other soil in the surrounds, so what has made the ground holy? In 1 Peter 2:9 we are told that we are a holy people. How does Moses' experience help you understand what it means to be holy?
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5. Probably the most significant portion of this passage is God's disclosure of his name – "I am who I am" or "I will be who I will be". Naming does not only identify it also speaks to labelling and 'getting a handle on something'. God does not give a

personal name to himself or a name reflecting something of his character – what does this tell us about our ‘handle’ on God?

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6. How do you feel about a God without limits, beyond description and definition, yet personal?

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7. The last portion of the passage deals with the process of consultation that Moses goes through with the elders of Israel. It is fascinating because it speaks of God’s desire not to coerce, but to influence. People always have a choice when it comes to God. Discuss.

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## **Week 4:**

### **Doubts**

#### **From the word:**

Read Exodus 4:1-17 out loud in the group.

#### **Going deeper:**

Moses has been living a relatively peaceful life with his new family – raising children and sheep. Suddenly he is faced, not only with Almighty God, but also with the prospect of returning to the very place he had run from all those years before. It is amazing to consider that his fears and doubts over returning to Egypt overpower the awe he experiences in speaking with the living God who appears to him in a burning bush. People often assume that when we face God one day that we will automatically worship and honour God and repent of our sin and do as he says etc. i.e. because of God’s holiness and awesome presence. But this encounter between God and Moses shows us that this is not necessarily the case, i.e. even when face to face with God, Moses’ emotions over his past overwhelm him and he raises all sorts of objections to obeying.

**Objection 1:** “What if the people do not believe me?” In other words, “what if they do not believe in my mission and in you, God?” But what Moses is really asking is, “I am not sure if I believe in this mission and in you, God.” So, God shows Moses three signs or miracles that should convince the people (and Moses) that God is

who he says he is. The first sign involves God using Moses to control a snake. The snake was a very powerful and prominent image in Egyptian culture. In fact, the Pharaoh had a cobra made of precious metal on the front of his headdress. It was a symbol of power. The first miracle shows Moses and the people that God has power over the power of Pharaoh. The second sign involves disease. Illness and disease were greatly feared in the times of Moses, and even today, but to a lesser extent, and the second miracle shows that God has power over disease, and therefore life and death, too. The third miracle is also significant because it has Moses taking water from the Nile and having it changed to blood. The Nile was considered sacred by the Egyptians and they believed that the annual flooding was because of the kindness of their gods. So, again, by turning the water into blood, God was showing that he has power over the life giving waters of the Nile.

**Objection 2:** “I am slow of speech.” After the question of God’s competence and abilities answered, Moses turns on himself and his own inadequacies. The phrase used here in the Hebrew does not mean that Moses had a speech impediment, such as a stutter, but rather that he was not confident in debate. He did not have a quick tongue and was not an eloquent speaker. He feared that when in a verbal joust with the Pharaoh or anyone else, that he would fail and be made to look like a fool and so be unable to fulfil the mission. God’s answer is to assure him that he will be fine.

**Objection 3:** “Please send someone else to do it.” In other words, “Lord, I am afraid and scared. Don’t send me.” God then decides that he will give Moses’ brother, Aaron, to Moses as an assistant who can speak on Moses’ behalf.

With all the objections out of the way, Moses agrees to go.

### **Making it real – Life application:**

1. Let’s start with the final objection, which is really at the heart of the matter - Moses’ fear over his past. This fear almost becomes an immovable barrier preventing him from living out

God's purpose for his life. Besides fear, what are some of the other barriers people put up around themselves to prevent them from letting God touch their hearts? I am not asking about the excuses we use not to do God's will, that is the next question, I am asking what prevents us from letting God in, in the first place? For Moses, it was fear.....

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2. What excuses do we use that prevents God using us as he could? Too young, too old, too poor, too uneducated, too unemployed, too.....?
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3. God's answer to Moses' first objection or question is to point to the staff in Moses' hand. The staff was the basic piece of equipment used by any shepherd. So, God asked Moses to see what was in his hand, i.e. what he had that could be used by God to fulfil God's purposes. The point is that God did not send Moses for special diplomatic training before he went to Egypt, he simply asked him to identify what was in his hand. So, the question for you is, 'What is in your hand?'

