

“I Am” // Ex 34:6–7; 3:14 // *The Name*, part 5

Alamance County Campus

We are one church that meets in **8 different locations across RDU**. We have chosen to pursue this strategy because we believe it's **more effective** than building one, gargantuan 6-flags-over-Jesus building in the middle of the Triangle and expecting people to drive to it; plus, we've learned it's **easier to do things like community and mission** when your church is close by. So our motto is, ***“Stay where you are, serve where you live; let's be the church in your community.”***

Anything outside of RDU, independent church...

So, we are constantly asking God where he would have us put our next campus. And, to that end, I've got a big, official, announcement for you...drum roll please... on Sunday, Sept 27, we are officially launching the Alamance County Campus in Mebane as our 9th campus.

This area has increasingly become a place where people who work and do life in RDU live. In fact, many of you **listening to me today** at one of our campuses call this area home.

Over the last few months, a core group from Alamance County has been gathering to pray and plan for this, and each time they met the **group has grown by 40%**. At their last meeting, they had over 175, and they **baptized 4 new believers...** and they haven't even launched. It's really been incredible to watch.

Could we **put our hands together** in praise to God for this next step he's directing us to take?

Introduction

For the **last several weeks we've been in a series on the Name of God**, because *to know God* you have to know his Name. Your name is important to you; God's Name is important to him.

We've based our study on Exodus 34:6–7, where God declares his name to Moses... I told you that this verse was the **Jews' “John 3:16;”** it is the most quoted verse in the Bible by other Bible writers.

Moses says, “God, let me see your glory.” God says, *¹⁹ **“I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ His glory is in his name. *34:5 And the LORD descended in the cloud and...⁶ proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”**

Each week we've looked at **1 of the characteristics** associated with God's name. Today we're **actually going to look at the name—YHWH**, Yahweh, or Jehovah (symbolized in your English Bibles by LORD in all caps.) It's a very unusual name, and it **reveals so much about how we should understand** and relate to God.

God first revealed this name to Moses not in Ex 34, but in **Exodus 3**, and the whole story shows you the ground rules for knowing God and what happens to you do when you.

Exodus 3:3–14

Exodus 3 opens up with Moses as a pretty defeated man. He'd started out his life with a lot of confidence... **Good looking guy** in a high paying job; and then he'd **felt like God wanted him to deliver Israel**, and he was trying to obey, but **things went bad...** the Jewish people rejected him, Pharoah got angry at him, and he ended up

killing a man. (That's a **bad day at work**, right? Everyone hates you, your boss fires you, and you kill someone on the way out to the parking lot.)

Needless to say, it left Moses feeling **pretty defeated**. And so for 40 years now he's wandered around in the wilderness nursing that failure.

Most of you know what it's like to feel insecure... to feel like you are not up to some particular challenge.

- You **just got hired for a job** and now you're not sure you can do it, and nobody else seems to either.
- Or, you are **dating someone** and not sure if you measure up to their family's expectations.
- Or you have just **embarked on some new phase of life**—being a mom, living on your own, going into retirement—and you're not sure you have what it takes.
 - Many of our **brothers and sisters at our campus in the prison** have told me they feel this when it comes time for their release. "I'm not sure how to function anymore in the real world!"
- Maybe you **feel like God has called you to a ministry** and you feel utterly insufficient (church planters)
- or maybe you just feel **overwhelmed by life...** (Or, what I like to refer to as 'parenthood.')
- Every year I feel like **less and less about parenting**. Before I had kids, I had 4 essential theories on parenting and I taught them to everyone. I taught them here at the church and you all took notes on them. Now I have 4 kids and no great principles for parenting.

Insecurity is a voice inside you that whispers, "**I am not _____ enough.**" What most often goes into that blank for you? Good-looking; athletic; young; smart; funny; spiritual... And in the **age of Periscope** and Instagram these feelings are heightened

because no matter what you do, it's always easy to find someone doing it better.

- **I never go on Instagram around Valentine's Day** because no matter what I do there's always some guy putting me to shame. I got my wife a bracelet and took her to her favorite restaurant; some guy got his girl a pony and took her backpacking through Europe.

Here's a statement we've returned to over and over during this series, from A.W. Tozer, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us... The most (determining) fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like."¹ You'll see that is especially true today...

Exodus 3:3 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law.... (He's not even his own! When you're in your 60's and you are still living in your father-in-law's basement, that's a failure in any culture) and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.

