

March 9/10, 2024

God's Transforming Presence

Exodus: The God Who Is With Series

Exodus 33:17-34:35

Pastor Ryan Harmon

One of the great privileges that I have as a pastor is I get the opportunity to walk with people through the great joys and the great difficulties of relationships. We are made for relationship, and I think all of us can agree that when relationships are going good—when they are flourishing—there are very few things in life that are more gratifying than that. But the opposite is also true. When relationships start to unravel, when there's tension, when there's discord, it can be absolutely devastating. One of the most painful things I think any human can experience is the abandonment of a relationship. When one party just says they are done, it is absolutely devastating. Throughout our study of Exodus, we've been watching as God has been forging a relationship with His people, with Israel. And I think we can all admit that that's been a relationship and a process that has had its highs, and it has had its lows. But last week, we encountered an episode that really put everything into jeopardy. Everything was filled with tension, as God's people turned to idolatry and formed an idol, and essentially rejected the God that had saved them. And in that moment, a very significant question kind of came across our path as we studied this passage. And the question is this, “Would God, and is God the kind of God that would reject His people? Would He leave them?” Personally, I think it's a question that gets to the core fear that all of us have. Would God ever leave me? Would He reject me? That's what we want to consider this morning, as we continue our study of Exodus.

So open with me to Exodus, Chapter 33. We're going to be picking up right where Bryan left off last week in verse 17 of Exodus 33. Last week, you'll remember that Moses met God on top of Mount Sinai. But as that meeting took place, simultaneously there was rebellion that was happening at the base of the mountain. The people of Israel were getting impatient, and they began, instead of waiting faithfully, they began to worship foreign gods. They formed an idol, and they began to have this raucous pagan party. And as Moses came down from the top of that mountain, he took these tablets that God had just written on—the kind of guidelines, the instructions of the covenant relationship—and he threw them to the ground and broke them, signifying dramatically that the terms of the covenant had already been broken, and now everything...everything was in jeopardy! The relationship between God and His people was now in question. We witnessed, as Moses went back up the mountain and he intervened, intervened on Israel's behalf, sought intercession before God, and God was willing, then, to forgive. But as that episode unfolded, we were kind of left on the edge of our seat because in verses 15 and 16 of chapter 33, Moses kind of offered this statement or even this question to God, and the question was essentially this, “Are You going to go with us?” He said to God, and this is my little summary, “If You don't go, we shouldn't go.” So the question now is, “Will God go with His people?” That's the tension Bryan left us with last week. I'm sure you've been thinking about it all week, right? Every day? Hmm. Well, right as we begin today, we get an answer to that honest, desperate question from Moses. “God, will You go with us?” In verse 17, the Lord answers.

The LORD said to Moses, “I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name.” (*NASB, Exodus 33:17)

Here's the answer to that all important looming question, “Would God go with His people? Would His presence accompany them as they move forth? And the answer is a clear and resounding, “Yes! God will maintain fellowship with His people.” Why? Well, it's based upon the relationship that He had forged with Moses. It's not based on Israel's ability to keep the covenant perfectly. It's not based on that they're repentant. It's not based on those things. It's based on the favor that God has placed upon Moses and upon his intercession on their behalf. Israel was in desperate need of an intercessor at this point, and Moses, because of the intimacy he had formed with God Himself, Israel was able to benefit from that relationship. And God said, “On the basis of My relationship with you, I will forgive them.” So, it seems here, at the beginning of verse 17, that things are back on track. But in a moment that really, I think, highlights just how horrific Israel's rebellion was, just how dangerous it was. Moses comes back to God and asks again for confirmation that everything is going to be okay. Verse 18:

Then Moses said, “I pray You, show me Your glory!” And He (*that is Yahweh*) said, “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.” But He said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” Then the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand *there* on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take my hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.” (Vs. 18-23)

