

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

Holy Encounter, New Response

**Goal for
the Session**

Hearing about Moses' call, adults will seek ways to encounter the holy and discern new avenues of discipleship.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

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

When struggling with a decision, many Christians yearn for a clear sign from God. Yet the idea of encountering the Holy One may make us distinctly uncomfortable. It is one thing to yearn for discernment, but quite another to feel God calling us to something we feel ill-equipped or disinclined to do. Further, many decisions call for leaving behind the familiar and embarking on new, uncharted paths. In this session, adults will explore an unexpected encounter with the holy.

*Make me aware, O God, of your presence with me and with those I lead.
Fill me with a sense of awe and wonder. Amen.*

YOU WILL NEED

- newsprint
- red and orange markers
- copies of Resource Sheet 2
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- hymnals with “Here I Am, Lord”
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for the next session

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 1, pens, paper, newsprint, marker
- option 2: white drawing paper; red, orange, and yellow tissue paper; white glue thinned with water; small paintbrushes
- option 3: Bibles, downloaded word cloud examples, or newsprint, colorful markers

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, sketch on newsprint a simple, bare-branched bush that covers most of the sheet. On newsprint or a board, list the information from the sidebar about God’s threefold response to Moses’ question about God’s identity. For option 3 in Responding, go to worditout.com, read the directions for making an online word cloud and download and print some examples.

Welcome everyone and make introductions as needed.

Form pairs and invite participants to tell about a time when they had to tackle a new challenge and how they felt during the transition.

Gather as a whole group and invite volunteers to report about their experience.

Explain that in today’s session they will meet a potential leader who had to tackle a new challenge. Encourage them to keep their experiences in mind as they hear about God’s call to a new leader.

Pray the following or a prayer of your choosing:

Instill in us a sense of wonder and mystery, O Holy One, as once again we encounter your Word. In the name of your Son, Amen.

In Israel's history, the role of shepherd had multiple meanings. Moses' pilgrimage with his flock presents him simultaneously as a seeker and a leader, shepherding his followers while he seeks divine guidance.

1. "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob": God identified as the God of Moses' ancestors.
2. "I Am Who I Am": God is actively present for God's people.
3. "I Am has sent me to you": The Present One sends Moses to be present for the people.

EXPLORING

Remind the group that Exodus 1–2 tells that Moses was a child of enslaved Israelites, oppressed by Pharaoh. Moses was saved and raised by Pharaoh's daughter. To fill in the blanks of the intervening time, ask one volunteer to read aloud Exodus 2:11–14, another to read verses 15–22, and a third to read verses 23–25.

Tell the group that today's focus scripture is about an encounter with the Holy One, so you will read the passage with the expectation that participants may experience a sense of mystery and awe in the reading. Invite the group to imagine themselves in the wilderness. Read aloud Exodus 3:1–6. Allow a brief period of silence. Then have participants come forward in turn, write the question or thought they have about the reading somewhere on the branches of the bush with red or orange markers, and read aloud their words for the group.

Ask adults to form pairs to read Exodus 3:7–15. Distribute Resource Sheet 2 (A Dialogue between Moses and the Holy One). Ask one person in each pair to read the part of Moses and the other the part of God.

In the total group after the reading, ask each person to underline the verbs pertaining to God's actions in verses 7–10. Discuss:

✧ What do these action verbs tell us about the nature of this Holy One?

Distribute Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Exodus 3:1–15) and ask participants to read the "What?" and the "Where?" excerpts in silence. On newsprint, list the information from the sidebar about God's threefold response to Moses' question about God's identity. Add to the information the threefold progression from the "Where?" excerpt (God as Supreme Being, as one who acts in human history, and as one who is in relationship with Israel). Refer participants to the sidebar. Discuss:

✧ What is meant by the statement that God's three-step identification of Godself is God's way of joining in the common refrain of "Here I Am"?

✧ What aspects of God's nature remain a mystery to Moses in this narrative, and to you?

Ask the group to read the "Now What?" excerpt. Invite adults to discuss how they respond to the ambiguity that exists in relating to a Holy One who is so far beyond our ability to define. Ask:

✧ How has God continued to reveal Godself to us?

To lead into Responding, ask the group to read the "So What?" excerpt and reflect in silence on the four questions posed there.

**EASY
PREP**

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

- 1. Saying Yes and No** In evaluating old and current ways of being disciples, adults can begin to discern what new ways God may be calling your congregation. Distribute paper and pens and ask adults to answer the four questions in the “So What?” excerpt with your congregation in mind. Then discuss what old and current ways of doing things they believe your church is being called to let go of. Record responses on newsprint, encouraging the group to avoid debating or passing judgment on the ideas. Do the same for new directions your congregation may be being called to embrace. Plan to give the ideas to your pastor or governing board.
- 2. A Sign of God’s Presence** An image of the enduring flame can serve as a reminder of both the mystery and the affirmation of the presence of the Holy One. Give participants sheets of white paper and yellow, orange, and red tissue paper. They can tear flame shapes from the tissue paper, place them on the white paper, and lightly paint over the tissue with white glue mixture, overlapping the tissue flames. Encourage participants to use the flames to center their prayer time just as they might a lit candle.
- 3. Create a Word Cloud of the Text** Creating a word picture of portions of the focus scripture can offer a new avenue into encountering the holy in the text. Invite adults to read Exodus 3:1–15 silently again, identifying words and phrases that seem to jump out or catch their attention. Have them jot these down. Show them the examples you downloaded. If adults have smartphones, they can go to worditout.com and follow the online directions. Make group or individual word clouds using the program and save to print later.

For a low-tech version, have adults jot down words or phrases from the text that are significant to them. Give each person a sheet of newsprint and colored markers and invite them to make a word cloud by printing or writing the words on the sheet in any pattern, shape, or color they like. Invite adults to view each one in silent reflection. Display them where they can be seen by members of the congregation.

CLOSING

Sing “Here I Am, Lord” or read the words as a poem, with participants taking turns reading stanzas and everyone reading the refrain.

Enter a time of prayer, inviting participants to consider in what ways their interactions have been holy ground for them today. Ask those who wish to do so to respond to the following: “Today, I was standing on holy ground when . . .”

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for the next session, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

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A Dialogue between Moses and the Holy One



Moses:

Moses! Moses!

Here I am.



God:

Don't come any closer. Take off your sandals—the ground where you are standing is holy.

I am the God who was worshiped by your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

I have seen how my people are suffering as slaves in Egypt, and I have heard them beg for my help because of the way they are being mistreated. I feel sorry for them, and I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians.

I will bring my people out of Egypt into a country where there is good land, rich with milk and honey. I will give them the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live. My people have begged for my help, and I have seen how cruel the Egyptians are to them. Now go to the king! I am sending you to lead my people out of his country.



Moses:

Who am I to go to the king and lead your people out of Egypt?



God:

I will be with you. And you will know that I am the one who sent you, when you worship me on this mountain after you have led my people out of Egypt.



Moses:

I will tell the people of Israel that the God their ancestors worshiped has sent me to them. But what should I say, if they ask me your name?



God:

I am the eternal God. So tell them that the Lord, whose name is "I Am," has sent you. This is my name forever, and it is the name that people must use from now on.

This is my name forever, and this is my title for all generations.

Based on Exodus 3:4c–15