

Semicontinuous

Exod. 3:1-15

**Ps. 105:1-6,
23-26, 45b**

Complementary

Jer. 15:15-21

Ps. 26:1-8

Rom. 12:9-21

Matt. 16:21-28

“I Am Who I Am”

**Goal for
the Session**

*Youth will explore God’s name and reflect on their identities
in relationship to God.*

■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

Focus on Exodus 3:1–15

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Gary W. Charles

God gives Moses a seemingly insurmountable task to accomplish, but God will not allow Moses to assume that he will engage the powers of Egypt alone. Moses assumes he needs more authoritative information, but the voice from the burning bush reminds Moses that he knows more than enough: “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’: This is my name forever, and this is my title for all generations” (v. 15).

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Rebecca Blair Young

God uses the name, YHWH Elohim, the Hebrew expression for Lord God, in reference to God’s relationship with Israel’s ancestors. In the context of human relationship, God graciously identifies Godself in familiar and familial terms. This three-step progression—from God’s identification of Godself as Supreme Being, then as Supreme Being who acts in human history by sending shepherds, and finally as the God in relationship with Israel—is God’s way of acknowledging and responding to Moses and to Israel, joining in the common refrain, “Here I am.”

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by H. James Hopkins

Moses learned that it was time to let go of his life as a shepherd and embrace a new role as the deliverer of the Hebrew people. What old ways of being have we been asked to let go of? What current ways of being are we being asked to let go of? What new ways of being are we being asked to claim? Absent the appearance of a burning bush, how do we know when it is time to let go of the old and take hold of the new?

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Geoffrey M. St. J. Hoare

The import of this name is that YHWH cannot be reduced to a characteristic any more than captured in a definition. However comfortable we may be with ambiguity as an intellectual matter, most of us, at the level of practical theology, want everything sorted out, logical, definitive, and clear. YHWH will fill out the content of the character implied in the divine name as the promised constancy and fidelity unfolds in history. In Exodus 20:2 YHWH will offer content to the name: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Exodus 3:1–15

Focus on Your Teaching

As young people mature, they gain a special capacity to embrace ambiguity. The choices and situations they face in the world begin to look less clear-cut or straightforward. This can be a source of considerable worry for parents, who have spent twelve or more years instilling right from wrong in unambiguous terms. Teenagers’ view of God becomes more complex as they discover a God who is known and yet remains hidden. In your teaching, help youth wrestle with the paradox at the center of God’s identity. Encountering the great “I Am” can help young people come to a new kind of faith, even in a complex world.

Holy God, speak to me and through me as I help our youth hear your call to new life. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- copies of Resource Sheets 1 and 2
- pens or pencils
- Bibles
- newsprint, markers
- candle, matches

For Responding

- option 1: paper, pens or pencils
- option 2: recording of “I Am” by Bebo Norman
- option 3: paper, pens or pencils

For Film Connection

- Bibles, Internet-connected device

Exodus 2:11–25 is a quick trip through Moses’ early adulthood: he flees Egypt and escapes to a land called Midian, where he marries and settles down to a life of shepherding his father-in-law’s flocks.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

As participants arrive, hand each of them a copy of Resource Sheet 1 (Yes and Maybe) and a pen or pencil. Invite the youth to take a few minutes to complete the resource sheet individually, then gather the group. Read aloud each situation on the resource sheet, and poll the youth about whether they find the situation clearly right or clearly wrong (“check”) or not so definite (“question mark”). When there is disagreement, allow participants to justify their answers. Then discuss:

✠ Is it better to be able to distinguish right from wrong or to embrace ambiguity? Why?

Invite the youth to listen for ways ambiguity is expressed in today’s Scripture story. Pray:

Guide us, O God, as we explore your holy Word. Amen.

EXPLORING

Remind the youth that the infant Moses escaped from death at the hands of the Egyptian pharaoh. In today’s session, the grown-up Moses has his first direct encounter with God.

Summarize for participants the events of Moses’ life in Exodus 2:11–25, and then invite the youth to read Exodus 3:1–15 silently. Next, ask a volunteer to read the passage aloud as the rest of the group follows along in their Bibles. After ensuring participants have a basic comprehension of the plot, write “I Am” at the top of a posted sheet of newsprint. Working together, list on the newsprint all of the things God says or does in the passage that describe what God has done or will do and what God cares about.

Form two groups, assigning one the category of God’s actions (what God has done or will do) and the other the category of God’s priorities (what God cares about). Give both groups the following instructions:

✠ Identify all the items from the newsprint list that fit your group’s assigned category.

- ✪ With that list as a starting point, create a list of characteristics of God. (Example: Because God has "observed the misery" of the Israelites, one characteristic of God might be "attentive to human needs.")
- ✪ Using your list of God's characteristics, write a description of God on a sheet of newsprint and be prepared to report it to the larger group.

Gather the youth together, and allow each group to present its description of God; post the descriptions side by side. Discuss:

- ✪ In what ways are the two descriptions of God similar? In what ways are they different?
- ✪ What accounts for the differences?
- ✪ Do the differences contradict one another, or do they together provide a fuller description of God?
- ✪ What qualities of God are missing from these descriptions?
- ✪ What new insights have you gained about God through this exercise?
- ✪ What about God remains ambiguous or unknown?

As a name for God, "I AM WHO I AM" can be difficult to grasp. Consult a Bible dictionary for more insight into God's name; search for "I Am," "names for God," "Yahweh," and/or "YHWH."

With God's characteristics in mind, reread Exodus 3:13–15. Discuss:

- ✪ If you were Moses, would it have occurred to you to ask God's name? Why or why not?
- ✪ Do you think I AM WHO I AM is really God's name, or is God being intentionally ambiguous—perhaps annoyed that Moses asked God's name—by answering in this way?
- ✪ If I AM WHO I AM is truly God's name, what do you think it means?
- ✪ Why do we never (or rarely) refer to God as I AM WHO I AM?