Israel and God are in a moment here where the relationship is being restored. And when relationships are restored, they often feel as though they're kind of beginning anew. It's kind of like a new start, and that's just really what's happening here. You remember, at the start of this entire book, way back in September if you were with us, God revealed Himself to Moses in that burning bush, and He declared His name. And essentially, what we see here, is that Moses is once again saying, “Can You give me a confirmation that we are back on track, that things are as they were?” So he says, “**Show me Your glory...Show me Your glory!**”

We talk about glory in the church a lot. We sing about it. We kind of use that word quite often. We read it, and I think it's one of those words that maybe is so familiar to us that we start to lose track a little bit of exactly what it means. So, I thought it'd be helpful to talk about that for just a moment. In the Old Testament, there's really two meanings of the word glory. The first one means something like fame, or prominence, or reputation. So, when we talk about how we want to do something for God's glory, what we're saying is we want to bring notoriety to God. We want to bring fame to Him. We want to make His reputation bigger. And certainly when we read the Old Testament, and even in the New Testament, we see things are done for His glory, and it's to enlarge Him, to magnify Him, to make Him famous. It's the first sense of glory, but that's not what Moses is really talking about here.

There's this other sense of glory in the Old Testament that's kind of hard to really describe because it's kind of like a shining forth or a radiation of God's very goodness, of God's perfection, of His being, of His beauty. He's so wonderful that no one can look directly at Him, but it does kind of send forth this luminous glow, this radiance. Sometimes we refer to it as the Shekinah glory. That's the Hebrew word. It's a radiance of God's splendor, this glow that His glorious being puts off. And Moses is saying, "Show me that." That's what His glory is. The reason that Moses wants to see it is he wants confirmation. He wants kind of a visual confirmation that what God had said, is something that will happen. Just as God showed up in the bush, Moses is now saying, "Show me a sign." And so God agrees...He agrees.

He tells Moses three things. He says *all of His goodness would pass by him*, and that idea of goodness, that kind of good witness is in all its incredible breadth. The goodness that is God would pass by Moses, and that gets at the idea of glory. Secondly, *He says that He would declare or proclaim His name*, and His name represents all that He is, represents who He is. But then God adds this one little detail. Moses couldn't see the fullness of His glory; he couldn't see God's face because it would destroy him. It would destroy him to stand in the fullness of that glow. And so God tells him He's going to kind of *hide him in the cleft of a rock, and as God passes by, he would see kind of the backside of His glory*. An incredible moment! But what's more astounding is all of this comes on the heels of what just has transpired at the base of that mountain. Despite the rebellion of God's people, despite their clear rejection of Him, despite the fact that so quickly after He saved them, they could so quickly return and revert to their old ways. Despite all of that, God would be faithful...God would be faithful! As we continue, we'll see the depth of His commitment to His people as He continues this conversation with Moses. Chapter 34, verse 1:

Now the LORD said to Moses, "Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered. So be ready by morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself to Me on the top of the mountain. No man is to come up with you, nor let any man be seen anywhere on the mountain; even the flocks and the herds may not graze in front of that mountain." So he cut out two stone tablets like the former ones, and Moses rose up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and he took two stone tablets in his hand. (Ch. 34:1-4)

Last week, we read that as Moses came down that mountain—God had just written on these tablets, and He had written kind of the guidelines for the covenant relationship, God's very wisdom for His people as they were going to begin to form a new community—but as Moses descended that mountain, he came across this pagan worship and this R-rated type of stuff that was happening at the base of the mountain. So Moses took these two tablets and he threw them to the ground and he shattered them. The text tells us that it was in anger that Moses did that. Moses was appalled at what he was seeing, and he threw them to the ground in anger. That's absolutely true, but we can't miss the fact that the significance of Moses breaking those tablets wasn't just this outburst of anger. The significance is that it symbolized that the covenant relationship was absolutely in peril. It was already broken. Everything was in jeopardy. And so the breaking of the tablets symbolized the breaking of relationship. This is a stark moment. And so the significance then of God saying to Moses, "Hey, come back up and bring two new tablets," is that it signifies God is going to make a fresh start. "We are going to return and we're going to resume. We're going to pick up where we

left off. I have forgiven and I am willing to work with you, My people. We will move forward.” God was willing. Despite Israel's disobedience, God was willing!

