

HUNGRY FOR GOD: STUDIES ON PRAYER

7

PRAISE AND ADORATION

Exodus 33:7—34:9

By John Ebert

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.”

Hebrews 13:15

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

1 Peter 2:9

“Prayer is listening as well as speaking, receiving as well as asking; and its deepest mood is friendship held in reverence”

George A. Buttrick

“Welcomed in to the courts of the King, I’ve been ushered in to Your presence. Lord, I stand on Your merciful ground, Yet with every step tread with reverence. And I’ll fall facedown, as Your glory shines around. Yes, I’ll fall facedown, as Your glory shines around. There is none in the heavens like You, And upon the earth, who’s Your equal? You are far above, You’re the highest of heights, I am bowing down to exalt You.”

Matt Redman

AIM

- To encourage us to worship the awesome and intimate God.

KEY VERSE

“Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD.”

Exodus 34:5

PREPARATION

Read over the notes on “**How to Teach the Bible in Small Group**” and “**Some Practical Suggestions for Leading a Small Group Discussion**” in Vineyard Church of Columbus’ *Small Group Leadership Training Manual*. Before you read over the Scripture, pray that God would give you direction for leading your group and teach you something relevant. Then, read through the passage and the Bible study below. **You will need to go over the questions and choose which ones you want to emphasize and which you could eliminate if your time is limited.** Note that the application questions are marked with an asterisk (*). Rather than leaving these to the end of the study, ask one or two as you work through the passage so people are being confronted by Scripture’s truths and applying them to their own lives. If you find you are falling behind schedule and need to move ahead, you could summarize some of the passage and then go to the final questions.

These studies contain more background material and information on the passages than any group will cover in a meeting. The authors are providing this for the leaders’ benefit—to help reduce your study and preparation time; to provide resources for possible questions group members may raise; and to clarify some gray areas of doctrine that may be in your mind as you prepare. Obviously we cannot exhaust any one subject in a document like this, so you may want to do further reading and discuss doctrine with your pastor. We highly recommend *The New Bible Dictionary* or *The New Bible Commentary* as excellent resources for study.

OPENERS

If someone asked you to describe God, what three words or phrases would you use?

You may permit more than three, but do limit the contributions so you can move on.

In 1654, a French scientist and mathematician had “...a profound religious experience” with God after hearing a sermon in a Christian community. Afterwards he wrote a few words on a piece of paper, sewed this into his coat lining, and had it with him for the rest of his life. From that point on, his life was changed. He devoted six years to studying the Bible and the writings of early Christian leaders. For the last two years of his life, he began writing a defense of Christianity, which was published after his death and has impacted millions. Listen to what he wrote as he reflected on his encounter with God:

Fire.

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of philosophers and scholars.

Certainty, certainty, heartfelt joy and peace.

God of Jesus Christ. Joy, joy, joy, oceans of joy!

(Blaise Pascal, quoted in Foster and Smith, p.172).

Is the God Pascal describes the same God we worship day-by-day, week-by-week? Have we seen a glimpse of God that profoundly changed our whole lives? Do we fall on our faces in awe and worship before the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because we have seen His holy fire, His awesome beauty and unsurpassed perfection? Does He deserve this kind of worship no matter what we have experienced? In this study, we will look at Moses’ own encounter with the Lord, which is one of the most profound and astounding moments in all of Scripture.

Pray and invite the Holy Spirit to come and meet you through this study.

INTRODUCTION TO THIS STUDY

[These notes are for leaders. You may determine how much to share with your group.]

The passage in this study is in the middle of the long story about God bringing the people of Israel out of Egypt and taking them to the Promised Land. Prior to this passage, God had called Moses to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt. After God sent horrific plagues and stunning miracles, Egypt’s Pharaoh finally released the people of Israel to let them leave Egypt. God brought the Hebrews to Mount Sinai where He made a covenant, a sacred agreement, with them and gave them the Ten Commandments. According to the covenant, the people were to worship only God and obey His commands. For His part, God would take care of them and bless them. Through this privileged relationship, God would show the rest of the nations who He was and what He was like.