Say: God called to Moses out of a burning bush. What is God calling you to be and do?

**EASY
PREP**

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

1. **Another Name for Me** Participants will reflect on their identities in relationship to God by giving themselves new names. Give participants the following instructions as they work individually:
 - ✪ Brainstorm a list of your priorities—the things you care most about—and some of your recent actions in relation to others.
 - ✪ Based on your list, brainstorm some possible descriptive names for yourself—that is, your personal "I AM WHO I AM."
 - ✪ Write a brief statement to introduce this new name to the group. (Example: "I care about the environment and do a lot of hiking. I am Creation Lover.")

Allow participants to present their new "identities," encouraging all to show appropriate appreciation for their peers' creativity. Ask:

- ✪ How does your new name reflect your relationship with God?
- ✪ How will you live into this new name going forward?

Play a recording of Bebo Norman’s “I Am.” It can be found on YouTube and iTunes.

2. **“I Am”—the Song** Youth will reflect on their identity in relation to God by listening to and discussing the song “I Am” by Bebo Norman. Play the song, twice if time allows, and then discuss:
 - ✪ Who is the voice, the “I,” in the song?
 - ✪ How is this voice like and unlike the voice of God in Exodus 3:1–15?
 - ✪ In what ways do you identify with the person the voice is speaking to, the “you,” in the song?
 - ✪ In what ways does the voice in the song reflect—and not reflect—your understanding of God and your relationship with God?
 - ✪ What does the song call you to do? What does it suggest about how to live our lives?

3. **New Holy Ground Meditation** Participants will reflect on their identities in relationship to God by imagining their burning-bush experiences. Distribute paper and pens or pencils. Invite the youth to draw freely as you guide them in imagining how God might come to them in person, asking:
 - ✪ Moses was doing his job, tending the flocks, when he encountered God. What ordinary thing would you be doing?
 - ✪ God came to Moses in a burning bush. How would God approach you?
 - ✪ God gave Moses a specific job: to go to Pharaoh and demand the release of God’s people. What would your job be?
 - ✪ God revealed divine priorities to Moses—what God cared about in relation to Moses. What does God care about in relation to you?

Invite participants to report their imagined encounters with God. Discuss:

- ✪ Where does your imaginary encounter with God intersect with your real relationship with God? What is God calling you to be and do?

CLOSING

Gather the youth in a circle, and distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Closing Litany). Light a candle and place it in the center of the circle. Invite participants to imagine the candle is the burning bush as you read the litany together.

Close with a prayer of thanksgiving for God’s presence in the lives of the youth as they carry God’s light into the world. Extinguish the candle. Dismiss the group with a blessing of peace.

■ ENHANCEMENT

FILM CONNECTION

Watch the burning-bush scene from *The Prince of Egypt* (bit.ly/FOWMoses). Discuss:

- ✪ How does the film version of this story compare with how you have imagined it?
- ✪ How does the film version compare with the Scripture text?
- ✪ In what ways do the similarities and differences between the versions affect the meaning of the story?

Yes and Maybe



Instructions: Read the situations described below. Circle  if you think the situation is a clear case of right versus wrong. Circle  if you think the situation is not a clear situation of right versus wrong.

1.   A boy steals a loaf of bread.
2.   A boy steals a loaf of bread because his family is hungry and has no money.
3.   During a test, a girl lets her best friend see her answers.
4.   During a test, a girl lets an intimidating classmate see her answers because she's afraid not to.
5.   A man on a bus sees a large wad of bills slip from another passenger's pocket as the passenger is exiting the bus. It's too late to call out to the passenger, as the doors have closed and the bus is pulling away, so the man picks up the money, which he discovers is more than \$300, and keeps it.
6.   A man on a bus sees a dollar bill slip from another passenger's pocket as the passenger is exiting the bus. It's too late to call out to the passenger, as the doors have closed and the bus is pulling away, so the man picks up the dollar bill and keeps it.
7.   A woman walking down the street sees an older person who seems to be having a medical emergency. She has had first-aid training but her certification has expired, and since the sidewalk is crowded, she assumes someone else will help the victim. She does nothing.
8.   A man walking down the street sees a woman being harassed by a large, muscular man. No one else is around. Wanting to help but fearing for his safety, he keeps walking until he's out of sight of the attacker, then calls 911.
9.   A fourteen-year-old girl is at a party at a friend's house. The friend's parents are out of town, and many of her friends are drinking. When the friend offers the girl a beer, she drinks it.
10.   The parents of a fourteen-year-old boy are going out of town for the weekend. Wanting to make sure their son doesn't go out and get in trouble, they suggest he host a party for his friends. They buy several cases of beer for their son and his friends in exchange for a promise he will stay at home.

Closing Litany

Instructions: Join together in the following litany. Note that there are pauses for free responses by participants.

N Narrator: Moses, keeping his father-in-law's flocks, came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Moses felt . . .

(Pause for participants to shout out words that describe Moses' reaction.)

N Narrator: Then God called out to him from the bush,

R Right Side: "Moses, Moses!"

L Left Side: Here I am.

R Right Side: "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. I am your God and the God of all creation."

N Narrator: And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Will we hide our faces in fear when God calls out to us? Because God is calling out to us:

L Left Side: "You are my beloved. With you I am well pleased."

R Right Side: "I need you, as my people and my church, to carry my light into the world."

N Narrator: How do you feel about this call from God?

(Pause for participants to shout out their responses.)

N Narrator: But as God promised Moses, so God promises us: "I will be with you."

A All: Thanks be to God!

—Based on Exodus 3:1–12