Herein lies, I think, a tension that we all face in our life with God. We serve and we worship a glorious, forgiving God, but it's also true that He takes sin very seriously. Sin breaks relationship. So the challenge for us, as people, is how do we maintain a sense of wonder and awe and worship because He is so forgiving, but not let that lead us into a place where we begin to presume on His goodness? You know, when we start to say to ourselves, “Well, I know that’s sin, and I know God doesn't want me to do that, but I know He'll forgive me, so I'm just going to flirt with it anyway.” We want to be people that praise Him for His mercy. We're never going to live up to it, never going to be perfect. He's so merciful, but we also want to take sin seriously. We don't want to presume on His goodness. We want to worship Him as He is, and also think about sin rightly. But we can't miss here with Israel, right here in this perilous moment, what happens is that God comes and forgives. He didn't reject Israel. He was willing to remain with them. So, it's this Old Testament display of this amazing grace that is God, and His ways with His people.

So just as these first two tablets came with a glorious kind of overwhelming display of God's power and goodness with the cloud descending, the lightning and the thunder, all of that stuff happened the first time the tablets were given. So now, too, this new giving—this re-giving of the Law, of the covenant terms—is going to be accompanied and confirmed by God's overwhelming and glorious presence. Verse 5:

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.” Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship. He said, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession.” (Vs. 5-9)

So God descended, and He allowed Moses to see as much of the fullness of His splendor as Moses could possibly stand, frail and feeble as he was as a human being. And in the same way when God showed up at the burning bush all the way back in Exodus chapter three, and He proclaimed His name for the first time to Moses, He said, “I AM WHO I AM.” I am Yahweh, and here God repeats that scene and He tells Moses His name once again. But He also continues on to give a description of His very character. This is what God is like. He says He is **compassionate**, He's **gracious**, **slow to anger**, **abounding in lovingkindness and truth**. Maybe your translation says, “*abounding in steadfast love,*” *steadfast love, love that endures, love that is patient, abounding in steadfast love and truth*. He keeps lovingkindness for thousands. He **forgives iniquity, transgression and sin**. That is who He is. It's who He has always been. It's who He revealed Himself to be through His Son, Jesus. That's who Jesus was, because that's who God is. It's glorious!

But the description didn't stop there, did it? He continued, and this part maybe gives us a little bit of heartburn, because He makes it clear He is a God of justice. And this means that *the guilty will be punished*. This means that the effects and the reality of sin or iniquity will be felt for multiple generations within a family, third and fourth generations. He's a God of justice. It's a fact that He is a God of justice and it's something that I think, maybe sometimes, we just settle for, kind of, saying, "Okay, I know I have to be okay with that." But I want to encourage you just to consider it anew...consider it anew. Imagine what it would be like to live in a world where there was no justice. No one ever said there will be a time when things will be put right. Imagine if we lived in a world where no wrong was ever punished, no guilt was ever punished, where sin didn't really have any kind of effect. What would that world be like? If you think about it for just a few moments, I think you can agree that it would be a world that would be difficult for any flourishing to occur. It would be a world where relationships couldn't really stand tall, where we'd be living in the opposite of bliss, whatever that is. It would be a world of chaos, a world of discord, a world of anarchy.

Think back to the very beginning when God established the earth in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. He formed the earth and then He put a garden in the earth. And then He placed His image bearers, Adam and Eve, in that garden. Then He said, "Hey, here's the order. Here's how everything is supposed to work. Here's how you're designed. Here's how the Earth is designed. Now subdue it, extend His order throughout the earth." But Adam and Eve veered from that, and they kind of took things into their own hands. And when they did that, sin entered the world, and chaos with it...disorder! The Garden of Eden God set up in such a way it was supposed to have order. Even when we think about our world today and who we are as human beings, we're made to work in orderly ways. Just think about something like the garden you have in your backyard, like gardens are supposed to have order. That's what allows them to flourish, allows them to be beautiful sometimes.