³ So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up." ⁴ 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."

⁵ "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ 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.

¹ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 1.

⁷ The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. (A whole sermon series right there—God has heard your cries of suffering!)

⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey....

¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

¹¹ But Moses said to God, “*Who am I* (“Wait. What? When did the subject switch to me? We were talking about you coming down to deliver the Egyptians, which sounded cool... but then you switched and started talking about me, which is not cool... **Remember that, God?** I tried this once and I failed.”) **that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?**

¹² And God said, “I will be with you. (Notice **how God deals with Moses’ insecurities**: he did not reinforce Moses with positive thoughts; or tell him that he’d underestimated his talents. He didn’t say,

- “Moses, here’s a mirror. Look into it and **repeat after me**: ‘My name is Moses. I am a bad man.’
- Now close your eyes and **visualize yourself walking** in to Pharaoh. Now experience the feelings of taking Pharaoh down.”)

None of that. Just “I will be with you.” **Real confidence comes not from competence, but from the assurance of God’s presence.**

¹³ Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

^{*14} God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

- The word in Hebrew (for “I am”) is *ha-yah*. **Everybody say it.**
 - **HA-YAH.** (If you do not get a little bit on your neighbor, you are not saying it right.)
 - It simply means, “I am.” From the verb, “to be.” ‘He is.’
 - “**I do not have a beginning or ending.** I didn’t come from anywhere; I am not going anywhere. I am the same all of the time, forever, I AM.”
- GOD is **like that fire that Moses** saw in the bush that burned without burning up the bush.
 - **Fires need fuel.** The fire Moses saw was self-sustaining; it needed no external fuel.
- God, **the eternal I AM, needs no external fuel.** Nothing preceded him. Nothing created him. He is self-sustaining. He is eternal. Unchanging. Always and forever the same.

Everything that has ever existed had its beginning in him. He was there before it started—if you could get back to the beginning of however this universe started, he’d be there, eternal, unchanged.

He is the source that gives life to everything else; he holds it all together now; he’ll be there when it all ends.

Every once in a while we need to think about the size of God. And God, not accidentally, gave us this open theatre where we could think about it every night. **My watch: open so I can see the workings... I think God did the same with the universe... Every night he says, “LOOK AT IT, and think about me!”**

- Closest star we see... 4 light years away...
- Rifle bullet... 1/2 mile per second. New Horizon spaceship: 20 miles per second, took 9 years to get to Pluto. Closest star, 4 light years, traveling at 186,282.2 mps (speed of Millennium Falcon)
- Scientists estimate the universe to be **91 billion light years** across... that means if you traveled in the Millennium Falcon at the speed of light... 186,282.2 miles every second, it would take

over a billion of your lifetimes just to get to one edge of the universe... and if you ever got there, God would be there. And if someone had simultaneously traveled to the other side, he'd be there, too.

He's Big. He is bigger than big. He's bigger than all of the words we use to say big. God is not huge, gigantic, humongous or gargantuan. He is beyond words.

This... ¹⁵ God said to Moses, (Think about that: Moses is having a conversation with *this* God) - "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' "This is my name forever, the name you shall call me, from generation to generation.

^{4:10} Moses said to the LORD, "But, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." ¹¹ The LORD said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? (I am)

The revelation of God's name as I AM shows you 3 vitally important things about your relationship to God.

- **First**, it shows us how we encounter God.
 - A little philosophical: I want you to see that burning bushes happen today.
 - You've never seen an actual one, but see it as a metaphor... mysterious things that make you turn aside that you look into and encounter a speaking God
- **Second**, the NAME gives us the ground rule for knowing God;
- **Third**, it shows us how meeting God should transform our identity.

1. I AM... Shows us how we encounter God

Typically, we don't encounter God through a lifetime of philosophical reasoning; instead, we have an experience where you are confronted by the fact that **HE IS**.

