

Fire Away

Why God's Holiness is Better Than Your High Scores

January 24, 2016 // Trevor Atwood // Exodus 3 // ROBOTS

Most of us are bored. We hate to admit it. But we are. The top 8 most downloaded paid apps on iTunes are all games. In fact, the video game industry THIS year will bring in over \$111 BILLION dollars worldwide. Because we're bored. And when I say bored, I'm not talking about not having enough to do. We have plenty to do. We are the busiest people in the history of the world. So if boredom isn't a lack of busyness, let me define what I mean by bored.

Boredom is the absence of mission.

Think about it. You can be doing a million things and still be bored. The problem is not that you don't have enough to do, it's that those things aren't really connected to anything with an ULTIMATE GOAL.

That's why so many of us love video games. They give us a goal. They give us a mission, but it's a mission without any real risk. You can be a race car driver, an assassin, a fighter pilot, an angry bird and there is absolutely no threat to your well being, no risk. No REAL adventure.

In Ray Bradbury's science fiction novel, **Fahrenheit 451**, which was written in 1951 and remains one of my all time favorite books, it won't be the first time I mention it in this series.

See, in Fahrenheit 451, the country is obsessed with entertainment. The walls are all televisions. Everyone is obsessed with being happy and ignoring the pain and hurt in the world, and the firemen don't put out fires, they start them. The firemen in Bradbury's story burn books. Because books have dangerous ideas in them. Ideas that move people to a mission. See, people are docile if you can just entertain them, so it's television and games for everyone.

But strangely, no one is happy. They are just kind of existing. Meanwhile, there is a war threatening to destroy them all but no one can look up from their devices to see it coming, and no one wants to answer the call to fight.

Now, 65 years later, we all have televisions the size of walls. And we can all binge on entertainment. We can carry movies in our pockets, and there is never a second you have to go without the ability to set a high score or get to the next level on your latest video game app addiction. But strangely, we're missing something. About GOD himself.

Listen, if you are bored, you need something that no Netflix series, no video game, no addictive app can offer you.

You need a mission. A real mission.

The cure for boredom is to be absolutely sure that you are caught up in something that is bigger than you. Something that you can't ever really fully grasp the magnitude of, but at the same time to know that you are playing a vital role in the way the mission is executed. You aren't just observing, you are participating. You need a mission with a cosmic goal, and an opportunity to get your hands dirty. You are created FOR that mission, and that is exactly what God is inviting you into.

Here we Go.

Exodus 3:1-8a

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, ...

9-14

And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I am who I am.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I am has sent me to you.’”

18-22

And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.’ But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.”

Before you ever understand the mission that cures your boredom, you have to see that God is not boring. There are two things that God does here with Moses that show exactly why (if you have really encountered God) you should never be bored.

One is what God calls himself. The other is how God shows himself. He calls himself I AM, and he shows himself as fire.

God truly is like fire. Until you see him as that, you’ll likely look to cure your boredom with technology, instead of ever seeing the mission for which he has set you apart. So today, I want you to see three ways God is like fire.

1) Like Fire is dangerous and attractive, God is Holy.

When you see a fire, you are drawn to it. But if you get too close, it burns you. If you fall into it, you die. Yet, you still want to see it up close. There is something about fire that you can stare into for hours. It’s attractive, but it’s dangerous. Now, look back at our story.

Moses was bored. He was busy, but he was bored. Moses, in a lot of ways, is not really at the apex of his life. In fact, you might say his life took a major detour. See, though he was a Hebrew, he had been adopted by an Egyptian king’s daughter. He was a prince. He had money, authority. Power. Position. But, in an attempt to fight against injustice, he murdered an Egyptian. So he had to run for his life. And he ended up a sheep herder. A very bored sheep herder in the middle of the desert. Every day, he walked his sheep around. Every day he had responsibilities to fill. He didn’t lack for stuff to do. But he knew what might have been. He used to be a prince for Pete’s sake.