Unfortunately, while Moses was up on the mountain receiving additional instructions from God, the people got impatient, wondering when Moses would return. So, they made a statue of a golden calf, called it their god, and worshipped it. God threatened to destroy all the people for their idolatry. But Moses interceded and God relented

and punished them less severely. However, God said that He could not go with the people because their continual disobedience would provoke Him to destroy them. The passage in this study occurred at the height of the tension between God's love for and desire to be with the people of Israel and His abhorrence of the sinfulness of the people, which had greatly offended Him and drove Him away from them.

Study the passage: Exodus 33:7–34:9

Let's read Exodus 33:7–34:9 by dividing it up into sections. Would 4 volunteers please read aloud 33:7–11, 12–17, 18–23, and 34:1–9?

1. In verses 7–11, where did Moses regularly speak with God?

Moses pitched a tent outside the camp, probably since God did not want to appear in the midst of this rebellious people. Perhaps His holy presence would endanger them; perhaps He did not want to associate with them or have them think that their sinful attitudes and behavior mattered very little. Be sure that no one confuses this tent with the grand tent-like sanctuary, the Tabernacle, which God told Moses how to construct (Exodus, 36:8–38, 40:2, 6, cited in Carson). The Tabernacle would be God's holy meeting place with His people, and was mobile so that it could move with them. This indicated that God's presence would distinguish them from all other peoples, that God would not rule or remain just in one locale, as was believed by some Middle Eastern religions. Instead, the Tabernacle symbolized that God would be with His people wherever they journeyed because He wasn't just God of a small territory, but Lord of the whole earth.

2. Why do you think God didn't enter the tent with Moses (v. 9), or have Moses stand outside while He inhabited the inside?

***What kinds of barriers are there between God and us today? Why do you think they exist?**

3. What do you think it means "The LORD would speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks with his friend" (v. 11)? Didn't we just learn that Moses was separated from God's Presence by the tent?

To speak "face to face" is an idiom, an expression that may be unique to a particular language. This phrase is very pictorial, since two people facing each other would tend to speak more directly and personally than people who do not maintain eye contact or cannot even see the other person easily. Matthews writes that "face to face" suggests "...an honest and open relationship. It does not contradict 33:20–23. Numbers 12:8 uses a different expression with the same meaning, 'mouth to mouth'" (Matthews et al, "Exodus 33"). Perhaps, too, "face to face" refers to the fact that God and

Moses spoke without a mediator, such as a priest, who has been cleansed and approved to approach God with blood sacrifices to cover human sin.

4. Since God has previously indicated (v. 3) that He would not accompany the Israelites to the Promised Land, what inquiry does Moses make of God (v. 12)?

In verses 12 and 13, Moses bases his requests on what God has already said. In verse 12, Moses indirectly asks who will go with him when he obeys by leading the people. Since God has just said that He would not go with the people (vv. 3, 5), Moses indicates that he is not interested in leading without divine help. He has seen the powerful acts of the Lord in sending plagues, in dividing the sea, in defeating the Egyptian army, and in protecting the Israelites (Exodus 7–14). He has also seen the Lord defeat other adversaries (Exodus 17) and miraculously supply water and food when none could be found in the desert (Exodus 16 and 17).

Moses faces a daunting task. He needs divine help to keep such a multitude united and mobile, especially since they numbered somewhere from 250,000 up to more than two million (Allen and Barker, p. 195). Moses also knows that the people he is leading often complain, falter in their faith in God, and may turn against Moses' leadership. When the people of Israel worshipped the golden calf they made, they wanted a visible representation of their deity just like all the other nations. Instead, this was a flagrant violation of God's second commandment (Exodus 20:4–6). Is Moses now asking for more detailed clarification of God's commandments so that the people he is leading don't make a mistake like that again? Or is Moses crying out to God because he is desperate for God's presence and does not want to be separated from Him (Carson).