Many times it **begins with an unanswered question**, like Moses had with the burning bush, and when you turn aside to investigate that unanswered question you find a God saying, "*I won't necessarily resolve this mystery for you yet, but 'I am.'*"

- For some, it is the mystery of the cosmos...
 - **Antony Flew**... one of the past century's most famous atheists, toward the end of his life declared himself to be a theist because he just didn't see any other alternative with the clear evidence of the complexities of design in the universe.
 - **Thomas Edison** said, "When you see everything that happens in the world of science, and in the working of the universe, you cannot deny that there must be a captain on the bridge."
- For **Albert Einstein**, it was the enigma of the depth of evil in the human race, which pointed to realities, he said, that had to be beyond biological: "It is easier," he said, "to denature plutonium than to denature the evil spirit of man."
- I read one atheist who said the most troubling thing for him was the "**problem**" of **universal human rights**... Let me use his words: "I am an atheist but I believe in human rights, which is problematic, because I believe we got here by trampling on the weak. Those of us with stronger genes dominated the weak, so why give people rights now? Some of my atheist friends say that the will of the majority grants people rights. But what if the majority says we can oppress a certain kind of person? Is there not a standard above the will of the majority to whom the oppressed can appeal?" His conclusion is, "I don't know why universal rights exist, but I know that they must; thus I must temporarily abandon my worldview to hold such a view."

For other people, the question is less philosophical; it is more like a **longing they feel** in something like the birth of a child... or, in the yearning they experience when someone they love dies... There is more!

- **Steve Jobs: Last interview on 60 Minutes**
 - “Throughout my life, sometimes I’ve believed in God; sometimes I haven’t. But ever since I’ve had cancer...I find myself believing a bit more. I want to believe in an afterlife. When you die, it can’t just all disappear. The wisdom we’ve accumulated; somehow it lives on... (It can’t be like an ‘on-off switch’): click and you’re gone. (Incidentally) that’s why I don’t like putting on/off switches on Apple devices.”²

For others, it occurs **through reading the Bible** and experiencing the reality of Jesus of Nazareth...

- **Anne Rice**: “Someone was searching for me.”
- Reminder me of... **Peter Kreeft, professor of philosophy at Boston College**, said that when he was searching to know God in the Bible it was like staring into keyhole and seeing someone staring back at you.³

For others, it’s just a **profound religious experience** through a miracle or a mystical moment...

- **Blaise Pascal** has been called the architect of modern civilization. He was a brilliant scientist at the frontiers of mathematics, even as a teenager. He is viewed by many as the founder of the probability theory, and a creator of the first model of a computer.
- Had an *experience* of God one night... wrote it down and sewed it into the lining of his coat
- “Monday, Nov 23, 1654. From 1030-1230... FIRE... God of Abraham, God of Isaac God of Jacob... Not the God of the

² Steve Jobs interview, *60 Minutes*.

³ <http://www.peterkreeft.com/topics/dynamite.htm>

philosophers and the sophisticated. Joy. Joy. Joy. Tears of joy. I submit myself, absolutely, to Jesus Christ, my redeemer.”

- **He experienced the God of the burning bush.**
- ~~The **writer of one of the most famous volumes of French history** said: “Seldom has so mighty an intellect submitted with such humility to the authority of Jesus Christ.”~~

Has anything like this happened to you? Maybe it wasn’t this dramatic. But Ecclesiastes says that he’s put **eternity in your heart...** which means he puts restlessness and unanswered questions as burning bushes in your heart...

- You look upward and experience these questions
- You look inward and sense this longing...
- Those feelings are the burning bush...
- When you turn aside to the burning bush, like Moses did, you’ll find him, the great I AM.

So, the name I AM shows us how we encounter God. Second, knowing God’s name as “I am”...

2. I AM... Gives us the ground rule for knowing God

- *I AM* means “I am *who I am*, not who you define me to be.”
- Theologians talk about the **“theology from above”** and the “theology from below.”
 - Theology from BELOW. **Philosophical speculation.** We can debate it. Whose ideas are better?
 - Theology from ABOVE: **It comes down.** It can’t be debated, it has to be either received or rejected.
 - **Plato’s cave.** “If only someone from outside could come in and tell us.” Christians believe that One did come in, and his name was Jesus.
- **Which type of theology do you believe in?** The theology that arises from below, or that which comes down from above? If you believe in the theology from above, here’s how you know: you don’t argue.

- You may think you have theophany from above, but the fact that you edit God and his word shows it is from below for you.
- **Can God contradict you?** For many people, their God cannot contradict them.
 - **If God says something to offend** them, they redefine God.
 - Tim Keller: **Stepford wives**.
 - **Allie: Very imaginative.** When she was younger, 4–5 or so, she had this thing called “Allie’s world” Everything was how she liked it. “*How did you get in here?*” This is how you are with God. The real God shows up and you say, ‘how did YOU get in here?’”
- God and his revelation descend from above. He says, “I am.” **His revelation must be received or rejected**, but he cannot be debated, edited, refashioned or reshaped. He is. *You either receive him for who he is, or reject him.*

Third, knowing God’s name as “I am” ...