So, it's odd here, that it is another kind of detour that is going to get his life back on track. That is going to completely change who Moses is and what Moses does. In verses 2-3, Moses sees this fire, and it's the exact kind of fire we want. It has all of its attractive qualities, heat and light, but for some reason, this fire doesn't burn up what it touches.

It's all the attractiveness without the danger.

This is what changes Moses' course. It detours him. It makes him leave his boring busyness to investigate something incredible.

But as he approaches in verses 5-6, God himself calls out from the bush and tells him to stop. God says, "I AM dangerous" He says "Take off your shoes, this is holy ground!" and then Moses hides his face. Listen, we often hear that God is holy and are put off by that, because we have a negative concept of holiness.

When we hear holy we think "pretentious" We think fake. Right? You ever called anybody "holier than thou"? But listen, the reason holiness is so off-putting to us, the reason holiness sounds so pretentious or less than authentic, is because you and I are anything but holy. So when we look at someone that claims to be holy, we think "No you're not. I bet I could point out a thousand flaws about you"

But God is different. He is other. That's what holy means. Different. Better. Set apart. GOD is unlike us. And his holiness is what makes him dangerous at the same time beautiful. God's holiness is attractive to us because it's what we want to be. Right? We want to be better. We want what is broken to be fixed. Where we are bad, we want to be good. Where we are ugly, we want to be beautiful. Where we are ordinary, we want to be extraordinary. So when we see that God is everything we aren't, we are drawn to him. We want to get closer to God.

But God's holiness is like a fire. It's attractive, but it's dangerous. What happens when you put something that is not fire, into a fire. The fire breaks it apart. Melts it. It turns it to ashes. This is why God tells Moses to stop. God's holiness mixed with your sin will melt you. It will kill you. It's all over the Bible. Whenever impure humanity gets close to the pure God, the God who is like fire always purifies. And what's left is ashes.

God is like the Grand Canyon. When you go to the Grand Canyon, you want to get as close as you can, because of the sheer grandeur of the place, but you know, the closer you get to the edge, the more your life is in danger. The Grand Canyon is attractive, but it's dangerous. No one goes to the Grand Canyon and runs as fast as they can and then yells "Cannon BALL" as they try to jump from the top down to the Colorado river.

When you see God, as the Bible presents him, you are taken by his grandeur and beauty, the whole idea of who he is. But you dare not flippantly cannonball yourself at him. Every time you stand next to a raging fire, when you stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon, you don't only realize something about those things., you also are faced with some hard realities about yourself.

Staring into a fire, you know that you can't go in. You know your skin, your body is too weak to stand up against fire. You realize you are inadequate to handle fire. Fire, in a very real sense, must humble you.

At the edge of the Canyon, you know you are small. It's impossible (or perhaps insane) to stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon and yell "Look how awesome I am!" If you did, you are a fool. Nobody goes to the Grand Canyon to see you!

This is why there can be no such thing as a bored Christian. God is too dangerous and attractive to be bored. If you are bored with God, you haven't yet seen who he is.

But, so many of us are bored. We spend half our days with our faces in some app that acts like a window into a different world, because we don't like the life God has put us in. We don't to be anywhere other than where he has called us.

If Moses would have had Angry Birds on his phone, do you realize he could have walked right by the Burning Bush and totally missed this encounter with God who was calling him into this dangerous but beautiful mission.

Here's why being bored with God is so bad: If you don't see God's holiness, if you don't see he is both attractive and dangerous, you become very complacent. Because when you lose a sense of who he really is, you lose sight of who you really are. You begin to make God in your image. God becomes smaller to you. And you become bigger in your own eyes. You think less of yourself as a sinner, and become more perturbed, even angry at God for not doing things your way. You begin to tell yourself what you deserve. You start to question suffering and pain, asking God how he could do something like this to you. Meanwhile, you completely overlook every good grace he's given you, like the ability to breathe, and think, and eat.

You aren't grateful. You're entitled. Because as you shrink God, and magnify yourself, you think God exists for you. You think you can saddle up fire and ride it. You think the Grand Canyon is your swimming pool, and, ironically, the more you think God is bound to do your bidding, the less attractive he becomes.