6. In verse 13, Moses asks God to teach him His ways so that he can continue to find favor with God. Why would Moses want to “know God's ways”? Doesn't he already know what God is like after meeting at the burning bush, seeing what God has done in the past ten months, and talking at the tent of meeting on a regular basis?

When someone in the Bible talks about knowing “God's ways,” he or she could be referring to knowing the way God deals mercifully with His people (Stek, note on Psalm 25:10, p. 809). These actions reveal His loving and merciful character. God's ways could also refer to the things that He requires in the covenant from those who benefit from His kindness (Stek, note on Psalm 25:4, p. 809). Although Moses was given the Ten Commandments and read them to the people, they quickly violated them. Did the Hebrews just need to learn more about God in order to please and obey Him? [See question 5.]

Moses seems to be trying to fathom whom God is to an ever-greater degree. Is this a scientific, information-gathering request (i.e., ‘God, give me more data about Yourself’)? Is Moses seeking a closer relationship with God, not resting on his past experiences with God, but pressing on to know God more? Why does he also remind the Lord that the people of Israel are God’s people? Is Moses moving toward asking God to extend the favor he enjoys to all the Hebrews, all those who have followed him from the time of deliverance in Egypt?

***What feelings might you have if you had Moses’ job? What would you require for your travels? What would you ask God to provide?**

4. How does God respond (v. 14)?

In verse 14, God responds somewhat enigmatically to Moses’ requests. Although God’s response appears favorable, in Hebrew, the form of “you” that God uses is singular. While this could be a reference to the people as a whole, it seems more natural to treat it as a reference to Moses. In other words, God says He will go with Moses and give Moses rest, but He makes no such promise about the people of Israel. Moses has found favor with God, but the people have not. The tension between God’s love for the people and God’s offense at their sin has not yet been resolved. God may yet destroy the people of Israel for their disobedience and bring Moses alone to the Promised Land. This reminds us that God takes sin very seriously, and it is not a trivial matter for God to forgive our offenses.

5. Why does Moses now ask God for something else (vv. 15–16)?

In verses 15 and 16, Moses is more direct in asking on behalf of the people. He uses plural pronouns, like “us,” and twice employs the phrase “me and your people,” emphasizing that he is including the people of Israel in his request for God’s presence and God’s favor. Perhaps in verses 12 and 13, Moses was asking on his own behalf to find out where he stood with God. Since God assured him of His favor in verse 15, now Moses asks more boldly on behalf of the people.

In verse 17, God grants Moses’ requests. God will go with Moses and with the people. However, God again uses singular pronouns, perhaps indicating that God is pleased with Moses, but is still angry with the people of Israel for their sin. It is because God is pleased with Moses and knows him intimately that He agrees to also lead the people.

6. What final request does Moses make in verse 18? What is he asking God to do?

In the Bible, God’s glory refers to “...the revelation of God’s being, nature and presence to mankind, sometimes with physical phenomena” (Wood, et al, p. 414). The word used for glory is related to a person’s weight, and therefore

their value and reputation (Wood, et al, p. 414). Often Scripture uses it to mean the sum of God's perfect and glorious attributes. Moses' request in verse 18 can be interpreted a couple of different ways. Just as "my Presence" and "your Presence" in verses 14 and 15 refer to God Himself, "your glory" in verse 18 could be a respectful way to refer to God, similar to the way we might call a judge "your honor." Since a critical question in this dialogue is whether God is going to go with the people, Moses might be asking for some kind of proof that God really will accompany them. He might be saying to God, "If you are going to go with us, then show us some visible sign that you are here." Prior to this, God had been leading the people through the pillar of cloud during the day and a fire pillar of fire at night. Also, God had been manifesting the pillar of cloud when He spoke with Moses outside the camp.

