



# Turning Points: Finding Your Identity

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## Introduction

The premise of this collection of thoughts—Turning Points—is firstly, that discipleship is not a linear experience. Rather it is often marked by moments. And some of these moments are so significant that they become a turning point that create change in discipleship.

Secondly, we can know that it is a turning point for biblical characters because we can see it resonate later. We can observe the impact.

And thirdly, the biblical turning points translate over time. They remain relevant and helpful in our own discipleship.

## Moses in Exodus

The events from Moses' life are recorded in the Torah. It's a gripping account. Grand incidents, incredible miracles, monumental challenges, scattered highlights, some triumphs, much tragedy.

This could make Moses seem beyond our reach, and even potentially an impractical touchpoint for our own discipleship. To focus only on Moses' deeds and the events that swell around him would be a mistake, for the Bible does much more than this. It carefully reveals a character that needed development over decades. A person who struggles with his own sense of self, and an individual who tenaciously clung to a few important ideas that mark what he values—and indeed who he is. The revelation of the man Moses, found in the pages of the Bible, shine a light on the very things that you too should tenaciously cling to. For the things that mattered to Moses still matter for the disciple today.

To appreciate Moses' *turning point* we need to start at the beginning. But first, a poem. I'm grateful to brother Andy Galbraith for pointing out this poem to me.

### Colors (Whitni Thomas)

*I grew up in a Yellow country*

*But my parents are Blue.*

*I'm Blue.*

*Or at least, that is what they told me.*

*But I play with the Yellows.*

*I went to school with the Yellows.*

*I spoke the Yellow language.*

*I even dressed and appeared to be Yellow.*

*Then I moved to the Blue land.*

*Now I go to school with the Blues.*

*I speak the Blue language.*

*I even dress and look Blue.*

*But deep down, inside me, something's Yellow.*

*I love the Blue country.*

*But my ways are tinted with Yellow.*

*When I am in the Blue land,*

*I want to be Yellow.*

*When I am in the Yellow land,*

*I want to be Blue.*

*Why can't I be both?*

*A place where I can be me.*

*A place where I can be green.*

*I just want to be green.*

## Third culture kid

“Third culture kid” is a term used to refer to children who were raised in a culture outside of their parents’ culture for a significant part of their development years. The experience of being a third culture kid is unique in that these individuals are moving between cultures before they have had the opportunity to fully develop their personal and cultural identity.

The first culture of children refers to the culture of the country from which the parents originated. The second culture refers to the culture in which the family currently resides. And the third culture refers to the amalgamation of these two cultures.

As you can imagine, being a third culture kid has both advantages and disadvantages. Advantages include having an expanded worldview, an interpersonal sensitivity to other cultures and acceptance of other cultures—what some would term cultural intelligence—and of course, high levels of adjustment. Disadvantages, or challenges, include confusion in regard to their loyalties or patriotism, and indeed their values—what some academics have described as an identity crisis—not being able to feel a sense of oneness with anyone, nationality or culture—therefore challenges in having a sense of belonging, challenges in developing the concept of a home, dysfunctional identity development.

Brother Andy (who shared that poem Colors) writes about this. By way of background, brother Andy grew up in India, the son of an Australian father and an Indian mother. He says, “I have a memory of being, I guess, around eight, sitting by the window in a car, looking out of the window at the sky, using my hands to cover everything else outside of my vision, then pretending I was in Australia.” In some way that reveals a struggle with identity, belonging, a sense of home.

## Moses – the 3rd culture kid

Now, Moses’ circumstances are similar to that of a third culture kid, but perhaps far more complex. If we just think about Exodus 2, there’s almost a staccato of stepping in and out of this cultural dilemma. In Exodus 2:1-2, we read of his Hebrew birth. In verses 3-6, then his Egyptian adoption. In 7-9, his mother is there nursing him. In verse 10 once weaned, his home is the foreign palace. But then of course he could look out of the palace and see his relatives at hard labor; maybe even some were his servants. And yet he’s also physically detached from his blood relatives and his nation in a foreign palace. And then, even in verse 9, we read that he’s given a

new name from his Egyptian stepmother—we don't even know his Hebrew birth name. Moses is given a new name, and we deduce from Acts 7, that he is trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was powerful in his words and deeds.

Now that is a complex situation for a child. For Moses, when it comes to being a third culture kid, when it comes to developing a personal identity, when it comes to having a sense of home or belonging, when it comes to just understanding who he is, then he had significant challenges. How would Moses identify himself? And who would he choose to be identified with? It seems that the writer of the letter to the Hebrews is well aware of this. The writer says,

*By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. (Heb 11:24-26)*

This first of three faithful moments identified in Moses' life is embedded in this idea of identity. He chose his identity in the people of God, though it meant consequences. Really it's our earliest insight into what this man is like. Well, before any grand event we have an insight into him. And he, of course, is not content with just a statement about his Hebrew ancestry and Hebrew connection. He takes it a step further. In Acts it says,

*But when he was about forty years old, it entered his mind to visit his fellow countrymen the Israelites. (Acts 7:23)*

This identity could not be removed or theoretical. At forty, he leaves the palace to visit his fellow countrymen, seeking some form of a stronger connection, or a fellowship with those he identified with. And perhaps rebellion was his intent, for it says in Acts,

*He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand (Acts 7:25)*

Let's just pause at that moment. Moses, at the age of 40, knew who he was. We should just appreciate that, acknowledge it. Belonging. Association. Community. Identity.