Think about this for a few seconds. What do you have that God can use? Don't be limited only to thinking about physical things, such as money or material possessions, but think outside the box, so to speak. Then, why not go in a circle and share it with each other. We are not all called, like Moses, to save a nation, but we are all called to make a difference where we are and amongst the people we know.

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4. God's response to Moses' second objection is to bring him Aaron? It is likely that Moses and Aaron had not seen each other for many years and that Aaron was younger than Moses, i.e. born after the infanticide that took place at the time of Moses' birth. No doubt, Aaron would have been raised on stories of his brother Moses who had been saved by the Egyptian Princess and who had been raised and educated as an Egyptian nobleman. The point is that, just like Moses' staff, God showed Moses that he had other people who would support him and be available to help fulfil the mission. This is a powerful reminder to us that we are not called to act or live alone for God. What has God put in place in the world today to make sure that we do not act alone? Do you find it easy or difficult working with other Christians? Why?
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## **Week 5:**

### **The mission begins**

#### **From the word:**

Read Exodus 4:18-31 out loud in the group.

#### **Going Deeper:**

This passage is quite challenging in places, most notably the references to God hardening Pharaoh's heart and then the rather odd account of the circumcision of Moses' son in verses 24-26.

Firstly, regarding the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart is ascribed to God 9 times in Exodus and also 9 times to Pharaoh himself. In Romans 9:17-18 Paul makes reference to this hardening as evidence of God's sovereign will. Of course, balanced against the overall testimony of scripture we know that we are given freedom of will, yet we have this very clear reference to God's action on the heart of the Pharaoh. What can it mean? Perhaps, as is mentioned in Romans 1:24-28 (read this passage), it is not that God prevented Pharaoh from doing the good thing, but rather that he did not prevent him from doing the wrong thing, i.e. he 'handed Pharaoh over' to his pride, arrogance and sense of self importance, which all led to him refusing the release the Hebrews. God allows Pharaoh to make the wrong decision, i.e. he allows Pharaoh to exercise his will and through this God's sovereign will is fulfilled. Whatever the interplay may have been

between God's will and Pharaoh's will, we must not fall into the trap of using this passage to proclaim some kind of fatalistic understanding of the world, i.e. where we are mere pawns in God's grand game of chess. He gives us free will so that we can ultimately choose him and choose his values and ways over and against that of the world.

Secondly, regarding the circumcision. Read Genesis 17:9-14. This is the introduction of the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham, i.e. the sign being circumcision. Scholars are not sure what this encounter with 'God' was, but it is clear that the message was delivered, whether by dream or vision or a messenger of God, that if Moses was going to be part of the rebirth of the nation of Israel that his son had to be a true Israelite and therefore be circumcised. It is through Moses and Aaron that God re-establishes the covenant with his people and so it is appropriate that Moses' son be circumcised. The Hebrew in verse 24 is also unclear, i.e. whether the 'attack' referred to was on Moses or on Moses' son, but again, the point is that Moses' son had to be marked with the sign of the covenant, which was circumcision. It is also believed that 'feet' is a euphemism for genitals, which would explain why the foreskin of Moses' son was touched on Moses' 'feet' since Moses would have been circumcised as a baby.

### **Making it relevant – Life Application:**

1. Moses goes and asks permission from his father in-law, Jethro, to go to Egypt. This speaks of loyalty and respect. Moses owed a great deal to Jethro and Moses recognised this. Would you agree that loyalty to and respect for others is not widely practiced today, i.e. in the business world or even within our families?
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2. Do you find it easy to acknowledge those who have helped you become the person you are today with the skills and interests you have? How do you feel about the following statement: "There is no such thing as a self-made person. We all have been helped along the way."
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3. There is also such a thing as negative loyalty, i.e. when you remain loyal to someone because of what that person has done for you in the past, even when that person has now done something wrong and needs to be held accountable, but instead of calling that person to account, you protect them out of loyalty. Can you think of any examples of this kind of behaviour in our country or the world recently? What should happen when someone we are loyal to acts inappropriately?
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4. Notice that Moses' decision to obey God affected his whole family, i.e. they had to uproot and go to a foreign and hostile environment and his son had to be circumcised. Sometimes our decisions affect the lives of those around us and often they don't understand this or we don't appreciate how our decisions affect others. Discuss.
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5. Last week we touched on the fact that Moses would not work alone, but would have the help and support of his brother Aaron. Of course, besides having 'good Aarons' in our lives, we also surround ourselves, from time to time, with 'Aarons'

who are not godly people and who land up leading us away from God and not toward him. Have you ever had a person or people like that in your life?

