

God in 3D
Seeing God at Work in Your Life and the World Around You
By Joey O'Connor

Chapter 1

Beware of Burning Bushes

Staring up at the golden Jesus, I did think it was a bit unusual they painted him gold and all. In many three-hour Good Friday services when the whole church went through the Stations of the Cross, I had it on good authority that before Jesus was nailed to the cross, he was actually whipped and beaten to a bloody pulp. I'd also been to a lot of churches and I saw with my own eyes many variations of the crucifixion theme. The Jesus I learned about in Sunday school wore no gold chains or rings. No bling on the King of Kings. So for some weird first-grade reason, at first glance, the golden crucified Jesus didn't make sense to me. I had this negative mental association with gold that dates back to the story of Moses. In Sunday school class, I'd heard of Moses going up the mountain to see God and bring back the 10 Commandments. Upon his arrival back down the mountain, Moses discovered the Israelites engaged in all manner of revelry, dancing and worshipping a golden calf. When I was a kid, I couldn't eat meat on Fridays (devoured lots of little fish-sticks) and though I had nothing personally against cows, I knew enough catechism to know God wasn't especially fond of golden calves, idol worship being bad and all. Seems the Israelites didn't get the memo.

This next part of the story is what I loved as a kid. Imagine the scene: The Israelites are partying like a bunch of frat boys. God sees all the commotion way before Moses does and threatens to destroy the whole lot of them, but Moses intervenes. Then,

when Moses arrives at the base of the mountain and sees what God already saw, he's now so disgusted with the Israelites that he smashes the 10 Commandments. He dumps the golden calf in the fire. Absolutely destroys the thing by pulverizing it into dust. Pours it into water and makes those idolatrous Israelites drink it. Not exactly protein powder nor a good way to start a long journey on the bad side of God. Makes you wonder if Moses ever just leaned on his staff next to a rock and muttered, "Should've never gone near that burning bush!"

Years earlier, Moses thought he was minding his own business, tending the sheep in Midian. When he led his father-in-law's flock into the wilderness near Horeb, the mountain of God, little did he know God was ready to mess with him. Though he had dual Egyptian/Israeli citizenship, after he smote the Egyptian task-master, Moses was Egyptian royalty on the run. If we were all playing dodge ball, Moses the murderer was the last guy I'd pick to be on my team. I'd pick his sheep first. Sheep don't kill, though Moses probably had it in him to be a very aggressive dodge ball player. Moses was the last guy you'd think God would choose for being His ambassador for a ten plague Egyptian Smote. He had absolutely no idea how God was ready to work in his life and the wild world around him. *If he only knew.*

When Moses saw the burning bush, he could have turned and walked away. But maybe he needed to warm up? Maybe this was one of those new clean-burning-eco-friendly-bushes that gave off no smoke? Or maybe after tending stubborn sheep for forty years, Moses was just plain bored and tired? Maybe he had prayed silent prayers to God asking for a change, wondering if this was it, tending sheep for the rest of his life?

I've seen many California wildfires, but I have yet to see a hillside of burning

sagebrush that doesn't get consumed? Who wouldn't be curious? My eyes were certainly drawn to the Golden Jesus hanging on the cross, so what adult or first-grader wouldn't be drawn to a burning bush that does not burn? By Hollywood's standards, burning bushes are a decidedly low-tech way for God to get Moses attention, but can't you see God gathering all the angels around Him with a playful wink, "Watch this!"

Whoosh! The bush ignites like a big beach bonfire and Moses first step in what became a very long and amazing journey began with these words,

*So Moses thought, 'I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.' When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am."
"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. (Exodus 3:3-6)*

Burning bushes are God's way of getting our attention by shining an undeniable light we can't ignore to draw us to the consuming fire of Who He is. In today's world, burning bushes come in all sorts of shapes, sizes and circumstances and they are God's way of whispering to our hearts to get our attention. And like Moses, who hid his face and was afraid to look at God, our initial reaction to hearing the voice of God is to run for the hills. We see all the grime on our sandals, but our hearts and lives have far more dirt than the dust on our feet. Moses saw a burning bush blazing in 3D glory and quickly found himself flicking off his flip-flops before the holiness of God. He was afraid to look at God, but God already saw right through him. Moses thought, "Murderer," yet God saw a man poised for a very important mission.