Nobody goes to the zoo to see a dachshund. You go to see the tiger. Because the tiger can rip your face off. When you lose God's holiness, when you change God into a docile and benevolent grandpa that only affirms you, you also lose his beauty.

If the god you serve isn't dangerous, constantly offending you, and making you rework and rethink your own view of the world and yourself, if you don't feel small in his presence, you've forgotten his holiness. You have tamed him. And it won't be long before you find yourself looking at dachshunds at the zoo. In fact, you'll probably download the app for it.

Nobody would visit the grand canyon if it was just a kiddie pool. And Moses would never have been re-routed out of his boring life if it was just a bush. Without God's holiness, without his fire, Moses never gets a mission. God is dangerous and attractive and you don't want him any other way.

I don't know why you go to church. I don't why you read the Bible. But I hope its to encounter and experience how beautifully dangerous God is. To see his holiness and shudder. And I hope that drives you to show off his holiness in your life. So that more and more people will stop yelling "I'm AWESOME" at the edge of the Grand Canyon.

See, The more you show off a very dangerous and attractive God, the more people will say like Moses, "I'll detour my life to see more of this great sight."

Listen, this day is going to disappear like an old video game. But if the word of God begins to take root in your life in such a way that people see the attractive danger of God's holiness in your life, well then you've got a real mission on your hands.

See, with the Bible, the story of the Holy God, it's the opposite of Fahrenheit 451. You don't set the books on fire, the book sets you on fire with a holy mission.

Imagine if this story ended after verse 6. with Moses paralyzed, laying face down on the ground. Wanting to get closer, but knowing if he takes another step it could mean certain death. What if Exodus just ended right there? Moses would have detoured, but he would have been paralyzed. There would be no mission. There would be no action. Does God really reveal himself to Moses just so Moses will lay down and hide his face? Just so Moses has a personal experience? No! Moses' encounter with God was a part of the rescue mission of hundreds of thousands of slaves.

So instead of just shock and awe, God makes a way for Moses to become like the burning bush. On fire, but not burned up. Close to God but not dead. God makes a way for Moses to stay on holy ground and then he makes his life really interesting with a mission, and he does it because God is like fire in another way.

2) Like Fire is intimate and life-giving, God is Love.

Ok, first, don't make intimate a feminine word. This is not just a section in Target. Don't throw that word away. Because guys, as much as the ladies, maybe even more, can appreciate the way fire brings intimacy.

Anybody ever been camping before? What happens when the fire gets going? Everybody comes around, right? And where do you share stories? Where you do open up about your life? Where do tell the other guys what you're afraid of and excited about? You do it around the fire.

Fire, for millennia, has drawn people close. It's been a symbol of coziness, intimacy, warmth. I can't even say the word "campfire" without you thinking "friends". Not only that, the warmth from a fire can save your life. Imagine being caught out in blinding snow storm. You trudge on for hours looking for shelter, but you can't find any. And then, on the horizon you see a little cabin. Smoke billowing out of the chimney and the soft light of a fire in the fireplace. Once you figure out you aren't in a Thomas Kincaid painting, you get really excited. Why? Because you know you'll be saved by the heat.

The great tension in all of our lives is that we want to be close to God, but we can't. It's that we want to dive into the Grand Canyon of God's holiness, his otherness, his bigness, but when we go to jump we realize either that we can't get close to him because of our imperfection or we convince ourselves that he's just a kiddie pool so we lose interest.

God has made a way for you get close, because he loves you. He wants you to know him intimately. In love, He has made a way, to transform you so that his presence won't kill you, instead, like a fire to a lost and frozen wanderer, it will save you. But he doesn't compromise. He has not made himself less holy so you can stand him. He doesn't make the fire less hot. The very dangerous God doesn't change himself, he changes you, because he loves you.

Look in verses 7 and 8. When God talks about the rescue of his people, he talks in terms of empathy. In verse 7, he says He hears his people. He says he knows their suffering, and that he will come down and deliver them up. This is astounding. This Grand Canyon of a God. This all consuming fire of a holy God...LISTENS.

God is intimate with his people. He's close and he's empathetic. Somehow, God knows your suffering and he's very interested in delivering you from it.

