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Favor With God
Exodus: The God Who is With Series
Exodus 32:1-33:16
Pastor Bryan Clark

Every week we have people around us that are anxious; they're fearful; they're confused; they're angry; they're seeking God; they're running from God; they're rebelling against God; they're involved in all kinds of behavior that's deeply offensive to God. So here's my question. For those of us that have experienced new life in Christ, what do those people need from us?

That's what we want to talk about today. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Chapter 32. Jeff mentioned last week that we're getting into the part of Exodus that has a lot of tedious detail that would be very difficult to go through on a weekly basis like this. So we're kind of taking bigger chunks and keeping the story-line moving. Today we find ourselves in Chapter 32. Last week, Jeff did a great job of setting the stage for our discussion this morning. Moses, Aaron, Hur, and the seventy elders have this amazing experience with God on the mountain. As a result of that, twice, the people reaffirm the covenant and say they will listen to what God has to say, and they will obey Him. Everything seems like it should be. So Moses goes on up the mountain, and Aaron and Hur and the seventy elders go back to the people. And for the rest of the book of Exodus, God is laying out for Moses, how it will be possible for a holy God to dwell in the midst of sinful people. If you go back to Genesis, chapter 3, immediately when Adam and Eve sinned against God, they were evicted from the garden, because a holy God cannot dwell with sinful people. So, how is it going to be possible for God to dwell in the midst of His people? God is laying it out for him.

It would be this tabernacle, and the tabernacle would sit in the midst of the people, and God would dwell there. Almost everything in the tabernacle, in some way, is a foreshadowing. It's a picturing of the ultimate fulfillment of the promise of a savior to come. So it's important to understand, that's what's happening up on the mountain. But it's interrupted by chapters 32, 33, and 34. This is what, in a Hebrew narrative, we would refer to as a structural element, the fact that that's what's going on, but there's this interruption which forces us to compare what's going on below the mountain to what's going on, on the mountain. This is also a lengthy, very complicated text. Theologians have argued for hundreds of years about some of the details in this story. There's just no way we have time to take all these rabbit trails, nor is it necessary. I don't think the point is to figure all that out. We're just going to simply take the text at face value for what it says and try to understand what the relevance is to our lives today. So we pick it up in Chapter 32, verse 1:

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what's become of him." Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings, which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me." Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears, and brought *them* to Aaron. He took *this* from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving

tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.” Now when Aaron saw *this*, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow *shall* be a feast to the LORD.” So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. (*NASB, Exodus 32:1-6)

So Moses has been on the mountain for 40 days. The people are starting to panic; they're getting restless, and they come to Aaron. It could just as easily be translated, the people assembled against Aaron. So they say to Aaron, “Come, make us a god.” The word for God all throughout this text is the Hebrew Elohim, and Elohim is a plural name for God. So it can be translated God or gods, plural. Most of the time in this text, it's used with plural pronouns. For example, when they say in verse 4, **“This is your God,”** literally, the Hebrew is, “These are your gods”. So based on the plural, and also their behavior, I don't think they're making this toward Yahweh. I think they're rejecting Moses and Yahweh. They've kind of said, “You know, we've had it up to here. Moses isn't coming back down.” As a matter of fact, specifically, what they say about Moses is filled with contempt. They've never really liked Moses; they've never liked doing what he's telling them to do. They've always had contempt for him. And it's like, “This guy Moses and his God, he's up on the mountain. He's not coming down; we're done with this. So, Aaron, make us gods.” Now the good news is, at least it's Aaron. Forty days ago, Aaron was up on the mountain with Moses. He had this amazing experience with God, so we feel like they're in good hands. So it's quite shocking to us that Aaron says, “Okay, take all the gold—this was the plunder from Egypt—and put it in the fire.” Then he molds it into this golden calf, and the people say, “These are our gods who delivered us from Egypt.”

Now it's really important to understand that in the ancient world, when they would make an idol like this, it doesn't mean they actually thought the idol was a god. It rather was a meeting place; it was a platform. So this is the platform that they would come to, and the gods would come to the platform and there they would meet. So you have to understand that's what they're trying to create, while on the mountain, that's what God is explaining to Moses. God is going to make a way by which a holy God can dwell in the midst of sinful people. The tabernacle would be that meeting place. But in essence, the people are saying, “We don't want that. We're tired of Moses; we're tired of his God; we're going to do this our way. So we want our own god to find our way, on our terms, who is going to be okay with the way we want to live.”

