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The Sandals



“Do not come any closer,” God said.

“Take off your sandals, for the place
where you are standing is
holy ground” (*Exodus 3:5*).

☞ I stumbled into the divine romance as a young mother. I'll never forget where it started: the side of my bathtub behind a locked bathroom door. It was the only place I could find some reprieve from my energized toddler. Leaving him to the care of my husband, I simply plopped myself onto the side of the bathtub and said, "God, I really want to see you move in my life."

I would love to tell you that I had visions of shining angels or that God's voice boomed from behind the shower curtain. But nothing so grandiose happened. So many times our journey with God happens just like that—in the ordinary. My father recently told me, "We would really be in trouble if God met us only Sunday in church. But He meets us every day in all kinds of situations. I don't know how many miles I've driven, crying so hard I could hardly see, because God's presence was so strong." As God met Moses on the job and my dad behind the wheel of a truck, so He met me, a young woman who was hungry for Him. So I simply listened for the voice of God within my heart and began the quiet journey of romancing the Lord.

I had been in the church my whole life, spent several years as a pastor's child, and had been taught all the stories of God's miraculous power. I knew all the terminology, doctrine, and theology. I was a devout Christian who did everything in my power to please the Lord and to live a holy life.

I had held all sorts of offices in the church and enjoyed this service to the King. Yet still I knew there must be more.

In my heart I began to think, *If all this stuff in the Bible is really true, then I want to see God's activity in my life on a powerful level as well.* So I simply asked God to start moving in my life. I am living proof that anytime someone simply sits and waits on God, He will move in a mighty way. I have come to firmly believe that God is waiting on us to recognize His holiness for what it is—to the point that we fall silent and ask Him to reveal himself on a deeper level.

The story of Moses' encounter with the burning bush is so typical of the way God desires to encounter us. Scripture states that Moses was taking care of business as usual. He was on the job, tending his father-in-law's flock when

The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Ja-

cob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. . . . Then Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (*Exodus 3:2-6, 13-14, NASB*).

Anyone who is familiar with the area Moses was in will tell you that burning bushes are not uncommon. The desert gets so hot and the terrain is so dry that certain bushes spontaneously combust. A man of the desert, Moses would have known this. But what was different about this bush was that it was burning and not being consumed by the fire. This unique situation caught Moses’ attention to the point that he went to investigate. The most pivotal part of this whole story is that only when Moses turned aside did God speak to him.

The story of the burning bush holds so many images that are reality in our lives. As Christians, we hold a precious marvel that is just as miraculous as the burning bush—Jesus Christ. Born of a virgin, He became the living sacrifice for our sins. Most Old Testament scholars agree that when the angel of the Lord appears in Scripture, He is the pre-incarnate Christ (Jesus before His conception as a human being). Just as the fire in the bush needed no fuel to maintain its

flame, so the sinless Son of God was not bound by normal methods of procreation when He was conceived in a virgin's womb. So the flame that needed no fuel is a symbolic representation for the God-Man, Jesus, who existed before humans were even formed.

Most Christians will readily say they want God to speak to them. They even long to hear His voice. But many times we fail to take the time to do what Moses did—turn aside to look upon the holy presence of a holy God. Only when we take those steps toward God and pause will He speak to us. According to Sandra D. Wilson, “In our relationship with God, the problem isn’t that he doesn’t speak; it’s that we are often unwilling to listen.”¹ Oswald Chambers agrees: “Why are we so terrified lest God should speak to us? Because we know that if God does speak, either the thing must be done or we must tell God we will not obey Him.”²

Notice that God manifested His presence through a fire and waited. The Lord didn’t scream out at Moses as he passed. He waited until Moses did a re-take and began to approach the bush before He started communicating. Imagine how Moses’ life would have been different if he had merely noticed the bush at a glance. What would have happened if he had shrugged off the bush as just another dried-up desert plant that had spontaneously combusted? Imagine how his destiny might have changed if he had never taken that first step toward the blazing bush. He may have gone about his

normal duties for many more years, never really discovering God's divine purpose for his life. He would have missed out on the parting of the Red Sea, the manna, and all the other miracles the Lord performed in freeing the Jews from bondage. But Moses didn't brush off the burning bush. He took the time to take a closer look.