An alternative interpretation is that Moses is extending his request for God to teach him His ways so that he might know Him better. In this understanding, Moses might be saying to God, "I have seen glimpses of who You are and what You are like, but I want more. I don't just want to see just a little of You; I want to see You in Your full glory." Carson believes that Moses doesn't want to leave this area, where he has spoken intimately with God, if God refuses to move on with Moses and the nation. "Behind this request is the fear that if God did not go up with the people, Moses would no longer be able to meet with Him face to face" (Carson).

***When have you prayed to God to help you know Him better? How did God respond to your prayer?**

7. Based on Exodus 33:11–18, how would you describe Moses' relationship with God?

Verse 11 says that Moses used to speak with God face to face as a man speaks with his friend. These verses reveal that kind of a relationship. Moses speaks freely and asks God for what he wants. God grants what Moses requests and tells Moses that He is pleased with him and knows him. When Moses asks God for a deeper intimacy with Him, God appears to welcome this request.

***Have you ever felt that you have this kind of relationship with God?**

Worship in the Vineyard is intended to foster this kind of closeness with God. Many of the songs use second-person pronouns, addressing God as "you" in order to encourage us to feel the direct contact with God that we have through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:19–22). Hopefully you and your group members have experienced some of this intimacy with God through corporate worship times. Likewise, we discussed the idea of devotional prayer in which we listen to God and respond privately because our relationship with Him is meant to be two-way.

***What do you think holds you back from knowing God more intimately?**

***What do you think it would take to speak with God like Moses did?**

8. Reread Exodus 33:19–34:5 silently. How does the interaction between God and Moses differ from the previous section? Who does most of the talking?

In the previous section, Moses did most of the talking, making various statements and requests. God's answers were affirmative, but brief. In this section, God does the talking; Moses says nothing at all. God tells Moses to do various things, like chisel out some tablets and come up the mountain, and Moses obeys without questioning.

9. How did the Lord respond to Moses' request to see God's glory, a manifestation of His holy being (19–23)?

God's answer to Moses' request in Exodus 33:18 (“show me your glory”) is both ‘yes’ and ‘no.’ In verse 20, God says that Moses' request cannot be granted. While in verse 11, God and Moses spoke “face to face,” here God's “face” cannot be seen. Remember that verse 11 is probably using an expression for familiarity and openness. Here, when God does not permit His “face” to be seen, this is another figure of speech. It is anthropomorphism, a way of describing something by giving it human characteristics (Kaiser, pp. 154–155). The Bible is clear that God is spirit, so He does not have flesh and bones and blood. The use of “face” in verse 20 could also be a synecdoche, a part of speech that uses one part to stand for the whole. So, “face” actually could represent all of God's person.

There may be several reasons why Moses is not permitted to see God in all His glory. The Lord tells Moses “no one may see me and live.” This may be simply that God's full presence is so overwhelming that it would destroy anyone who saw Him, just as looking directly at the sun can damage your eyes. While Moses can have a great deal of intimacy with God, if Moses saw God's full glory, he would not survive the encounter.

It also might refer to the fact that no one was holy enough to approach God without a mediator, such as a priest, who had been cleansed and approved to approach God with blood sacrifices to cover human sin. In Exodus 33:3 and 5, God says He will not go with the people so He will not destroy them because of their sinfulness. In Chapters 33 and 34, there seems to be a limit to how close Moses can come to God before his sinfulness offends God and leads to his destruction. In any case, God does not reject Moses' request outright. God won't show Moses as much as He could, which seems to be motivated by His love. Instead, God plans to protect Moses while His full glory passes by and let Moses see God's glory from behind. In verse 23, God, who is spirit, has a

“back.” This is another anthropomorphism, used to convey that God would be passing by Moses, and not until He had moved on, would Moses be allowed to look. This might be what Paul referred to in I Corinthians 13:12 about seeing “but a poor reflection as in a mirror.”

10. Based on Exodus 33:19–34:5, how would you describe Moses’ relationship with God?

In Exodus 33:7–18, Moses and God seemed to relate as friends. In contrast, in this section, God seems to treat Moses more like a servant. In the previous section, Moses seemed to be drawing close to God. In this section, that closeness seems to have reached a limit beyond which Moses cannot approach.