Now I speak about this as a bit of an expert, not because I've ever gardened a day in my life. I haven't. But because when I lived in Madrid, right around the corner from our house, there was a plot of land that was taken over by a group of anarchists. It was the *anarchist garden*. No one is in charge. There are no rules; do what you want. And do you know what an anarchist garden looks like? Weeds...discord...disarray, not beauty! It's not restful. It was like a pile of rocks with a few little sprouts that popped up here and there. No one was in charge; there was no order. But the world is made for order, and one aspect of God being a God of justice is that He will uphold that order, or He will punish it if it is broken. And in that sense, His justice is an expression of His love, because He knows how things are supposed to work. And if we think about His justice rightly, we will, like Moses, bow down and worship Him, thank Him for His character, and thank Him that He is God and that we are not. It's just what Moses did.

So, with all that in mind, God's gracious character, God's justice-seeking character, with all of that in the forefront, the conversation then continued. And what we see as we continue is that the One who knows best, God, the One who knows best how humans, how civilizations, how everything is supposed to be ordered, begins once again to lay out for His people His outline for living. So, I'm going to warn you, I'm going to skip forward over some of these verses, just because some of it is repetition of what we've been over, other weeks. So, we'll begin in verse 10 and then skip ahead to verse 27 in a few moments.

Then God said, “Behold, I am going to make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform miracles which have not been produced in all the earth nor among any of the nations; and all the people among whom you live will see the working of the LORD, for it is a fearful thing that I am going to perform with you. Be sure to observe what I am commanding you this day: behold, I am going to drive out the Amorite before you, and the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite. Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. But *rather*, you are to tear down their altars and smash their *sacred* pillars and cut down their Asherim—for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God— (Vs. 10-14)

(And then skipping ahead to 34:27)

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. (Vs. 27-28)

So after God made it clear that He would reinstate the covenant relationship, He then proceeded to outline the terms of the covenant again, so that it can be placed on the tablets so that it could guide the life and the community and the living of Israel. But in what we just read, God adds and really kind of highlights an important warning for His people. He gives special attention here to this fact that Israel is about to enter into lands filled with foreign peoples, and those foreign peoples are serving and worshiping foreign gods. He knows, and we know, because we just saw it at the base of the mountain, this will be a particular temptation for Israel. And God admonishes them and warns them and says, “Be on guard, you're going to enter in, and you're going to be tempted to enter into relationships with these people. And when you do, you're going to want to take on their gods, and then you're going to enter into a covetousness and adulterous relationship with them. And I'm a jealous spouse. I just want to be with you. I'm not sharing you.” But God knew this would be a particular challenge for Israel. So He was warning them ahead of time and asking them to live out, actively, this demonstration of faith and fidelity to Him and to Him alone.

We have to understand, even though this *seems* really foreign to us, it *is* really foreign to us, and it would have been a frightful thing for people in the ancient Near Eastern culture to tear down poles or shrines, anything dedicated to deities, even if they're pagan deities. Asherah, we know is the consort, kind of like the spouse of different male gods throughout the ancient Near East, and they would be fearful to tear down these poles dedicated to her. That would bring fear that maybe Asherah, if she's real, is going to come and punish me. And so for Israel to go and tear down those shrines, tear down those poles, reject those gods, was to put themselves in a precarious position. Now they were to place their trust actively in God, and God alone, to believe that He could deliver them, that He was greater. God was calling them to an active living out of their commitment to Him. He promised, “I will be with you. I will go with you.” But don't let that lead them to believe that that meant they could just kind of kick up their feet and relax. No, He was calling them to be on guard, to be active, to watch as they go out into the world, a world that is not aligned to God, and to live faithfully to Him, committed to Him, and to Him alone. Israel is being called to an active faith!