Likewise, when we stop brushing off the story of salvation as just a tradition and take the time to step aside and look more closely at the great I Am, He will speak to us just as He did to Moses.

And so He began to speak to me—a young woman who cut my teeth on church pews and knew the Bible cover to cover. Like Moses, raised by a devout mother, I had learned the fundamentals of the faith. But knowing the fundamentals of the faith is not the same as stepping aside to gaze upon the fiery presence of a God so holy and so complete that He doesn't need physical fuel. Only when I paused to gaze did I begin a radical journey to discerning His voice, discovering His perfect will, and moving heaven with my prayers. According to J. I. Packer,

Meditation is a lost art today, and Christian people suffer grievously from their ignorance of the practice. Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, thinking over, and dwelling on and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy

thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God.³

Removing the Sandals

One of the first things that God told Moses to do was take off his sandals, because the place he stood was holy. The bush and surrounding terrain weren't holy within themselves. The presence of God was holy, and everything His presence touched radiated with His holiness.

God's asking Moses to remove his sandals holds multiple meanings. First, it was considered an act of respect in their culture to remove the shoes, as removing the hat to go indoors is today. So on a very basic level, God was telling Moses to show respect. However, once Moses took off his sandals, he wasn't going anywhere until he put them back on. The desert is no place for a barefoot stroll. Aside from the issue of respect, I believe God was also indicating that Moses was going to be there awhile. And so he was; the conversation with God spans nearly two chapters of the Bible and deals with a variety of issues.

So it is with us. When we turn aside to gaze upon the Lord, we must be willing to "take off our shoes" and commit time to listen to Him. Otherwise, we will hear only part of what God has to say to us and understand only a fraction of all He wants to show and teach us.

William W. Walford said it like this:

*Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer,
That calls me from a world of care
And bids me at my Father's throne
Make all my wants and wishes known!
In seasons of distress and grief
My soul has often found relief,
And oft escaped the tempter's snare,
By thy return, sweet hour of prayer.*

*Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer,
The joy I feel, the bliss I share,
Of those whose anxious spirits burn
With strong desires for thy return!
With such I hasten to the place
Where God, my Saviour, shows His face,
And gladly take my station there,
And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer.*

*Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer,
Thy wings shall my petition bear
To Him whose truth and faithfulness
Engage the waiting soul to bless;
And since He bids me seek His face,
Believe His word, and trust His grace,
I'll cast on Him my ev-'ry care,
And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer.⁴*

On another level, removing the sandals can be symbolic of God's asking us to take off or set aside anything that might come between us and Him . . . anything that would ultimately stop us from touching holy ground. This can come in the form of sin, coping mechanisms, attitudes, emotional or spiritual wounds, or bondage to the past. Sometimes these "sandals" are layered in our hearts. God asks us to take them off one at a time.

And so it was with me. God in His mercy asked me to relinquish my own "sandals" one layer at a time. He then began a process of healing and deliverance. With each layer I released, I was able to sense His presence all the more. And even today I am continually amazed at the new areas of freedom where He leads me.

However, my willingness to relinquish these "sandals" to God one at a time was superseded by a decision to release my will—the very essence of who I was—to the control and guidance of a holy creator. That point of surrender within our hearts is what drives our desire for a holy romance.