***Have you ever felt a sense of awe or reverent distance in your relationship with God?**

While we seek to foster intimacy with God in the Vineyard, we do not want to lose sight of the holiness and awesomeness of God. God is not some harmless, tame deity whom we can bring out whenever we need a little extra help. God is the all-powerful creator of the universe, who is far greater than anything we can imagine and is far outside any possibility of our control. Scholars call this quality “transcendence,” meaning, “God is far above, beyond and outside the created order” (Manser, et al, p. 27). God is also holy and pure and will not endure the presence of evil and wickedness. Without some grasp of the greatness and holiness of God, we will not appreciate what a miracle it is that God welcomes us into relationship with Him and draws us close to Him.

***How can we maintain a proper balance between respect for the holiness of God and receptivity to His invitation to draw near and be intimate with Him?**

It may be easier to understand and maintain a proper balance between respecting God’s holiness and His invitation to draw near by remembering a relationship between a godly father and his children. Such a father wants his children to draw near to him and shares many tender moments, which nourish each child and delight the father. He sees what is special about each child, valuing them for who they are and encouraging them to use their gifts and talents. At the same time, the children know that dad is also the “boss,” and will mete out proper discipline when necessary so that they will develop in desirable ways and forsake destructive patterns. Just as Moses did with God, children know that they can be bold in asking their father tough questions or expressing their needs and fears. Like Moses, they don’t assume that they can order their father around, do whatever they please or spit in his face if he says “No” to something they want. The father is the one who knows what is best for the children, and they know they must obey him and respect his authority over them. In the same way, God is our divine Father: As His

children, He invites us to intimately know Him, rely on His abundant grace and mercy, and trust Him for all our needs, including eternal salvation. On the other hand, God commands that we fully submit to and honor His sovereignty and holiness, as the writer of the Book of Hebrews reminds us in Chapter 12:18–29:

Unlike your ancestors, you didn't come to Mount Sinai—all that volcanic blaze and earthshaking rumble—to hear God speak. The earsplitting words and soul-shaking message terrified them and they begged him to stop. When they heard the words—'If an animal touches the Mountain, it's as good as dead'—they were afraid to move. Even Moses was terrified.

No, that's not *your* experience at all. You've come to Mount Zion, the city where the living God resides. The invisible Jerusalem is populated by throngs of festive angels and Christian citizens. It is the city where God is Judge, with judgments that make us just. You've come to Jesus, who presents us with a new covenant, a fresh charter from God. He is the Mediator of this covenant. The murder of Jesus, unlike Abel's—a homicide that cried out for vengeance—became a proclamation of grace.

So don't turn a deaf ear to these gracious words. If those who ignored earthly warnings didn't get away with it, what will happen to us if we turn our backs on heavenly warnings? His voice that time shook the earth to its foundations; this time—he's told us quite plainly—he'll also rock the heavens: 'One last shaking' from top to bottom, stem to stern.' The phrase 'one last shaking' means a thorough housecleaning, getting rid of all the historical and religious junk so that the unshakable essentials stand clear and uncluttered.

Do you see what we've got? An unshakable kingdom! And do you see how thankful we must be? Not only thankful, but brimming with worship, deeply reverent before God. For God is not an indifferent bystander. He's actively cleaning house, torching all that needs to burn, and he won't quit until it's all cleansed. God himself is Fire!

(THE MESSAGE)

Maintaining an appropriate balance between respecting God's holiness and enjoying an intimate relationship with Him is not possible under our own strength. Fortunately, God is delighted to help us with this formidable task, which **requires nothing less than our complete surrender to Him as Almighty God: a willingness to pray and ask God to change us from the inside out in whatever way He chooses.** It is the way of a child: vulnerable, dependent, trusting. Submitting ourselves to God in this way is perhaps one of the greatest forms of praise/worship we can undertake in this life (Romans 12:1–2).