Look, sometimes we think God isn't listening because we are trying to pray away the very detour he is putting in our lives to save us. Do you think Moses really wanted to leave his royal position in Egypt to go herd sheep in the desert? Of course not. But God left him out there for years before he detoured him again. Just because you have to wait on God doesn't mean that he isn't inviting you into his mission. Often, throughout the Bible, there is a period of waiting, a detour, before God fully uses a person the way he wants to.

Moses wandered the desert. David was anointed as king when he was a kid, but had to hide in caves on the run from Saul for years until he finally came to the throne. And what can you tell me about Jesus' first 30 years? Hardly a thing. Because Jesus was probably just hammering nails and digging splinters out of his hand until he finally started his ministry 3 years before he died. The Apostle Paul had a radical life-changing encounter with God and then disappeared into the desert for 3 years to train. Israel waited in slavery 400 years and then another 40 in the desert. And God doesn't say "What, oh sorry, I had my headphones in." No, all along he has heard them. Hurt with them. All along he has been working a plan to save them from their oppressors and save them to this promised land. All along he's been an intimate and life-giving fire, getting them ready for a cosmic mission.

Just because your life seems detoured, doesn't mean that God is not close, and it doesn't mean he's not working a life-giving plan. He's not setting you up to be bored, he's calling you to faith. See, faith is trusting that God is doing exactly what you would do if you knew everything he knew. But, you're not God. You don't know what he knows. So you have to trust that he hears you.

Listen, God wants you close to him. He also wants you alive. The great dilemma you face in your life is that there is no life apart from God, but he is too holy to get close to. And that is where the angel comes in. Did you notice him in verse 2? Inside this burning bush that isn't consumed is an angel? But this isn't just any angel. This is what the Bible calls repeatedly "The angel of the LORD". Now, there are lots of places in the Bible where angels show up. And sometimes, people fall on their face and start worshipping. But when those angels are worshipped, they quickly correct their worshippers. They'll say "Whoa. Don't worship me. I'm not God. I just have a message from God." But, whenever this "angel of the LORD" shows up and people fall down and worship, he doesn't correct them. In fact, sometimes you aren't sure if the angel is talking or if God is talking. Like in this passage, it opens with this angel in the bush, but then the rest of the passage is the voice of God.

See, The Angel is a mediator.

Somehow, this angel of the LORD makes the very dangerous God, safe. He makes a God that is set apart from humanity, personal. He makes the God that is high above people, descend, so he can be present with them.

Who is this angel? Who is this mediator? Well, did you see what God calls himself here in verse 14? Moses asks God for his name because when he goes to Pharaoh he wants to be able to say who sent him. And God, the Angel of the LORD says "I AM" My name is "I AM" "I am who I am." Holy. Beyond comparison. Independent. Unfathomable. But, when God says to call him "I am". He is also saying I AM with you.

Now, centuries later, someone else says "I AM" in John 8:58

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

Jesus is the Great I AM. He is the mediator. He is the angel in the bush. He is the way you can finally get close to God. He is the way you can have life-giving intimacy with God without diminishing his dangerous holiness at all. It's how the dangerous God becomes safe, but still beautiful. Jesus is how you ride a tiger. Hug a chainsaw. Cannonball into the Grand Canyon. Jesus is the reason you can be taken straight into the fire of God and not be burned.

Because Jesus took death for you. He was burned for you. He died on the cross instead of you. He was your mediator. Jesus is the way God came down to rescue you. He is the way that God knows your suffering. When you were tainted by sin, God came to you, died for you, so you could be close to him. When Jesus says "Before Abraham, I AM" He is claiming that all the attributes of God are in him. I AM WHO I AM. The Cross of Jesus shows you that God is holy. That he still takes your sin very seriously. DEADLY seriously. And don't you see? The only thing that mixes with fire is more fire. And the only thing that mixes with a righteous holy God is righteous holy people.