So God's instruction was now rewritten...the terms of the covenant set again. And then we learn that Moses was on that mountain forty days and forty nights again, like he was before, which is a sermon all in itself! You just want to reflect on that for a few moments. I mean, nourished, sustained by God's presence alone! Who needs water? God, the giver of life is sustaining Moses; it's just incredible! But at this moment, we've reached this scene, this moment in the story where before everything kind of started to fall apart, this is the moment where Moses descended, but then he found the people worshipping foreign gods. So in this moment, there's a strong distinction, a strong difference. At this moment when Moses descends, it's going to be different. Instead of finding Israel worshipping and rejecting God, worshipping other gods, what we see is that God gives Israel a vivid reminder of the incredible power of His presence and the way it transforms those who are in it. Verse 29.

It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony *were* in Moses' hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him. So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers in the congregation returned to him; and Moses spoke to them. Afterward all the sons of Israel came near, and he commanded them to do everything that the LORD had spoken to him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him. (Vs. 29-35)

It's an incredible scene. The last time Moses came to the bottom of that mountain, there was rebellion. This time there is a visual reminder that testified to the contagious holiness of God. God's presence, changing Moses, God's glorious presence impacting whatever and whoever is in His presence. Simply put, time in God's presence had changed Moses. He descended that mountain, not knowing his face was shining, but when the people saw it, the reflection of God's very glory, they were filled with fear. So Moses put a veil over his face, Moses walking around essentially with a lampshade. "Don't let them see too much brightness." As I think about that veil, that shade that covers the kind of the radiant glory of God that was reflected on Moses, I can't help but be a little sad for Israel in that moment. Just think about that. We were made to reflect God's glory. That's what He designed us for. And we know what God had called Israel to. He said, "You will be a kingdom of priests. You'll be My holy nation. You will be a people for My own possession. You're My treasured possession." People were called to live in the light of His presence, and Moses knew how critical that was. Over and over again, throughout this chapter, he was just begging, "Let Your presence go with us. We need Your presence. Without Your presence, don't send us." Israel needed God's presence, but the thing that they needed the most, they were fearful of. All other times God had said, "Hey, don't come near to this or that." "Don't touch the mountain." But no such warning was given here. They weren't told to stay back from Moses, or don't look or behold his face. And yet, Moses' face glowing—even though that glowing was temporary, and it was fading—it caused them to fear. I just think to myself, "What a shame...what

a shame!” We were made to live in light of God's glory and to reflect His glory. We can't miss that God has been so willing, so merciful to walk with His people. And here we can't miss that the crisis that has really taken up all three chapters—chapter 32, 33, and 34—this crisis has been averted. God solved the problem. His relationship with Moses allowed a way forward.

Remember last week, Bryan said that these three chapters are interesting because they sit right in the middle of these chapters that are all about the building of the tabernacle. And then we have a pause, and it's this crisis. The tabernacle is all about God's presence going with His people, this mobile presence. The mobile house of God is moving along as they journey up to the promised land. But what's so significant is that for just a few moments, it seemed as though everything was in jeopardy. But now as chapter 34 draws to a close, God's presence is confirmed; the relationship is restored. And our minds will turn again, next week, to the building of the tabernacle of God, the place where His presence will dwell with His people.

So this morning, as we close, I just want to take a few moments and just reflect with you on the glorious nature of God as it is displayed here—just who He is. In spite of the rebellion, in spite of the clear rejection of Him by His people, people who He has just delivered miraculously out of slavery in Egypt, despite all of that, He forgives! Despite all of that, He says, “My presence will go with you.” That moment was tense. Sin was a big problem, but God is a forgiving God. And Moses, when he saw that, when he realized that, oh, he bowed down to worship. That's who we serve. I do wonder, though, as I've been having different conversations with people as we've been walking through this series in Exodus, I've heard a number of people just ask the question that really is a very central fear. It's the fear I brought up at the very beginning. It's a concern. If God, even this past week as we studied last week in chapter 32, and 33, if He's so willing to reject Israel, would He reject me? Would He be willing to do that? And we have to remember again, the end of the story today. God looked at Israel and He forgave them. He forgave them, and He promised that His presence would go with them.