First Things First

According to C. S. Lewis, "You can't get second things by putting them first; you can get second things only by putting first things first."⁶ Stormie Omartian states, "Your relationship with the Lord must always have top priority over everything else. The Lord said, 'You shall have no other gods

*The beginning of power is
consciously opening our minds to
God and being receptive to
His presence, His Spirit,
His voice and His will.*

—Charles L. Allen⁵

before Me' (Exodus 20:3), and He means it. God wants your undivided attention. When you seek Him first every day and ask Him to help you put your life in order, He will do that."⁷ You may be thinking that you're so ready for God to put your life in order and you're eager to remove your own "sandals," but that initial desire will breed a conflict within your inner self if you have not fully surrendered that self to the lordship of Christ. According to David A. Seamands, "Self-surrender is the ultimate crisis because it is the all-inclusive crisis, encompassing all other crises of life. . . . Self-surrender is both a definite crisis and a never-ending process. When we talk about self-surrender we are talking about a commitment of your will to the lordship of Christ."⁸ Until we make this commitment, there is a struggle within our hearts over whether or not we will wholly commit our lives to the divine romance, and we often find ourselves caught in patterns of sin that seem to have control over us. The apostle Paul put it like this:

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is

not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing (*Romans 7:14-19*).

When the Lord told Moses to remove his sandals, there was no argument or struggle. He removed them without hesitation. Likewise, only when we place our will in the hands of the Lord are we willing to say as did Samuel, “Speak, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:10).

When I began my own journey, I came to such a crisis experience early in my teen years. However, I believe many times God asks us to renew that commitment as our knowledge of Him grows and we reach new levels of maturity. Different denominations have different names and descriptions for this experience. Some call it “making Him Lord of your life.” Some call it “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” Others refer to it as “the fullness of the Spirit.” Those like Oswald Chambers label it “sanctification.”

According to Chambers,

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly” (1 Thessalonians 5:23, *KJV*). When we pray to be sanctified, are we prepared to face the standard of these verses? We take the term sanctification much too lightly. Are we prepared for what sanctification will cost? It will cost an intense narrowing of all our interests on earth, and an immense broadening of all our interests in God. Sanctification means intense concentration on God’s point of view. . . . Are we prepared for God to do in us all that

He separated us for? . . . The reason some of us have not entered into the experience of sanctification is that we have not realized the meaning of sanctification from God's standpoint. Sanctification means being made one with Jesus so that the disposition that ruled Him will rule us. Are we prepared for what that will cost? It will cost everything that is not of God in us.⁹

And so it is that when we tell God we want more of Him, He in turn asks for all of us. So many people get to this point and balk. Thoughts of a divine romance hold such promise of reward that many are enticed to the process. But for every step we take toward God, He will ask us to remove or release yet another thing in our mind, heart, or spirit that hinders us from being progressively more like Him. Unfortunately, many want the reward of the holy romance without the sacrifice of self. According to Stormie Omartian, "Holiness means being sanctified by Jesus. Once we have received Jesus, we can't continue to live our old sinful lifestyle. Now that we have Him living in us and the Holy Spirit guiding us and transforming us, we have no excuse."¹⁰

Corrie ten Boom tells the story of a lady planning a meeting in a room in her house. She reported to her brother that the room was filled with women during the first meeting. The next week, she told him the room was fuller. The third week, she reported that the room was even fuller. Skeptical, the brother told her that was impossible. She replied that it was

*Prayer is an offering up
of our desires unto God
for things agreeable
to His will.*

—Westminster Shorter Catechism



certainly possible, because with each week that progressed, she removed pieces of furniture to make room for more ladies. Ten Boom goes on to say, “You can be filled with the Holy Spirit, and be still more filled. Perhaps some furniture must be moved out of your heart . . . ‘that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts’” (Ephesians 3:17, TLB).

As we develop the divine romance, He is guaranteed to ask us to release “furniture” so that He may fill us completely. Whatever He asks of you, do it. Dare to follow in Moses’ footsteps and turn aside to listen. When you hear, don’t hesitate to rush to the task of obedience. Your spiritual power and effectiveness hinges on your willingness to remove your “furniture,” your “sandals”—and yourself.