I think their reaction catches Aaron off guard. When the text says **Now**, there's kind of a surprise to it. All of a sudden, Aaron realizes, “Man, this is going in the wrong direction. What just happened here?” So immediately he builds an altar, and says, “Tell you what, tomorrow we're going to have a big feast to Yahweh.” He's trying to kind of pull it all back in. So when it says in verse 6, **they rose early and offered burnt sacrifice and brought peace offerings**, that language is almost identical to what we read last week in Chapter 24 when Moses rose early and made all these legitimate offerings and sacrifices to God as a part of that amazing experience. So this is their artificial version of that. Where it says that people **sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play**, the phrase **rose up to play** is very graphic in the Hebrew. Since we have people of all ages here, I'll be a little careful of how I say it, but basically, it's a drunken party with significant sexual immorality. That's what the terms are referring to. Verse 7:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshipped it and have sacrificed to it and said, ‘This is your god (literally your gods), O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’” The LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.” (Vs. 7-10)

So God is having this conversation with Moses up on the mountain, explaining how this is going to work, and all of a sudden, He calls it off. “We’re done here!” The people have decided that’s not what they want. They have turned back to their polytheistic pagan gods, (You get a sense of what’s coming here) when God says to Moses, “*Your people whom you brought out,*” in other words, He’s done with them. They have gone their own way; they have corrupted themselves. It’s the exact same word that is used in Genesis chapter 6, when the text says that *the people did evil all the time, and they corrupted themselves*. It’s the exact same word right before the flood. So you already get this kind of ominous feeling, this is not going to be good. So they’ve made their own god, their own altar, their own idol.

When God says to Moses, “**I have seen this people,**” essentially here’s what He’s saying. “I have been with these people every step of the way. I delivered them from Pharaoh; I delivered them from slavery; I parted the Red Sea; I gave them food; I gave them water; I gave them victory over the Amalekites. I’ve done everything they’ve needed, and this is their way of responding is with contempt? They have rejected Me, and they have decided we want to go a different way?” He calls them **obstinate people**. It’s a colorful Hebrew word that literally means stiff-necked. It had to do with horses, like a horse that was unwilling to cooperate with the bit in its mouth. So whatever the rider is doing, the horse’s neck is stiff, and he’s fighting every direction that the rider is trying to use to control the horse. You can imagine these people. They’re just pulling every direction saying, “Don’t tell me what to do. Don’t tell me where to go. We’ve decided we’re in charge; we’re going to do this our way.” So God says, “You know, leave Me alone. I just want to be here with Myself, and I’m done with these people. I’m going to wipe them out and, Moses, we’re going to start over with you and make a new nation.”

Now, I would think this had to be somewhat tempting to Moses. These people have never liked him. They’ve always viewed him with contempt. They’re grumbly, obstinate, uncooperative people. And I think maybe if I was Moses, I would have said, “That sounds like a pretty good idea! Let’s wipe them out and find some nice people.” To understand God’s heart in this moment, think of it like this: God is the groom, and He’s standing at the altar, waiting for His bride to enter into this beautiful love relationship. But He waits, and He waits, and He waits, and His bride is nowhere to be found. And finally someone comes up and whispers to Him, “I hate to tell You this, but Your bride is not coming down the aisle because she’s sleeping with all Your groomsmen.” And in that moment, He’s devastated; He’s brokenhearted, and He announces “The wedding is off. I’m not going to marry this woman. Just leave me alone.” You feel His grief in all this, of what these people have done to Him.