## Moses – identity lost

But that identity found, is soon in jeopardy—in what would appear to be only a 24 hour period. At the age of 40, he murders an Egyptian for mistreating one of the Hebrew brothers,

and then within 24 hours, he's back visiting the Hebrews. Again he steps in to settle a dispute, but this time between two Hebrews. I'd suggest that the result for Moses was crushing because it directly relates to his identity. They say, "Who made you a prince or a judge over us?" A statement of disassociation from Moses, and perhaps worse. They say, "Are you going to kill us too?" They saw Moses not only as disassociated from them, but indeed a threat to them.

His gesture of identity, his zeal for his people, even his acceptance of mistreatment by connecting with them, and his efforts in going to visit them, they come too little. Worse, those who he associates with reject him and are scared of him. His identity begins to unravel or fray. That day started with Moses certain of his identity in the Hebrews, and the day ends with Moses alienated from the Hebrews and on the run.

## Gershon

Now, if you're concerned that this discussion of identity feels a little bit like pop psychology or contrived logic leaps, then I think Moses has a clear statement for you. In Midian he marries Zipporah and soon has a boy. He names him Gershon, which means foreigner, sojourner, alien, or perhaps (more 2021), refugee. He confesses himself,

*I have been a sojourner in a foreign land. (Ex 2:22)*

Not just in Midian, but so too in Egypt. He'd been 80 years a refugee. Never home. Not belonging. The name is a window into his thinking.

Let's just pause now at the end of Exodus 2 with a picture of personal misery for Moses. He has no place. He has no purpose. He has no personal identity. This time there's no belonging. There's no association. There's no community. There's no identity.

## Identity truly found

I think it's important to realise the position that Moses finds himself in as we enter Exodus 3 for the episode of the burning bush is more than a convenient passage to discuss the name of God. Importantly—and perhaps primarily—it's a conversation between God and Moses. And if we focus on that aspect alone for a moment, we have the privilege of observing the way in which God reverses Moses' reality. Remember, at the beginning of the conversation Moses is a refugee without place, purpose, or personal identity.

Now before we walk into the conversation there's a caution here. It would be careless of me to over-simplify the notion of personal identity. I'm no psychologist nor philosopher nor academic. And I'm aware that subjects such as self identity and group identity are complex concepts that cannot be just neatly bent to fit this talk for my convenience. However, my limited understanding, my limited reading, on this subject confirms that having values, responsibilities, purpose—having a place—are significant contributors to self-identity.

And so to the conversation. It is God who says to Moses (note the first person),

*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, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 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. (Ex 3:7-9)*

This must have been fabulous for Moses to hear. The people who he had had his identity in, from a nation that had held them as slaves—the same nation he had fled from fear of his life—God is going to deliver them. He says that he would do it. But the conversation continues when God says,

*Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. (Ex 3:10)*

Moses protested immediately, doesn't he? Who am I?

*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt? (Ex 3:11)*

I think we should just break into the conversation at this moment to note a couple of things. God is addressing carefully some of the issues in Moses' life. Firstly, God is offering Moses a place. A good and a broad land. A land that flows with milk and honey, the promised land. No more a refugee, but soon to be a citizen of a land. Belonging. Home.

Secondly, God offers Moses a purpose. He's going to be the deliverer, the leader. Not just connected to the Hebrews. Not just sharing in their sufferings in a theoretical manner. But he was to become their deliverer.

And then it's interesting, I think, that God intentionally connects Moses to a people. He reminds him,

*I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.*  
(Ex 3:6)

## Moses' personal identity

So the conversation continues. But Moses is disconnected. There's no response of zeal or joy or purpose. In fact, he asks a rather disconnected question. He says, 'If the Israelites ask, "What is his name?" what shall I say?' It's an odd question. God's name was already known to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and indeed to the nation.

God's answer is superb. God actually provides two answers. There's one question and two answers. He doesn't answer the question immediately, he leaves that to the second answer. He has something to say to Moses first. To Moses, God says, "I am who I am." *Eyer Asher Eyer*.

Now this is not God just simply reiterating his name. Nor is it, of course, God providing us with material to take up volumes of academic discussion on the names and titles of the deity. It's an answer to Moses. It's for Moses. And it's personal...

God's name is a statement of certainty, surety, purpose, and conviction. It is an invitation to relationship. And in that, it is an invitation to identity.