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6. Moses' and Aaron's first responsibility, in starting this mission God has laid before them, is to represent God to the Hebrew people. They had to go and remind the people of Israel, in their sufferings, that God's presence was with them and that he cared for them and had a purpose for them. The response of the elders of Israel was to worship God. Often we serve the same purpose amongst others, i.e. simply to remind them of God and his care and his love for them. As you think about where you work or where you live or the people in your family and in your circle of friends, what can you do 'simply' to represent God to them?
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## **Week 6:**

### **In Pharaoh's Court**

#### **From the word:**

Read Exodus 5:1-23 out loud in the group.

#### **Going deeper:**

It was time for Moses and Aaron to see the Pharaoh. They petitioned for an audience and their request was granted. They would have been shown into the royal court, no doubt a large room, and at the far end the Pharaoh surrounded by his Sardinian body guards, his Arabian servant girls and his priests and court officials. Knowing who Moses was, he would have probably wanted to present to Moses and Aaron a show of authority by being dressed in his royal garments with the various Egyptian symbols and ornaments of authority. He was the most powerful monarch of the day and everyone who met him would be shown this fact. The Pharaoh would have expected to receive praise and gifts from his visitors, as was the custom when being granted an audience with the Pharaoh, but instead he is given a demand – to release the Hebrews so that they can worship their God. He is immediately insulted and declines their request. At first Moses and Aaron attempt to persuade the Pharaoh by appealing to God, but when Pharaoh dismisses God with disdain, they attempt to appeal to his

compassionate side by saying that God would punish the Hebrews if they are not given an opportunity to go and worship. Again, the Pharaoh shows no concern for the Hebrews, in fact, he doubles their burden by no longer providing the straw for the bricks, instead demanding that the slaves find the straw themselves and keep up their quota. The people grumble against God and against Moses, and Moses protests to God by saying, “you have not rescued your people at all.”

### **Making it relevant – Life application:**

1. Pharaoh shows nothing but disdain for God. He is angry at Moses’ and Aaron’s presumption of ‘imposing’ their God on him. Have you ever experienced this kind of response when speaking of God or Church or Faith to others? Why is there such contempt and ridicule by some towards those who believe?
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2. The Pharaoh was second only to the Egyptian deity of Ra (the son god) and so he did not take kindly to Moses and Aaron making demands. Even their attempt to appeal to his compassion failed. It was all about Pharaoh and his needs and desires and how it impacted him. In affect he was saying, “Your leaving for 3 days will negatively affect the work on my projects!” Is it a fair statement to claim that selfishness and ‘looking out for number 1’, i.e. where we are all in effect little Pharaohs, is at the heart of our fallen world’s problems?
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3. Pharaoh becomes the archetype of selfishness when he justifies his selfish behavior and decisions and lack of compassion on the Hebrews by claiming that they have brought the hardship (no more straw) on themselves because they are lazy. He concludes that the reason they want time off is because they are lazy and so he makes them work harder. In this way Pharaoh is able to justify his own selfish behavior. What are some of the excuses we use to justify our selfish behavior?
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4. Consider the fact that there was no concept of a working week in those days, i.e. no concept of 5 or 6 days work and then a day of rest. There were no labour laws, no unions, no workers' rights. How would you feel being at the mercy of a boss or employer who has absolutely no regard for your wellbeing and where you don't have the law of the land to protect you? And perhaps we should also ask the opposite question, i.e. if you are an employer or have authority over people in the work place, are you concerned for their well being?
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5. Moses complains bitterly to God and speaks quite frankly (see verse 23). What does this tell you about the kind of relationship Moses had with God? Have you ever complained to God over your circumstances and his seeming inactivity in your life?
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6. Now let's think a little broader. Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh, the highest authority in Egypt, on behalf of those being oppressed and taken advantage of, as spokesmen against the injustices in the land. Who should be the Moses' and Aarons of today in our land? And who are the Pharaohs of today, i.e. the perpetrators of injustice and oppression (it is not just corrupt officials in the government – who else?)

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