

# HANOVER INTERNATIONAL WORSHIP

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## Exodus 33:17-23 (English Standard Version)

17 And the Lord said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name."

18 Moses said, "Please show me your glory."

19 And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

20 But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."

21 And the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock,

22 and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.

23 Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

What kind of team members do you want for your congregation? What kind of staff, what kind of volunteers?

If we were to do a small survey right here and now, I am sure we would get a long wish list. What kind of team members? Well, open-minded, friendly, of course. Reaching out to people. Trustworthy.

We want pastors who can connect to the young people and who will visit the old.

We want preachers who are inspired and inspiring.

We want church elders who are respected in the congregation and who can get things moving.

We want musicians who are proficient at their instruments and who can make choirs thrive.

We want volunteers who can be role models for children and teenagers, who will be looked up to. That's what our wish list might look like.

But there's that other kind of team member that might give us a bit of a hard time. For a long time for instance our church could not imagine employing a disabled person.

A pastor in a wheelchair? Impossible.

A speech impaired youth minister? Inconceivable.

A Sunday school teacher with low self-esteem and, consequently, a low position in the parish pecking order? Nah, we don't want *her* to teach our children –

We want super team members.

We want a super staff and super volunteers.

We want alpha animals.

The "alpha animal" is a term from the behavioral sciences. It is the animal with the highest position in the flock or herd. The bellwether. The queen bee. The leader of the wolf pack. The top chicken in the pecking order.

I am sure you all remember those alpha animals from school. Those were the popular kids. The ones that everyone was eager to be friends with. The ones that were always at the center of things. The ones that were just bursting with self-esteem.

Yes, there are those in church too.

There are those super pastors. People will check the newspaper and say: Oh, *he* is preaching on Sunday. Let's go there.

There are alpha animals among pastors and staff and volunteers who will magically draw people and attract followers.

In our Old Testament reading today, we heard about one of God's staff members.

Moses. Was he one of those alpha males, the leader everyone wants to look up to and be near? The star among the people, God's favorite, and everybody's favorite?

It might seem that way. After all, Moses led a whole people out of slavery. He even stood up to Pharaoh, telling him to let his people go.

That is how we see Moses depicted by the great artists, like Michelangelo: a great, awe-inspiring leader. An alpha male.

Is that what Moses was like?

When Moses had his first encounter with God, when he saw that inexplicably burning bush, when he felt: Here, I am really close to God, when he received his call: Lead my people into freedom - what did Moses say?

Oh, no, Lord, I can't do that.

Really, I can't. I can't speak in front of people.

You know I can't. I even have a speech impairment.

Sound familiar?

It's *exactly* what I hear when I ask people:

How about you? Wouldn't you enjoy working with children? How about joining our Sunday school

team? How about volunteering as a small group teacher in confirmation class?

Oooh, no, I can't. Really, I can't. I can't speak in front of people.

Oh, you know, I do love children, but that – no, I can't do that. A whole group of children, and me in front of them? No.

Or maybe: You know, I am so busy. I would love to do it, but I really don't have the time.

Well, let me tell you, with these replies, you are in excellent company.

It's how Moses answered.

It's how the prophets answered.

It's how people throughout the Bible answered.

No, I can't.

Really, I don't think I can do that.

I am too young. I am too old.

What are the people going to say when they see me, with my (whatever it may be).

What are they going to say if I put myself out

there and stand out from the crowd?

No, really, I can't.

And now here is this Moses.

A man with some kind of a speech impairment.

And worse yet.

A man with guilt. With really bad guilt.

Moses had killed a man.

Well yeah, it was a slave driver, but nonetheless.

He had the death of a fellow human being to answer for.

That is the kind of person God calls into His service.

That is the kind of person God chooses as his staff, as his team member.

What is God thinking when he chooses people like that? Well, we'll never quite know, but I am sure he *is* thinking.

These alpha animals are always susceptible to one thing, and that is: ascribing their success to themselves.

It's *their* vibrant personality that attracts young

people into the congregation.

It's *their* brilliant rhetorics, *their* preaching talent, that draws people into their services.

It's *their* charisma that does it.

But that is not the point!

The point is that it's God who does it!

The point is attributing everything to God and not to yourself. The point is to give God the glory and the honor for what *he* has done.

To Moses, it is perfectly clear that God is the one who is leading his people out of Egypt.

Not himself. God.

Moses is no more than God's tool.

His representative. His messenger. His staff.

But the one who is actually doing the work is God. Not Moses.

Moses has always been in close touch with God. He goes into the holy tent on a regular basis and talks to God. He needs to be near God. He needs to feel and experience some of God's glory.

So that is exactly what he does when everything gets too difficult. When things get overwhelming.

He can't handle it any more, not all by himself.

So he asks God for help.

The burden of being God's staff member gets too heavy for Moses. The responsibility weighs him down.

And Moses wonders: Why am I the one who has to take all this? This can't be right. This can't be all for me to carry.

So Moses complains to God.

And God says: Look. Now you go and find 70 people to do your work with you. Have them share your workload.

So Moses goes and does just that.

God is not someone who says, "I need an alpha male to do all the work."

And church is not about a pastor who gets paid for doing the work, and the people sort of sit

there, expecting to be waited on hand and foot by the pastor.

Actually, we are not even talking about the difference between full-time church employees and volunteers. That is a modern concept and a modern development.

Even if it does sort of look like that in this story. Moses, God's full-time employee, and his 70 volunteers. But that's not the concept as the Bible intended it. Martin Luther made that quite clear, and so did Jesus himself.

Everyone who follows Jesus is part of God's team. Everyone.

Being part of God's team means following Jesus and trusting in him, just like Moses trusted in God. Getting our strength and our orientation from him.

Martin Luther called this the "priesthood of all believers". It's not like one person is the priest, or the shepherd, and the others are the sheep.

All of us who follow Jesus are part of his team.  
All of us who follow Jesus are priests for each other. We all have this job. Not just a few of us. Not only the pastors, not only a few special members who have been singled out to be volunteers. All of us. As Christians.

Moses gets to see God's glory, well, at least from behind. And whenever Moses goes into that tent, into that sanctuary, whenever he comes near God, some of God's glory sort of rubs off on him. Moses' face shines with some of God's glory whenever he comes out of that tent, and the people see it.

That is our job, as God's team members: to reflect God's glory. To make his glory shine upon others.

Our job is not like: "Be nice to each other"

Our job is to follow Jesus, to let his glory shine on us – and to reflect it. People should be able to see some of God's glory shining in our faces.

Remember the words we hear at the end of each service?

"The Lord make his face shine upon you".

In the blessing, we experience God's glory, to take into our everyday lives, and to reflect his glory in our faces so that others will see it.

Moses needs to go into that tent, into God's presence, time and again to be near God's glory and to renew the shine on his face.

And so do we. We need to go into God's presence, to be close to him in our worship, and renew the shine of his glory in our faces.

That is what we need worship for. In order to experience God's glory, and to be near him. So that we may be reminded that we are part of his team, that we all are his priests, no matter if we are full-time professionals or volunteers or "only" just Christians.

And so that his glory may shine upon us, and that we may reflect his glory in our everyday lives.

Amen.