
The Essence of God

Exodus 34:6-7 contains one of the most powerful sermons ever preached because it is preached by God Himself. In it, He reveals His name and His nature to His people.

Exodus 34:6-7

6 The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

I. God is compassionate

- Toward creation (Psalm 145:8,9)
- Toward humans (Psalm 103:8, 13, 14)
- Toward the discouraged (Psalm 86:5, 15)
- Toward the profoundly flawed (Exodus 32-34)

II. God is gracious

- To forgive (Numbers 14:17-19, Nehemiah 9:17)
- To restore (Joel 2:13)
- To overwhelm the self-righteous (Jonah 4:2)

Discussion Questions

1. What are the first thoughts that come into your mind when you think about God? Why do you think A.W. Tozer says that “this is the most important thing about you” (*The Knowledge of the Holy*, p.9)?
2. Discuss your answers to the first question and examine how your answers square with what we learn about our God in Exodus 34:6-7. What surprises you most about what you learn about the Lord in these verses?
3. Why did God’s people in the Exodus originally stand in need of God’s mercy and grace? How are the people described in Exodus 32:9; 33:3, and 34:9? How were they profoundly flawed, and how are we exactly like them?

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4. The essence of God's compassion/mercy is that He spares us from what we truly deserve. Write down a few of the things that you truly deserve from God that He has withheld from you. To get you started, reflect on the below quote from Philip Yancey in his book *What's So Amazing about Grace?*. "If I care to listen, I hear a loud whisper from the gospel that I did not get what I deserved. I deserved punishment and got forgiveness. I deserved wrath and got love. I deserved debtor's prison and got instead a clean credit history. I deserved stern lectures and crawl-on-your-knees repentance. Instead, I got a banquet spread for me."

 5. How is it that God spares you all of these things? See Romans 8:31-32.

 6. What will experiencing God's mercy do in us (see Luke 6:36)? John Calvin declares that "we will never worship God with a sincere heart, or be roused to fear and obey Him with sufficient zeal, until we properly understand how much we are indebted to His mercy."

 7. If one of the chief outcomes of experiencing God's mercy is to make us brave and courageous for the Lord, where is the Lord asking you to step out in faith to serve Him? What would it look like for you to "kiss Jesus in front of the world every day"?

 8. The essence of God's grace is that He gives us what we don't deserve. According to the Exodus 34:6-7, what is it that God gives us that we don't deserve? What is one way you would live differently if you regularly remembered how gracious God has been to you in Jesus?

 9. Are there any individuals or groups of people that you believe are beyond God's redeeming grace? The prophet Jonah thought the Ninevites should not experience God's grace (see Jonah

4:2). Would you pray that this person or group of people would come to repent and believe (2 Peter 3:9)? Then, ask the Lord to overwhelm your own heart with His grace and dissolve the remaining self-righteousness that dwells there. As a result, you will become a more joyfully contagious Christian.

10. Share with your group one way that you want to experience and express God's mercy and grace to others. Here are a few specific, practical questions to help you do that:
- In what ways do you need to become more patient with people who irritate you?
 - Is there anyone around you who is hurting that you can help?
 - Is there someone that you need to forgive and give a second chance to?
 - How can you do good to someone who has hurt you?
 - How can you show kindness to someone who has offended you?
 - How can you build a bridge of love to someone who is different from you?
 - How is God calling you to value relationships over rules?

Going Deeper

1. How would you explain to a young believer Exodus 34:7, especially the part about "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation"? Here are two quotes from the ESV Study Bible to get you started:

Note on Exodus 20:5-6: "Human experience confirms that immoral behavior on the part of parents often results in suffering for their children and grandchildren. This is one of the grievous aspects of sin, that it harms others besides the sinner himself. But this general principle is qualified in two ways: First, it applies only to those who hate me, i.e., to those who persist in unbelief as enemies of God. This cycle of sin and suffering can be broken through repentance. Second, the suffering comes to the third and the fourth generation, while God shows steadfast love (v. 6) to another group of people, namely, to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."

Note on Deuteronomy 5:9-10: This is not God punishing innocent children for up to four generations (see Deuteronomy 7:10). Rather, up to four generations of those who hate God may suffer the effects of their ancestors' sins or even continue in the same sins. The view that innocent children suffer for their parents' sins is opposed in Jeremiah 31:29-30 and Ezekiel 18:2-4. God's steadfast love far outlasts the effects of sin on subsequent generations.