God, from the bush, invites Moses to entwine his will with God's will, his purpose with God's purpose, his present with God, his future with God.

To be united with the I AM.

And to be connected with the I WILL BE.

To find his identity by relationship with God.

This isn't Moses receiving his marching orders, or his duties to perform. This is an invitation. This is a moment where God invites Moses to commit his identity with him.

And it is God's second answer that answers the actual question of Moses. God says, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

And so, just like Moses, your calling, your discipleship is not 'marching orders'. It's not a series of duties to perform. Like Moses, your call is one to developing your identity in God. It's a call to relationship, to pause at the highest good that there is and commit yourself to it.

We know by experience the clutter and the busyness of our Christian lives can distract us from this first and primary element of discipleship: God and you. Relationship. You and him. Your identity wrapped up and found in him.

It's interesting—and encouraging—that it is Paul who says in Philippians 3, “I count everything else in my life like rubbish,” and, “I am found in Christ.”

## Turning point

Moses' turning point is indeed the bush. It's his turn from a foreigner without a home, to being promised the land of milk and honey. Refugee to home. From a shepherd without purpose, to becoming the deliverer of God's people. From aimless wandering, to leading. And from having a poor, personal and cultural identity, to being invited to identify with—and relate to—the name and the purpose of God.

So we have landed upon an important turning point for Moses that is characterised by him appreciating and connecting to the name of God, the people of God, and the place of God. It's solid ground from this point forward.

## Lived evidence

As we said at the outset, our proposition is that we can be confident that an event is significant—a turning point—for a disciple (or for Moses in this instance) when it is evident in subsequent events or commentary in their life. So when we tune into this signature feature, we can't help but see this emphasis in Moses, in his words, in his poetry and song, in his writings—from this point forward.

In fact, almost all of the key events in his life from this point forward are marked by this idea of Name, People, and Place. Let me just quickly bounce you through some of these.

Exodus 15, the song of Moses and Miriam after crossing the Red Sea,

*Yahweh is his name. (Ex 15:3)*

*your people, O LORD, ... pass by whom you have purchased. (Ex 15:16)*

*You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode (Ex 15:17)*



Name. People. Place. In fact, in Exodus 15 is the first time that someone says that God is “my God,” and it’s Moses.

Deuteronomy 32, another song, this time at the end of Moses’ life, just before his death,

*For I will proclaim the name of the LORD (Dt 32:2)*

*But the LORD’S portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage. (Dt 32:9)*

Name. People. Place.

At the golden calf, another significant incident. I’ll paraphrase here. Moses says to God, “Remember how you swore by your own name, that Israel would be your people and that you would give them a land?” Name. People. Place.

And have you ever noticed that these three are actually connected in Deuteronomy 6? We turn to Deuteronomy 6 to read.

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. (Dt 6:4)*

but Moses continues and says, “teach your children the law,” and, “When you come into the land remain faithful.” So once again, the connection of the three. It is Name, People, Place.

Of course, throughout Deuteronomy there’s the repetition of the idea that God has chosen these people, not because they are righteous, but God has just chosen to have himself associated with them. A people holy to him, a treasured possession. The Name and the People are connected over and over in Deuteronomy.

So too, the Name and the Place. This constant repetition that they were going to be given a land by God, brought to a land by God, given a fruitful land land sworn to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And so the Name and the Place are connected.

Perhaps one of my favourites is soon after the burning Bush. Moses walks into Pharaoh’s palace. Does he say to Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord, God of Israel, let his people go”? No!

*Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go...’ (Ex 5:1)*

You can sense skin in the game in that statement. God and Moses speak as one. God’s people are Moses’ people. God’s purpose is Moses’ purpose. And Moses’ identity is found in God.

This is the thing about Moses. It’s the thing that makes him tick. The Name of God. The People of the Name. The Place of the Name. It starts at the burning bush. And it’s evident thereafter that his identity is found in these.

## Conclusion

You and I both know that personal identity is no pop idea or conceited construct. It matters. Ideas such as relationship, association, love, home, promise, hope, belonging, are all ideas that lay at the very heart of being a disciple.

Moses provides a simple, yet profound, litmus test for our own identities. Is your identity in the Name of God? Is it in the People of God? Is it in the Place of God? Are these the things that make up who you are, who you want to be, how you want to act, the things that you love most? Is it primary in your discipleship, primary to just who you are?

Your identity deserves deep consideration, nurture, thoughtfulness, intention. In fact, it's your personal touchpoint with Moses. You and Moses can be united in this same zeal. It's the place of connection between you and him. So much is it the place of connection, that one day you will come to Mount Zion, that Place, and to the city of the living God, that Place, the heavenly Jerusalem, that Place, and to enumerable angels in festal gathering, those People, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, those People, and to God, the Name, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, those People, and to Jesus, the Name, the mediator of a new covenant.

The Name. The People. The Place.

Moses is found in these. His identity is in these. And, yes, you too.