Now, please don't miss this. If that is true of Israel, it is much more true of us who are in Christ. It is much more true of those of us who have placed our faith in Christ, because what we see on these pages, what we see in Moses, is a foreshadowing, but what we see in Christ is the fulfillment. Moses offered himself up as a sacrifice. Last week we read about that. Moses said, “Take me.” Jesus was the perfect sacrifice. Moses begged for forgiveness. Jesus accomplished perfect, and ultimate, and final for forgiveness, by offering Himself as a perfect sacrifice, an atoning sacrifice once for all for sin. If this is true for Israel in this moment, it is much more true for those of us that now live in light of the cross. We live in a different reality. For those of us who live in light of the cross, live on this side of the cross, who've placed our faith in Jesus Christ, we don't live in this precarious position. We live in a state where we can constantly affirm with bold confidence that nothing can separate us from God's love. Nothing can move us into a place where our relationship with Him is beyond repair. Why? Not because we're so good, but because Jesus paid it all. Israel, we know in the Old Testament, had to offer up sacrifice over and over again. Jesus is the perfect sacrifice, once for all sacrifice, so there's no need to offer sacrifice over and over. Sin and its growth does not encroach upon our relationship with God because Jesus paid for sin. He cleansed.

So where does that leave us? Well, if you have never pursued Christ, if you've never come to Him, if you've never placed your faith in Him, let today be the day. Come to Him and place your faith

in Him. He has paid it all. If you have given your life to Him, then I want to encourage you, “Don't stand far off from the glory of God. Don't be like Israel standing far off, afraid of His presence. Pursue Him. Draw near as Moses was able to draw near.” The logical question that follows on that is, “How, how do we do that today?” And the simplest answer I can give you is, “Look to Jesus. Look to Him in His Word. Dwell upon Him. Savor Him. Think upon Him. Contemplate who He is. Consider Him. Take Him with you; talk with Him; converse with Him; live with Him. Pursue Jesus because, in Him and in His gospel, the fullness of the glory of God has been revealed.”

Now, maybe you're thinking, “Well, that's nice, but really, come on, this is Moses we're talking about, and we're not like Moses. He stood in the presence of God, and who are we to think we're anything like him?” And I think you're right to ask that question. See the truth, the biblical truth, is that we have much more than Moses had. The life that we get to live because of Jesus Christ is much more than what Moses experienced. Who are we? We are people with much more access than Moses had. That's who we are. And I don't want you to take my word for it. I want you to listen to the Apostle Paul as we close.

In 2 Corinthians, chapter 3, Paul is reflecting on this very reality, the moment of Moses being on the mountain with God and His face glowing and he says then in 2 Corinthians 3, verse 13, that we who are in Christ, we are not like Moses, because Moses saw the glory of God and he was transformed, but that transformation was momentary, and it was fading. But for those of us who are in Christ, we can enter in unfettered access, behold and take in the glory of the Father not once, but forever, and we can be forever changed. He says just that in verse 18, of 2 Corinthians 3. Paul says, ***“But we all, with unveiled face, behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.”*** Moses' glory was fading, but we all, that is all who are in Christ, we are free to constantly gaze upon the glory of the Lord, made manifest in Jesus Christ and in this gospel. And as we gaze upon that glory, we are called to do it not sometimes, but all the time, not occasionally, but constantly. And God promises that as we do that, we will be transformed, transformed into His very likeness, not with a fading transformation, but one that is continually growing from glory to glory, all of that for God's fame, for God's reputation, for His glory! Pray with me.

