

# “Living Your Okayest Life: But What If I’m Not Made of the Right Stuff?”

Series: *Living Your Okayest Life*  
Scripture: Exodus 4:1-13  
Rev. Pen Peery  
February 2, 2025



I am reading from the fourth chapter of Exodus. This is part of the story of God calling Moses. You might remember that God appears to Moses in a burning bush. That happens in the chapter before the words I will read today. From the burning bush, God asked Moses to lead God’s people out of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land.

You also might remember that Moses was a little apprehensive about what God had asked him to do. Moses’s first question in the face of this awesome responsibility is to ask what he should call the God who sent him to deliver God’s people – God tells Moses that God’s name is I AM.

In today’s Scripture, Moses starts to reveal a bit more about his reluctance. I am reading the first thirteen verses of the fourth chapter. Listen with me for the word of God...

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Then Moses answered, ‘But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, “The Lord did not appear to you.”’ The Lord said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ He said, ‘A staff.’ And he said, ‘Throw it on the ground.’ So he threw the staff on the ground, and it became a snake; and Moses drew back from it. Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Reach out your hand, and seize it by the tail’—so he reached out his hand and grasped it, and it became a staff in his hand— ‘so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.’

Again, the Lord said to him, ‘Put your hand inside your cloak.’ He put his hand into his cloak; and when he took it out, his hand was leprous, as white as snow. Then God said, ‘Put your hand back into your cloak’—so he put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored like the rest of his body— ‘If they will not believe you or heed the first sign, they may believe the second sign. If they will not believe even these two signs or heed you, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.’

But Moses said to the Lord, ‘O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.’ But he said, ‘O my Lord, please send someone else.’

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Let me first say that I know we’re talking about Moses.  
But we’re not really just talking about Moses.

My guess is that – on a human-level – you may identify with the way Moses rolls out his excuses to God.

First – in the chapter before I started reading today – Moses says he needs some *clarification*. It’s not an excuse, per se, but a stall tactic. “Before I say yes, I need a *little more information* God. What am I to say if the

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people ask me who you are?” God gives Moses his answer to that – *I AM WHO I AM, tell the people that I AM sent you.*

Second – in today’s passage – Moses acknowledges a little *self-doubt*. “What if people don’t listen to me, or don’t believe that you, the Lord of all, actually appeared to me?” God responds to that, too, letting Moses practice two nifty tricks, and describing a very gross third trick that Moses could use if the first two don’t work.

Finally – Moses gets to the heart of the matter. The real issue is less about needing more information or worrying about whether or not people will believe him. The real issue is personal. **It is physical.** It’s about the way his brain connects to the muscles in and around his mouth. Moses is “slow of speech and slow of tongue.” I imagine Moses sharing that news in a wearied voice. Being slow of speech and slow of tongue is likely something Moses has been carrying around with him a long time...maybe all of his life.

Now – I want to be clear – I don’t have any secret knowledge of what was going on in Moses’s head. I can’t tell you with certainty that this last excuse about his perceived physical deficiency or shortcoming was – in fact – the real...or most pronounced hang-up for Moses. I’ve not read any scholarship that would suggest that.

All I am going on to make this assumption is my own lived experience. And what I know is that it is hard to talk about our physical insecurities. It can be embarrassing. And it can **absolutely** be a reason why we want to avoid saying yes to anything that would put us in the limelight. I know from experience that it is *much* easier to lean into other excuses about why we can’t do something than to admit that what is really holding us back is the fact that we aren’t comfortable with who we are and how we appear.

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You know what we don’t talk a lot about in church?  
Our bodies. The physical parts of ourselves.

Maybe it’s because we’re polite.

Maybe it’s because we’re southern.

Maybe it’s because we have PTSD after attending “those classes” in the church as an elementary school aged kid, or attending “those classes” with our kids.

But I’m aware that we don’t talk a lot about bodies in church.