Then Moses entreated the LORD his God, and said, “Oh LORD, why does your anger burn against your people whom you have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, ‘With evil *intent* He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth’? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about *doing* harm to your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken, I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’” So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people. (Vs. 11-14)

Moses is absolutely remarkable in this story. Moses has been mistreated in so many ways by these people, yet Moses has this fierce commitment to these people. But he also has this fierce commitment to the glory and the reputation of God. He says, “God, what are you doing? These are your people. You’re the one that delivered them out of Egypt. You’re the one that has brought them to this place.” He says, “What about your reputation? If you just kill them, the Egyptians are going to say, ‘What kind of a god is that? He just took them out of Egypt in order to take them to the mountains and kill them all.’” He says, “God, you made a promise to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob that you would turn them into a great nation, that you would deliver them to a land flowing with milk and honey. God, you promised.” Moses is so zealous for the glory and reputation of God, but he also has his fierce commitment to these people. He pleads with God, and God, in a way that we cannot understand or explain, changed His mind and agreed not to wipe these people out. These people had no idea what Moses just did on their behalf. He literally saved their lives. Verse 15:

Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of testimony in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides; they were written on one *side* and the other. The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets. Now, when Joshua heard the sound of the people, as they shouted, he said to Moses, “There is a sound of war in the camp.” But he said,

**“It is not the sound of the cry of triumph,
Nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat;
But the sound of singing I hear.” (Vs. 15-18)**

Joshua was not with Moses when God explained this. So they're coming down the mountain and he's hearing this noise. He thinks there's some sort of a war going on. Moses says, “You know, it's not the sound of victory; it's not the sound of defeat.” The word isn't actually **singing**. It's more the idea of revelry. It's the idea of what I'm hearing is a wild party. That's more what Moses is saying.

It came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and *the* dancing; and Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. He took the calf which they had made and burned *it* with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink *it*. (Vs. 19-20)

So whatever Moses was expecting, the way the text is written, he's pretty shocked by what he sees. He has this righteous anger at the behavior of the people. But it's important to understand he isn't just in his anger, destroying the tablets. Rather, in the ancient Near East, these covenants were typically written on tablets of stone like this. But when the conditions of the agreement were violated, the tablets were shattered as a way of saying the deal is off. The covenant is broken; we're not going to do this. That's what Moses was doing. The covenant had been broken; the deal is off. He then takes the golden calf, pulverizes it into powder, and puts it in whatever was their water supply. These people would have had to drink this water, and it would have been a reminder of the bitterness of this moment. Even though that sounds really weird to us, it wasn't that unusual in the ancient world. When one nation would conquer another nation, they would often gather the idols and pulverize them into powder as a way of saying "Our gods are greater than your gods," and that's what Moses was doing here. Verse 21:

Then Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you, that you have brought *such* great sin upon them?" Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord burn; you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil. For they said to me, 'Make a god for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what become of him.' I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.' So they gave *it* to me, and I threw it into the fire, and poof! (that's my add; *laughter*) out came this calf." (Vs. 21-24)

So it's really interesting that Moses holds Aaron accountable. Aaron should have known better. Forty days earlier, Aaron had been on the mountain, and he had had this amazing experience. Aaron was Moses' brother and had been part of all these miracles that God had done. And so Moses holds Aaron accountable. "Aaron, look what you've done to these people." Why didn't Aaron care enough to stand for righteousness, and to call these people to a better way of life? But he goes with the flow. His excuses sound a lot like Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, "Oh, Moses, settle down. You know yourself these people are evil. I couldn't do anything about it. It's just the way they are. As a matter of fact, they started to get kind of nervous because you were so long coming down from the mountain. You know, Moses, if you were to come down from the mountain a little sooner, maybe this wouldn't have happened. And, Moses, the craziest thing happened. I collected some gold and threw it in the fire and poof! out comes a golden calf."

Now think about this, Aaron had been with Moses for all the ten strikes, for the Red Sea, the manna, the water—all these miracles that they had experienced together. Perhaps he thought he could convince Moses that this was just another miracle. But Moses isn't even going to respond to this ridiculous answer from Aaron. Verse 25:

Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control—for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies—then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, *come* to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him. He said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Every man *of you* put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.'" So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day. Then Moses said, "Dedicate

yourselves today to the LORD—for every man has been against his son and against his brother—in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today.” (Vs. 25-29)