11. In verses 18–19, how does God respond to Moses’ request to see His glory? What does God promise to reveal?

Although God will not let Moses see His face (v. 20), God does reveal four things in response to Moses’ request to see His glory.

1. God will show His goodness, that is, the quality unique to God of being “morally perfect, and gloriously generous.” God is the standard for what is “good” (Mark 10:18) and all that He has made, does, gives, and commands is good (Wood et al, “Good,” pp. 423–424).
2. God will proclaim His name to Moses. Just as God knows Moses by name (v. 33:17), so Moses will know God by name. In the ancient world, a person’s name revealed that person’s character. Thus, “Jacob,” which means “he deceives,” was one who schemed many times to get his own way (Genesis 25:26). When he wrestled God and would not let go until God blessed him, the Lord changed Jacob’s name to “Israel,” “he struggles with God” (Genesis 32:28).
3. God will show mercy. The Hebrew word translated as “mercy” is related to the word translated as “favor” in verses 33:12–13 and as “pleased” in verses 33:16–17. It can also be translated as “gracious.” God will show favor to, God will be pleased with, God will be gracious to whom He wishes.
4. God will have compassion. The Hebrew word translated as “compassion” is possibly related to the word for “womb,” implying that this is like the love that a mother has for her child.

God’s statements about His mercy and compassion point to His sovereign freedom. God is merciful and compassionate, but He is also holy and just. “God is light; in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). He is pure and always true; He does not ignore or compromise His standards out of pity for those who rebel against Him. We cannot presume on God’s mercy and compassion, because if God were bound to show us mercy no matter what we did, that would negate His holiness, reduce the seriousness of our disobedience, and turn God into someone we would use but not respect. Because God chooses freely whether to show mercy or not, our sinfulness is a serious matter and may affect God’s choice of how to deal with us. When God does have mercy on us, it is truly undeserved. God’s infinite grace towards us should prompt us to adore Him in worship.

12. In Exodus 34:1–3, what other barrier did God demand between Himself and human beings?

13. How did God appear to Moses on the mountain (34:4–7)? What more do we learn in these verses compared to 33:19?

God comes down to Moses in a cloud. The cloud is a visible indication of the presence of God, but also hides God from Moses. As such, it renders God both visible and invisible at the same time (Durham, p. 453).

Then, God once again proclaims His name to Moses: “the LORD.” When “LORD” is rendered in small capital letters, as it is throughout this passage, it represents a translation of God’s Hebrew name “Yahweh” (transliterating the Hebrew letters gives “YHWH”). In Hebrew, “YHWH” is similar in form to the verb “to be.” God tells him that He is the same LORD whom Moses encountered at the burning bush, the same LORD who commissioned Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land (3–4). Exodus 3 is notable as the place where God first revealed His name “I AM WHO I AM” (i.e., YHWH) to a human being and revealed YHWH as His name forever (vv. 14–15). That encounter also had marked Moses’ first with God (Durham, p. 451).

The name “YHWH” distinguishes God as the one, true God of Israel, the Almighty Ruler of the universe, Who chose Israel to be in a special relationship with Him (Exodus 3:15, 6:2–3). This name of God is unique from all others, because it reveals Him in His *substance*, as the fountainhead of blessings for man, distinct and separate from His operations in nature. Under this title throughout Scripture, God is set forth in His essential, moral and spiritual attributes (Lockyer, p. 19). Other passages in Scripture reveal how the name “YHWH” further distinguishes God. His existence is independent and eternal (Psalm 10:16; Isaiah 40:28; Jeremiah 10:10; Revelation 1:8, 11:15–17). He is the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He “does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). He is consistent and true to Himself; He never lies and always keeps His promises (Numbers 23:19; 2 Timothy 2:13).

It’s interesting to note that for thousands of years, the Jews have avoided speaking or even writing the unique Name “Yahweh,” out of fear that if they said ever said God’s Name, they might misuse it, thereby breaking one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:7). Instead, they speak or write of this distinguished name of God as “*The Name, The Separate Name, The Great and Terrible Name, or The Name of Four Letters,*” among others (Lockyer, p. 17). How many of us have such a reverence for God?