Our Father, we do thank You. We thank You that Your nature, as we look at it, is worthy of worship. It is worthy of praise. You are compassionate and gracious, slow to anger. We thank You for that. We are people that need compassion. We need Your mercy. But we also, Lord, say that we are thankful that You're in charge, that You're a God of justice, that You promise us You will set things right in the end, that things will be as they are supposed to be. And we thank You that in Your Son, You gave us the perfect sacrifice that atones for sin, and that has now granted us unfettered, no obstacles, to come and draw near to You, that we might glory in Your presence made manifest to us in Jesus and in the gospel. And so we pray that You would do that, and You would transform us into His likeness, from glory to glory for the sake of Your name. We pray these things in the name of Jesus, Amen.

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WINTER 2024 // WEEK 9

Life Group Questions

Exodus – The God Who Is With // March 9/10, 2024

God's Transforming Presence // Exodus 33:17-34:35

Introduction

In Exodus 33:17-34:35, God assures Moses of his favor and reveals His glory and character while reaffirming the covenant made with His people. This passage explores themes of God's promises and commitments, His relationship to the Israelites, and the balance of His mercy and justice.

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 is the most interesting thing you've learned recently?

- 2) How did you and your best friend meet?

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) **Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group.**
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Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

- 1) What did you find most interesting in this passage of scripture or in this week's sermon?

- 2) In recent chapters, God has taken the position of a judge over His people in their time of disobedience and rebellion, and Moses has been a mediator who intercedes for them. However, in this week's passage, we see the beginning of a time of restoration for the Israelites' relationship to God. **How do we see God planting seeds of restoration for the flourishing of His people in this week's passage?**

Exodus 33:17-23 shows growth in the relationship between Moses and God: Moses humbly seeks to experience God's glory, and God carefully and mercifully reveals it to him. **Is it challenging for you to seek the experience of God's glory in your life? Why or why not?**

Moses's growth is shown in his willingness to boldly ask God to show Himself. **Is there anything that you are afraid to ask God for? If you are willing, share it with your group.**

- 3) In *Exodus 34:6-7*, God makes some remarkable and decisive statements about His own characteristics and identity. Take a moment to read through these and reflect on His character. **Which of these self-identified qualities of God do you find particularly surprising, puzzling, awe-inspiring, or worthy of praise?**

We are told that God "forgives wrongdoing... yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished," exploring His sense of justice and righteous retribution as well as His merciful and forgiving nature. **How do we manage the tension between these two seemingly opposite traits?**

How can we find comfort in following a God who cares about justice and takes sin seriously?

- 4) In *Exodus 34:29-35*, Moses' intimate interaction with God caused his face to glow. **While our faces might not glow, what are ways that your relationship with God has changed you?**

Read *2 Corinthians 3:12-18* together with your group. Unlike Moses, Paul tells us in v. 18 that we have the privilege of unceasingly (unveiled) gazing upon the glory of the Lord and are, in turn, transformed from glory to glory. **What are some helpful ways you have found to dwell on who Jesus is and, thus, behold the glory of the Lord?**

Read *2 Corinthians 4:16-18* as a group. Paul is helping his readers consider how to follow Jesus in the midst of struggle. He tells them that God intends to use “light momentary afflictions” to produce in us an eternal weight of glory. **How have you seen God use trials in your life to help you become more like Jesus? Does this knowledge help you face current trials with more hope?**

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 some time this week reflecting on the qualities of God that He names in *Exodus 34:6-7*. Consider how you can watch for these things to appear in your life and in the world around you, and how you can praise God for these parts of His identity. (A great resource for this reflection is a video from The Bible Project titled “**Visual Commentary: Exodus 34:6-7**” which you can find through this link: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/character-of-god-exodus/>)

Prayer Focus: Pray *2 Corinthians 12:9* over the course of this week and reflect on how God may be showing His strength even in the moments when you are weak. Ask Him how His grace can transform you day by day to point toward His power and sufficiency.

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of “coming together” is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say “Amen” aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?