So again it's worth noting that Moses holds Aaron accountable. He says, “These people are out of control.” It appears even after Moses has dealt with the calf, that the behavior is continuing. Literally, the Hebrew word is *unrestrained, ungovernable*. In Proverbs 29, it says, ***Where there is no vision***, meaning the vision of God's Word, ***the people are unrestrained***. It's the exact same Hebrew word. “These people are out of control and, Aaron, this is your fault. You let them get out of control. They are now extremely vulnerable to their enemies in this wild drunken state. The enemy could easily come upon them and completely wipe out all these people.” Now Aaron has put these people at great risk. So Moses stands in the gate, which is typically a place of judgment, and basically says, “All those who are for Yahweh...” In other words, all those willing to repent, all those willing to turn away from what's happened here... “come stand with me. If you are for Yahweh, stand with the Levites.” Obviously many more besides the Levites come and stand. But then they are given the assignment to take a sword and go from gate to gate. The assignment is not, “Go kill everybody else.” The assignment is to go from gate to gate to gate to replicate what just happened there. In other words, go to each of these gates to call to the people that whoever is willing to repent—that is for Yahweh—come to the gate. Those who are insistent in their rebellion must be put to death. And the text tells us 3000 were put to death that day. Now, in light of the number of people in Israel, that's a fairly small percentage. But it's still a significant number of people. But you have to understand that Moses understands these people are hanging by a thread. He has interceded for them; otherwise God would have wiped them all out. And now they need to repent of their sin before God. They need to clean this infection out of their nation, and they need to come back to God or else. So this is a very passionate, delicate conversation. Verse 30:

On the next day Moses said to the people, “You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going to the LORD, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” Then Moses returned to the LORD, and said, “Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if you will forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!” The LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin.” Then the LORD smote the people, because of what they did with the calf, which Aaron had made. (Vs. 30-35)

So Moses gathers the people and said, “What you have done is a terrible sin. I'm going to go back up the mountain and see if I can make atonement for you so that God might forgive your sin. So Moses goes back up to God, and says, “God, I know that what these people did was terrible, but I'm asking You to forgive their sin.” But Moses has no way to make atonement. He can't just ask God to act like it never happened. So what he's saying is, “God, if you won't forgive them, I'm willing to give my life. Put me to death instead of them.” The whole idea of **the book** is to understand that in the ancient world, these small nations, these city states would have some sort of a book that was a record of the people that were living in that nation. It had to do with service; it had to do with taxation. And so when someone would die, they'd be blotted out of the book. When someone was born, they'd be added to the book. So at this point, that's about all this means. Later

in the New Testament, the Book of Life takes on more meaning. But I wouldn't read more into this here than simply Moses saying, "I'm willing to die for the people. You can blot me out of Your book to atone for their sin." But essentially what God says is, "Moses, you can't do that." Moses simply didn't have what was necessary to atone for their sin. So God is going to deal with them. He'll punish them in His way, in His time.

Verse 35 is kind of a summary. It's hard to tell whether God's smiting these people was the 3000 that were put to death, or whether it's something that happens in that moment, like some sort of a plague or something. It could even be referring to, ultimately, that this generation will not enter the land of promise because of their sin. Because they're an obstinate people, they will die in the wilderness. That may be what He's referring to. It's hard to tell. Chapter 33, verse 1:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your descendants I will give it.' I will send an angel before you and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. Go *up* to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way." When the people heard this sad word, they went into mourning, and none of them put on his ornaments. For the LORD had said to Moses, "Say to the sons of Israel, 'You are an obstinate people; should I go up in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you. Now therefore, put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what I shall do with you.'" So the sons of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb (or Mount Sinai) *onward*.

(Exodus 33:1-6)

So God says to Moses, "Alright, Moses, it's time to move. I'm going to keep my promise. I'm going to lead you to the land of promise. I'm going to drive out the enemies. I'm going to give you a land flowing with milk and honey, just like I promised. But I'm not going with you. I'm going to send an angel." This is not the angel of the Lord that we saw in Chapter 23. This is one of God's angels. Again, God was on the mountain, explaining to Moses what His plan was, by which a holy God could dwell in the midst of sinful people. But they have rejected all that. So what He's saying is, "I'm not going with you. If I was in your midst, I would kill you because a holy God cannot dwell in the midst of sinful people." So the people hear this and they mourn, and they're sad. Whether they were merely sorry or truly repentant, only time will tell. But one of the things that God had said to Moses was, "For starters, these people could get rid of their ornaments." In other words, this is all that plunder that came with them from Egypt. And what God is saying is, "If you're really repentant, it's time to be done with all that stuff, with all this junk that you have brought with you from Egypt. Let's leave it behind and move forward as the people of God. Verse 7:

Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. And it came about, whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent. Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance

of the tent; and the LORD would speak with Moses. When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. Thus, the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

(Vs. 7-11)

So God was on the mountain explaining to Moses that there will be a tent of meeting, and that will be how I will dwell in your midst. But now they have forfeited all that, so the deal is off. So Moses has a tent of meeting, but it's not in the camp. It's outside the camp because Moses still has the favor of God. So Moses continues to meet with God, but the people can't. So the pillar of cloud would come down, and it would enter into the tent, and Moses would meet with God. And they would talk to one another like one talks to a friend. It's an amazing description of this relationship that Moses had with God. But it's also a very sad description because what the text says is because of their rebellion, because they're obstinate, because they have rejected God, that when God comes and meets with Moses in the tent, all they can do is remain back at the doorway of their tent. They can see this tent outside their camp, and they know that Moses is meeting with God, but they can't. All they can do is watch from a distance. Verse 12:

Then Moses said to the LORD, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people!' But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, 'I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.' Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people." And He said, "My presence shall go *with you*, and I will give you rest." Then he said to Him, "If your presence does not go *with us*, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the *other* people who are upon the face of the earth?"

(Vs. 12-16)

So Moses says, "God, okay, it's time to go, but you still haven't said who's going with us. You said that Moses finds favor with God, and I want to find favor with You. I want to know You; I want to walk in Your ways. I want to walk in Your favor." And God says, "Moses, I'll go with you. I'll be with you." But Moses says, "You know, if you're not going to go with us, then I'd rather not go at all." He said, "We would rather just stay here in the desert if You will dwell with us, than to go to the land of promise if You're not going to be with us." That was the whole deal, that God would dwell in their midst. And Moses is interceding for these people, pleading with God to once again make that possible.

So where does this go? What is next in this story? Well, stay tuned. We'll talk about that next week. But for this morning, as we wrap this up, there are several characters in this story to consider. First, would be the people. They are rebellious, obstinate, and stiff-necked people who are determined to have their god define their way on their terms, a god who is okay with their lifestyle. "God, we're going to do it our way." All you have to do is read the text to know that's not a good idea! You get a clear sense of how God feels about that. If that's you, I'd strongly encourage you to reconsider that, because it's not going to go well for you.

Second is Aaron. It's very interesting how clearly Moses holds Aaron accountable for what's happened. What if Aaron would have cared enough about these people to have taken a stand for righteousness, to have called them to something more, to have invited them to wait, that God will be faithful. Think how different this story could have been. There may be 3000 people who died that wouldn't have died. They were out of control, and Moses says, "They're out of control because you let them be out of control, because you didn't do your job." Aaron simply didn't care enough because he wanted to fit in. He wanted to belong. He wanted to be accepted. He wanted to go with the flow. And the consequences to these people were devastating.

And then there's Moses. Moses is remarkable in this story. Moses has this deep passion for God, for God's holiness and God's reputation to the nations. He has a passion for God's righteousness and God's favor, but he also has this remarkable, passionate commitment to these people—these people that have held him in contempt, these people that don't like him, these people that keep grumbling against him. Yet he still has this passionate commitment to these people, to stand for righteousness, to call them to a better way of living. He begs God; he intercedes on their behalf. "God, please, don't destroy these people." Can't it be possible that once again a holy God could dwell in the midst of His people? His commitment was so strong to these people. He said, "God, I'm even willing to die for these people. I will die if you let them live." But of course, Moses could not atone for the sins of these people. We are reminded, however, that Moses is what we refer to as a *type*, a *foreshadowing of the Savior to come*. Moses is a pre-picturing of One who would come, who could make atonement for sin, that God would send His own son in fulfillment of the promise He made, and who would shed His blood to make atonement for the sins of the people.