When God passes before Moses in Exodus 34:6–7, He adds more specific detail about who He is and reveals His character through seven positive attributes or blessings, and two consequences for those who defy Him:

Blessings:

1. God is compassionate. This is the same word in Hebrew as in verse 33:19, the one that may refer to a mother's love for a child.
2. God is gracious. In Hebrew, this word is the adjective form of the verbs translated as "have mercy" in verse 33:19. God shows favor even when it is not deserved.
3. God is slow to anger. Note that it does not say that God will never get angry. However, he will have to be provoked for a long time before he will get angry.
4. God is abounding in love. The Hebrew word is not the word normally translated as love, but a word that includes the idea of steadfastness and loyalty. It indicates God stays committed to people for a long time even when they are unfaithful.
5. God is abounding in faithfulness. God is reliable. Like the word translated as love, this indicates that God will stay committed for a long time.
6. God maintains love to thousands. The "thousands" may mean "thousands of generations" in contrast to the three or four generations that God punishes. Some scholars believe the three or four generations refer to the generations of a family alive at the time that someone offends God. That sin then has consequences for the entire family (Matthews et al, "Exodus 34," p.). God may punish for a few generations, but his steadfast love lasts much, much longer.
7. God forgives wickedness, rebellion and sin. The Hebrew word translated as "forgive" also has the meaning of "lift." God "lifts" the burden from sinners who violate His laws. Three different words, the three most common Hebrew words for sin, are used to describe what God forgives. This emphasizes the comprehensive nature of God's forgiveness (Brueggemann, p.946).

Consequences for Sin:

1. God does not leave the guilty unpunished. In Hebrew, the verb is doubled for emphasis. God really will not pardon the unrepentant, but will see that they are punished.
2. God punishes sin, extending that punishment over several generations. The Hebrew word translated as "punish" has the meaning of "visit." God visits the sin of the fathers upon the children (Brueggemann, p.947). The harshness of this consequence is later ameliorated in the Book of Ezekiel, where God states, " Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, " What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, 'The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children's teeth are set on

edge'? "As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore. "Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die." (Ezekiel 18:1–4).

The positive characteristics show God's gracious nature, God's willingness to overlook past wrongs, to forgive sins, to hold fast to relationships despite difficulties and failings. The negative characteristics emphasize the seriousness of sin. Those who disobey God and reject his love deserve God's anger and punishment. While God's nature loves and is merciful, sin is still an offense to God, and God is not required to forgive it. While God may patiently hold back punishment for a long time, He may choose at any time to visit or bring fair punishment on those who sin. However, He differs greatly from other ancient and contemporary deities in that He is not capricious, unpredictably nice on some days and surprisingly malicious on others.

The tension between God lifting sin and God punishing sin is not resolved in this passage from Ezekiel. God is concerned both for the person who sins and for His own glory that is offended by that sin. We don't know how God may react in any situation. God is free and sovereign; He does whatever He pleases and is not under our control (Psalm 115:3; Isaiah 46:10). While it may seem that God is unpredictable and even dangerous (Brueggemann, pp. 947–948), God reveals Himself as fair, consistent, and very long-suffering with sinners. He repeatedly warns His own people and the nations around them of coming judgment. He does not punish them without cause. We also see that God's tendency is to be gracious and merciful (seven phrases) rather than angry and unforgiving (two phrases).

Exodus 33:19 and Exodus 34:5–6 both appear to be ancient confessions of who God is. Similar descriptions occur throughout the Old Testament, most notably in Psalm 86:15, Psalm 103:8, Psalm 145:8, Numbers 14:18, Joel 2:13, Nahum 1:3, Nehemiah 9:17 and Jonah 4:2 (Durham, pp. 453–454). Some of these, such as Psalm 145:8, emphasize God's generosity, while others, like Nahum 1:2–3, emphasize God's severity.