3. I AM... Transforms our identities

As I mentioned, Moses was really insecure...

- He had... personal disabilities. Speech impediment
- He had... personal failures: killed an Egyptian
- He had personal doubt, when Moses says, “*Who am I?*” in vs. 11, scholars say we get an echo of the question that the Israelites **threw back into Moses’s face** the 1st time he tried to rescue them. They said, “Who are you?” (Ex 2:14)
 - **Moses’ repetition of the question** shows us that these doubts put on him by others have gone into his soul.
 - **Has someone** criticized you for so long you started to believe it about yourself?

You know, interestingly, Moses’ insecurities kept him from seeing how God had indeed prepared him for this task. For 40 years now he has led sheep through this wilderness, the very wilderness that Israel

would need to escape from Egypt through. He **knows now** how to lead unruly herds, as well as where all the water places are and the dangers... in the palace he’s seen how to set up governments; learned to write...

- This is his **Karate Kid/Mr. Miyagi** moment.
- Moses hadn’t been able to see it because he had failed to believe that God, the great I AM, was in every single thing, shaping him...
- **What if you looked at your life through the eyes of faith...** that in everything, the good and the bad, the exciting and the disappointing, the tragedy... there was a loving, sovereign God using it all to prepare you?
- **I challenge you, look back** through your life—all of it—and see it through the eyes of faith.

But more importantly, **when Moses says to God, “Who am I?”** God says to Moses, “It **doesn’t matter** who you are. I matters who *I am.*”

Moses says, “I am not... Eloquent. Smart. Successful.” God says, “I didn’t choose you because you were those things. I have enough of all those things for the both of us.”

- God **doesn’t really want the guy** that says, “Oh, I know God will pick me. I’m awesome.” You’re going to clog the line.
- He wants people who are broken, who feel insufficient... EMPTY VESSELS who allow him to work through them; who know to lean on him.
 - **1 Cor: Not many mighty; not many eloquent, rich or powerful.** He chose the weak and the despised because the glory in his work must go to him.
- **Feeling inadequate is a prerequisite to being used by God.**
- God says, “**I am the God of very unpromising material.** You may not be, but I always am, and my “am-ness” overcomes your “not-ness.””

“But God... I am not very good.” “**I am...**”

“God I am not very skilled ...” “**I know. I am.**”

“God I am not sure... I am not confident or a steady person.” **“I know... I am.”**

“I am not able to live a victorious Christian life.” *I am.* **Only one person ever to live the Christian life successfully...** he was so good, they named it for him. I am going to live it through you.

“It is not about who you are... but who I am.”

You bring into this place all kinds of deficiencies and worries and insecurities and feelings of inadequacy.

- Scripture says, Yes, and you don’t really even know the half of it!
 - **You’re so weak**, you can’t even guarantee you’ll be around tomorrow.
 - So small, it’s a sin if you promise something about tomorrow...
 - You are **like a wisp of smoke** (James 4) or **blade of grass** (James 5)... the slightest shift in wind direction, the slightest change in temperature, and you are gone.
 - In the **scope of the universe you’re so small and insignificant and pitiful** you don’t amount to a grain of sand on the ocean floor.
- *At this point, I know you’re thinking, “Man...I’m so glad I came to this talk. J.D., thanks for making me feel like nothing. Thanks for making me feel small...”*
 - *I am not trying to make you feel small. I am telling you that you ARE small. There is a big difference.*⁴
 - I’m trying to get you to see that YOU ARE NOT, but it doesn’t matter because his name is I AM.

And you don’t need to sweat anything because look who is calling you! His NAME is I AM.