And the Son would enter into the world knowing that we are an obstinate, stiff-necked people, bent on rebellion, bent on being our own gods, bent on doing it our own way. John says, "***He came into His own and His own received him not.***" Paul says, "When Jesus died, we were sinners. We were the enemy of God. We declared ourselves to be in rebellion against our God." Yet His commitment not only to the glory, and the reputation, and the righteousness of God, but it was this fierce commitment to us as obstinate, stiff-necked people to ultimately pay the price for our sins, that we might be forgiven and enter into a relationship with God. It would be through Jesus that a holy God could have a relationship with sinful people, through Jesus as the fulfillment of the promise.

So now we're back to our question. Every week we have all these different people around us. For some of them, it might be tempting, just like it might have been to Moses, to say, "God, you know, I've kind of had it up to here. How about wiping out this group of people?" But really, what do these people need from us? From those of us whose lives have been transformed by the power of Jesus, what they need from us is to be as committed as Moses, to be as committed to the glory and the reputation and the righteousness of God. To be as committed to the favor of God, but also to be as committed to the people around us as Moses was committed to his people—a difficult stiff-necked people. To care enough about them to call them to righteousness, to care enough about them to call them to a better way to live, and to care enough about them to intercede for them with a holy God, and to beg God to somehow make Himself known to these people, so that these people might come to know Jesus as their Savior. To care enough...to intercede...and to do whatever we can. These are people Jesus loves. These are people Jesus died for. We need to be as committed to these people as Moses was to his people.

Jesus was asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” He says, **“To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength”** The second is like it. It is, **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** It seems to me Moses did that really well. How about us?

Our Father, we're thankful that when we were lost in our sin with no hope, You sent Jesus to be our Savior. God, what we had earned was condemnation, but through the blood of Jesus, You changed Your mind and gave us life. Lord, may we be as passionately committed to You and to the people around us as Moses was. God, for your glory in Jesus' name, Amen.

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
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Introduction

This week we jump ahead again in Exodus past the descriptions given to Moses in preparation of the building of the tabernacle. Yet, as Pastor Bryan told us, the golden calf incident and what follows are related at least in the literary context to the tabernacle. The tabernacle is to be the place where God dwells among his people, yet the people seem to have a different idea about what that should look like. And we are left wondering whether the tabernacle will be built and whether God will continue to go with his people.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. Due to preferences over a wide range of groups, we do not expect you will cover every question each week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

- 1) What was your favorite childhood meal?
- 2) What lesson did you have to learn the hard way?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
 - c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you
 - 2) **This week read the passage as it is broken up in the questions.**
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Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

1) What questions or curiosities do you have after hearing the sermon on this passage of scripture?

2) Read *Exodus 32:1-9*. **Why did the people make a god(s) for themselves?**

If you had been among the people of Israel during this time, how do you think you would have responded to Moses's absence and the building of the golden calf?

What parallels do you see with *Genesis 3:1-6* and *Genesis 6:12*? What is the core issue?

Is there an area of your life in which you are obstinate or stiff-necked toward God? What is the core issue in this area?

3) Read *Exodus 32:10-14*. **How do you reconcile the idea that a sovereign, unchanging God changed his mind?**

How does this passage confirm or change your thoughts about prayer?

What characteristics of Moses' or his prayer do you think caused God to change his mind?

4) Read *Exodus 32:15-35*. **Compare and contrast Moses and Aaron as leaders throughout this passage, paying particular attention to verses 19-26 and 29-34.**

- 5) Read *Exodus 33:1-16*. Again, what do you notice about Moses in terms of his leadership of the people of Israel in this passage?

Looking back over what we have covered in Exodus, what do you think brought about these changes in Moses from when he was originally called by God in chapter 3?

Do you see God working in your own life to grow you in similar ways?

If so, and you are willing, share this with your group.

If not, this might be something to talk with God about and ask him to reveal to you how He is working in your life.

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in Life Group, take a few moments to share how the Lord may have used this exercise in your life.**

Scripture Focus: Spend time reading *Psalms 139* this week. Meditate on God's closeness and intimate knowledge of you. Spend time journaling about your response to this Psalm.

Prayer Focus: Pray *Psalms 139:23-24* several times this week asking God to reveal any idols that may be in your life. Listen for how the Lord may respond to this prayer. **Is God asking you to do something specific in removing these idols from your life?**