14. Based on Exodus 33:19 and 34:5–7, what do you think is "God's glory"?

Perhaps driven by our analytical, Western mindset, we have a tendency to think of God in terms of quantifiable concepts, like omniscience (knowing everything), omnipresence (being present everywhere) and omnipotence (being all powerful). While these accurately describe God, they treat God as a separate object, unrelated to anything else and distant from us.

Another way to describe God is to say what God has done. The Old Testament often defines God in terms of His activity. God is the one who delivered the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. God is the one who brought the people to the Promised Land. God is the one who made David king of Israel and gave Israel victory over her enemies. Again, while these accurately describe God, they treat God as a servant, someone to be valued for what He does for us.

In this passage, when God shows His glory to Moses, He does not mention His abstract power and greatness or what He has done for Moses and the people of Israel. According to some, another way to look at God's glory, that is, what is most important to God, what is on God's heart, is from a relational aspect (Brueggemann, p.947). God's glory is to have mercy on those who don't deserve it, to show compassion on those who are in difficulty. God's glory is to hold fast in love to His people, whether they worship Him or turn away from Him. God's glory is to forgive sin and hold back anger and punishment.

God does not minimize the consequences of disobedience and sin. Sin offends God and warrants God's punishment. If God did not take sin seriously, then God's gracious nature would be compromised and cheapened. Precisely because sin is such a serious break in our relationship with God, the awesomeness of God's undeserved mercy and love for sinners was shown when He lifted the guilt off of us and bore it Himself when Jesus died on the cross. This is the love, compassion, grace and mercy of God that should make us stand back in awe at how amazing God is and should cause us to fall down and worship the unfathomable God who reaches out to us even when we turn away from Him.

***How does God's self-description compare with the three words (or phrases) you used to describe God at the beginning of our discussion?**

14. Look at Exodus 34:8–9. How does Moses react to God's appearance?

Moses bows down and worships God. The phrasing in Hebrew emphasizes that Moses did this quickly, without hesitation. This is the best response to the revelation of God's glory, of God's great and incomprehensible love for us.

Moses goes on to acknowledge that the people of Israel are "stiff-necked," meaning they will continue to sin. However, given the revelation of God's glory, that God has compassion and mercy for sinners, Moses asks God to forgive their sin, go with them, and take them as His inheritance, that is, as His people, the people who represent Him on earth.

***How will you respond to what God has revealed to you in this study?**

We should follow the wisdom of the teacher in Ecclesiastes, who wrote,

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words.

Ecclesiastes 5:1–3

APPLICATION

***How do God’s characteristics, as revealed to Moses, inspire you to praise Him? Which attribute impacted you the most and why?**

***Do you find it easier to “do” something for God or His kingdom rather than worship Him? Why?**

***Have you surrendered to God to the point where you have asked Him to do *whatever is necessary* to make you more like Him? If not, why? If so, what were the results?**

***Choose one characteristic of God from this passage, and spend time each day reflecting on it and praising God for His person.**

Suggestions for Ministry time:

Meditate on the awesome love that God has for us. Worship God for His glory, for how He shows mercy and compassion on us.

If anyone feels that he or she does not know this God of love, pray that the Holy Spirit would give him or her the power “to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge” (Ephesians 3:18–19).

WRAPPING IT UP

This passage illustrates some tensions in our relationship with God. On the one hand, God has made the way for us to draw near, as a friend talks to a friend. Yet on the other hand, there is a limit to how close we can come to God before we are overwhelmed by God's greatness or holiness. While God punishes sin and disobedience, He also forgives sin and shows love to those who don't deserve it. The barriers between God and us, such as God's greatness and our sinfulness, are real and serious problems. In that light, God's actions to overcome such barriers, forgive our sin and bring us into His presence are even more amazing. It is the glory of God, the heart of God, to demonstrate steadfast love and mercy to those who do not deserve it. As sinners who do not deserve God's favor, let us worship and adore this awesome and loving God who draws us to Himself.

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