When God calls you and I, what is His purpose? What does He really want? Like any loving father, God wants many good things for His children. He has many fond

thoughts and desires in this grand adventure of life He has given us. But for now, very simply, God wants us to hear His voice of love, His whispers designed to woo us, to work His good purpose and pleasure in our life and in the world around us. To be in intimate relationship with God walking with Him and doing the work He has called us to. *To be and to do all whom we are created to be and do in Christ. Being and doing in Christ.*

This is the life God is calling us to. This is what He wants us to see.

When you and I begin to see how God works in our lives through His word, His people and the world around us, there's simply no turning back. Like Moses, when you encounter God and see Him begin to work in your life, your life is never the same. It can never be the same. There's no going back. When you get a glimpse of God and the myriad of amazing, mysterious ways He desires to work in your heart and the world around you, you are forever smitten with the intimate knowledge that you've arrived at a large gate that says, "The Point of No Return." When Jesus scratches that soul itch with his free invitation to a whole new way of life, it forever messes with you. "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Matthew 7:13)

Once you get a small taste of life on that narrow road, the love of God found in Christ Jesus, you know your soul has touched something eternal. When Jesus invites you to see and experience Him in ways you never thought possible, you set out on a journey of Moses-like mountaintop experiences of seeing God at work and the bitter disappointment of what it's like worshipping idols in the distant valleys of trying to live a life apart from God. Believe me, I've taken my share of Chicken Exits. Each and every

time I try to run and ignore the voice of God, Jesus has already beaten me to the emptiness of my illusions. And patiently, He waits for me. Inviting me. Calling me.

Jesus' words of invitation, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture," are not the sentimental Hallmark metaphors of some pasty Precious Moments ceramic savior suggesting we ought to at least try to live by the Golden Rule. No, they are the words of the Savior who burst onto the world scene under the cover of darkness and in the humble obscurity of a manger to rescue this broken world from the very real presence of sin and death. Jesus is the Gate and once you walk through that Gate, you will forever long to see God at work in your life and the world around you. Seeing God at work has an uncanny way of creating thirst in the soul. Again, it is God's way of messing with us.

By listening and responding to the voice of God, Moses had no idea what adventures lay ahead in walking with God. He had no map. No compass. No night vision goggles. No GPS. No Google Earth. Which is exactly the way God wanted it. For Moses to see God at work in His life and the world around him, he would need a whole new set of eyes. He would have to live without a map, trusting God to lead him in places he had yet to see.

I don't know about you, but I want to throw away all my maps of control, comfort, familiarity and safety. I am sick of searching for a balanced life. The only normal I know is the setting on my dryer. I don't want a balanced life. I want to be part of a far greater adventure. I want to be lashed to the mast. I want to burn bridges behind me so there is no possibility or hope of return. I want to run into burning bushes. And be consumed.

Once you've seen God at work and the world around you, you can never be the

same. Once you've truly "tasted and seen that the Lord is good," everything will pale by comparison. Once you crack open the doorway for Jesus, He forever messes with your life. If you want to see God work in your life, seeing begins with listening. Who we listen to will determine where we focus our eyes, what captures the affections of our heart and who we follow. And there are no formulas for following God. No quick fixes for the life of faith. No three-point sermons that will erase all the tension in our lives. Moses was far safer schlepping with the sheep, but had he ignored that burning bush, he would have second-guessed himself all the way to the grave, "I wonder what that burning bush was all about?"

It's only when Moses came closer, did he really begin to see and hear.

He had no idea how radiant his life was about to become.