“Who could possibly be smart enough to figure this all out?” **I am.**

“How am I supposed to know which way to go?” **I am.**

“Whom can I trust?” **I am.**

“I’m not sure who is really on my team.” **I am.**

“Nobody is listening to me.” **I am.**

“My marriage is crashing and I do not know where to turn.” **I am.**

“I had always hoped for a marriage and kids and a family but it seems like that time has past me by.” **I am.**

“I’m 50 years old and I feel like I am starting all over.” **I am.**

“Everybody thinks I can’t do it.” **I am.**

“What if I fail again?” **I am.**

“I’m not sure I believe anymore.” **I am.**

“I have given all I can give and it is not enough.” **I am.** “I’m pouring into everybody but nobody is pouring into me.” **I am.**

“I can’t hold on.” **I am.** “I am tired.” **I am.** “I quit.” **I am.** “I need a drink or a fix or a hit.” **I am.**

“I need a lover.” **I am.** “I need a fresh start.” **I am.** “I just need somebody to hold me.” **I am.”**

In the Gospel of John we see Jesus repeatedly taking the name I AM and declaring it to our weaknesses. The name I AM dominates the Gospel of John.

- To those who feel in **darkness**, he says, “I am the light.”

⁴ Louie Giglio, message, “I am not but I know I am.”

- To those who **thirst**, “I am the living water.”
- To those who feel **lost**, “I am the way.”
- To those **confused**, “I am the truth.”
- To those **under the curse** of death, “I am the life.”
- To those who feel **insufficient**, “I am the Good Shepherd.”
- To those who **need a fresh start**, “I am the door.”
- To those **crushed by guilt**, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

To the unrighteous, he says, “I am your righteous covering.” To the powerless he says, “I will be your defense.” To the empty he says, “I’ll be your fullness.” To the dead, he says, “I’ll be your resurrection,” and to the defeated he says, “I’ll be your hope.”

MUSIC Now, knowing what you know God’s name, I want you think about a command in a new light... Commandment 3: Do not take the Lord’s name in vain...

- This was **always taught to me** as “Do not say, Oh my God, Good Lord, or Jesus Christ” as an exclamation! True.
- But a friend of mine points out that this was not just a command on how to use God’s name, but how to take his name.⁵
- And here’s the example:
 - In times past there was a girl named Veronica McPeters and on the greatest day of her life she became a Greear. When she took my name she became part of me. One with me.
 - **When you became a Christian, you took God’s name, I am.** The properties of the “I am” became yours.
 - You **became one** with him. What he has you have. You became a participant in the divine nature (says Peter) an inheritor of the divine promises (says Paul). ALL THE PROMISES OF GOD are yes... for you are one with him!
- *When you say no to God, or falter in obedience, or cower before an assignment, because you think, “I am not _____,” you **are***

⁵ Steven Furtick, message on Exodus 3 preached at Elevation Church. Much of the below is adapted from his use of it.

taking his name in vain, because though I am not, he is, and we are one.

- When you say, “I am so stupid. I am a loser. I am such a terrible mom.” God says, “***I am not any of those things! And if I am in you, you are not either.***”
- *What I am, you are. Stop taking my name in vain.*
 - **You say, “But God, I am so dysfunctional.”** And he says, “Yet I am so complete.”
 - **You say, “I am so deficient.”** He says, “I am so sufficient.”
 - **You say, “I am so doubtful.”** He says, “I am so faithful.”
 - **You say, “I am so sinful.”** He says, “I am so graceful.”
 - **I am so weak;** but I am so strong.

“Whatever you’re not... Whatever you need... Whatever you did not get from your parents or your teachers... Whatever you are not getting from someone else, I AM!”

- When the Pharaohs in our lives say to us, “Who do you think you are?” “I don’t think I am anything... but I know the GREAT I Am!”
- And when the haters in our own hearts whisper, “You are not...” we shout back, “You are right. But he is, and now I am in him.”

My challenge to you: **Name your insecurity...** and write out, “In Christ, I am _____.” Sufficient. Fully supplied. More than a conqueror. Undefeatable.

Which leads it to **one last correction in this series...** C.S. Lewis: ***“I read in a periodical the other day that the fundamental thing is how we think about God. By God himself, *it is not so!* How God thinks about us is not only more important, but infinitely more important. Indeed, how we think of him is of no importance except insofar as it is related to how he thinks of us.”**

- Not saying what you think about God is not important...
- But what he thinks about you... What he has become to you...
- The gospel is not that you were awesome and he chose you; it is that you were messed up and he saved you.

- When you were unrighteous... he gave you righteousness; and Paul says that just as he did that, so he will give you power when you are powerless.
- And when you falter, he will hold faithful. Not how I hold on to him, but how he holds on to me.

In this series, I want you lay hold of the name of the glorious God who exists not in the heaven, but has united himself to you, and for you to NOT TAKE HIS NAME IN VAIN.

PRAYER