Jesus' perfect holy righteous life has been offered to you as a gift. So now when you put your faith in his life in your place, you are righteous. You become fire yourself. The Bible calls you Holy. Not because of what you have done, but because of what your mediator has done for you. He's lit you on fire, but you don't burn up. Jesus has died to bring you close and give you life. Christ lived and died and rose so that you could become a holy fire. Once you see and believe that Jesus is the only way you will ever get to the God you so desperately need, that's when boredom begins to fade. Because there is one more way God is like fire.

3) Like fire fuels explosive motion, God sends us with power.

Don't miss what is happening in this passage. Moses is given a mission. His boredom is cured. This mission to deliver Israel from slavery will define his life. You may not have known when you came in today that Moses was a sheep herder, but I bet you knew Moses as a great leader and deliverer. Moses' detour isn't his legacy, his mission is. While the detour was important for Moses to meet God, it was the mission that defined him.

Now, something else you may have noticed about Moses, he keeps whining about his limitations. In fact, in the next chapter he tells God that he is a lousy public speaker and maybe that's why he shouldn't go. But you know what God keeps telling him. **I am with you.** He keeps taking him back to the Grand Canyon and saying "Do you think anything is impossible for me?"

When God calls himself I AM, He is talking about his self-sufficiency. That he doesn't lack. He doesn't need. He owns everything. And now, now that Moses is connected to him, he has access to all those resources to accomplish the mission he's been sent on. Look at verses 19-20. God says "I already know you not only need my help, you need my power. You'll never do this without my hand. I'm not asking for your power, I'll supply that. I'm asking you to trust me. And I'm with you."

Every fear. Every excuse is overcome by the mystery that the holy, dangerous, beautiful God of the universe is right along side him. Look, nothing explodes without being lit. An engine doesn't combust, without a spark plug. Once the fire of God's judgment is taken from you and the fire of his love consumes you, that fire propels you. It fuels you to go on mission for him.

Remember Pentecost in Acts 2? What happened to the apostles right before they were sent out to proclaim the gospel in power? They got lit up. Tongues of fire over their heads before they spoke the gospel to every tongue, tribe and nation. See, God doesn't just save you from something. He saves you to something. He doesn't just come to Moses for a personal experience. He lights him on fire, burns his excuses and his boredom and sends him on a mission. That is exactly what he's done with you. And me. That is what he does with the church. God is a spiritual tornado. He never brings you in without sending you out. And he always equips you to do what he calls you to.

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

[that's I AM, that's I have all the resources in my control, all the power is mine, since you seen the fire keeps burning, that never runs out of fuel because of its self-sufficiency]

Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

See, to the church he says, "Make disciples, but do it knowing I AM with you." Every resource I have given you is to serve this mission. We, the church, are to be defined by dedicating everything we are to this, making disciples of all nations. We've been sent.

NOW Look how this chapter ends in Exodus 3:22. This is extraordinary. God tells Moses that when Israel leaves Egypt, that the Egyptians will be so eager for them to leave, that they'll give them their gold and silver and jewelry. You know what this will be used for? Years later, God will call Israel to build a temple for his glory. And this is exactly the stuff they will use to decorate it. See, even before Israel knew all of the mission, even before they knew how the resources would be used, God was providing for them. He was giving them the resources they needed for the mission. When God sends you on a mission, you will never lack what you need, because I AM, the self-sufficient God is with you.

Let me drive this home. We are the church, the rescued people of God, made holy and dangerous, so we are on mission. There is no other kind of church. If there is no mission, there is no church. There is only a bored group of people singing about a fire they wish they had. I'm talking about God lighting a group of people on fire that don't burn up and don't burn out but set this world on fire with the Love of Christ.

People are always God's plan A. He didn't go to Pharaoh and say "Hey, I'm God let 'em go". He went to Moses and said "I AM" Now go tell Pharaoh. I believe God has come to you and said "I'm using you". He's come to his church and said, "I want to use you. I'm calling you."

Will we bring excuses? Distract ourselves with our games, and apps, and TV binges? Or will we trust that the God who lacks nothing will give us exactly what we need to accomplish his mission?

Go. Make disciples. And behold. Jesus is with you even to the End of the Age. Let's light the world on fire.