Oh, we pray for people when they are sick. We ask God to heal diseases. We focus a lot of our attention in church on our brains...trying to **understand** God and our faith, trying to **learn** and **think** about how to best live out our faith in the world. All of that is kind-of connected to the physical. But rarely do we talk about the very thing that we all carry with us wherever we go.

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When I was in seminary 25 years ago, we had a worship professor who decided that we needed to spend more time in our chapel services talking about God’s gift of our bodies. There was a week-long focus in chapel titled “Good is the Flesh.” “Good is the Flesh.” It even came with hand motions. I don’t know if I have ever been more uncomfortable in my entire life. I could not tell you one thing about any of those services...except that, 25 years later, I am still relieved that they are over.

If you are sitting in the pew or at home and are worried that this sermon is going to be like *that*...take a deep breath.

And...while you are breathing – in the privacy of your mind – consider your own body. Consider the way you have been made. How you...work. How life has shaped and impacted your body. How your body has benefitted you. How your body has disappointed you. The amazing things your body has enabled you to do. The ways your body limits you from doing things you’d hoped to do. What you appreciate about your body. What you wish were different.

I’ve preached a sermon or two in my career and I don’t think I have ever asked a congregation to consider these things before. I don’t think I ever really considered how not talking about these things ignores a huge part of our lived experience as human beings. Namely: the reality that our relationship to our bodies probably occupies and impacts a lot more of our day-to-day lives than we think.

Our weight. Our height. The proportion of weight and height together. How well we can see and hear. Our mobility. Our complexion. Being follicly challenged. How our voices sound. Our accent. Our sexual orientation. Our gender. The shape and size of our eyes...and ears...and noses. The way we sneeze. The grace – or lack of grace – with which we dance. Our athletic ability. (This is a list that could keep going for a long time...)

We are those things...we carry them around with us in our bodies wherever we go. And accompanying who we are is that insidious thought of who we should be...and what we should look like...and sound like...and who we should be attracted to...and how we should be able to move...we carry that stuff around with us wherever we go, too: the myth of perfection – shaped by our culture, and our insecurities, and the memory of the bodies we used to have, and – for some of us – the unfair and unrealistic expectations of friends and family and partners.

The distance between who we are and what our image of perfection suggests we ought to be – when it comes to our bodies...and the physical parts of ourselves...that can be a space that is filled with lots of pain, and struggle, and shame, and loneliness...it can be a dangerous space – especially if we don’t talk about it.

Our lives are saturated with the pressure to close that distance in pursuit of bodily perfection. Scroll on your smart phone. Turn on the television. Take a glance at a billboard. Notice how much money is in the weight loss industry. Talk to a teenager – especially a teenaged girl – about what messages they glean about their bodies from the world around them. The pressure is real. And the perfect is elusive...it always changes...it’s never attainable...even for people that we imagine to have perfect bodies.

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In some ways, it is absurd to think that something as flimsy as faith and the dusty wisdom of stories in the Bible could challenge the power of what our culture has wrought when it comes to painting a picture of bodily perfection...and constantly reinforcing our pursuit of it.

But in another way, maybe we can remember that it is here...in the context of our faith and with the help of the Scripture...it is here that we can claim the truth: That we worship the creator God. The God who took dust from the ground and breathed into it life. Who shapes and molds and gifts us with bodies – not that feature imperfection, but that reflect something of God’s own image. A God who delights in us – and our bodies – just as they are.

And that God invites real human beings to join in the work of ministry in the world.

People like Moses – who stammered and stuttered and didn’t think he could speak for God.  
People like Sarah – who thought she was too old and too barren to bear a child of promise.  
People like Mary – who thought she was too young to be pregnant with a Savior.  
People like Bartimaeus – who was blind.  
People like Samson – who walked with a limp.  
People like Legion – who struggled with mental illness.  
People like you.  
People like me.

So take a deep breath.  
Inhale the gift of life that God has given you to live in the body that is yours.  
Exhale the myth of perfection that we carry around and that gets in our – and God’s – way.

And remember that you belong – every part and aspect of you – to the God who called that which had been created...very good.

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In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.