

God's Self-Description

Our God is... (Part 1)

Exodus 34:5-7

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What we think about when we think about God

- What is your earliest memory of God?
 - When you were a little boy or girl, what did you think about God?
- My earliest memory of God.
 - I actually do remember my earliest memory of God. I at least remember what I thought God looked like.
 - In the back classroom of the old Three Forks Church of Christ building when I was about 3 years old or so, this is what I thought God looked like.
 - Show picture of George Washington on the one dollar bill.
 - And I specifically remember thinking God looked like this green man, but He was up in the clouds.
 - I'm not really sure what this means? Hopefully it does not mean that I worship money or George Washington. I don't know; maybe it means I thought God was an old white man sitting in the clouds who is a presidential figure.
 - I'm not sure exactly how I came to this conclusion.
- What you think about when you think about God is very important. It's one of the most important things about you.
 - A. W. Tozer - "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."¹
 - "Our opinions about God will not change God, but they can change us."²
- The primary purpose of the Bible is to show us God and to show how we can relate to Him.
- "Who is God?" is the most important question we can set out to answer.
 - Of course, we can never fully comprehend God, but this is a question worthy of spending the rest of our lives trying to answer.
 - How you answer the question "Who is God?" will define you.
- What God is like really matters. It matters to this world. And it matters to us personally. What God is like matters. But what we think about God also matters.
- Someone might ask you later, "What was tonight's sermon about?" Or, what are you studying at HFC this semester, you can honestly say, "God."
- What if you don't believe in a god? Maybe you came to the conclusion that there is no god. Or maybe you rejected the god of some "Christians" you know represent. Let me ask you to do this. If you are going to reject that there's a god, come terms with the god you're rejecting. Maybe the god you're rejecting isn't the god of the Bible whose fullness is found in Jesus.

¹ John Mark Comer, *God Has a Name* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 23.

² Austin Fischer, *Young, Restless, No Longer Reformed: Black Holes, Love, and a Journey In and Out of Calvinism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), back cover.

- I also want you to ask yourself this: If a god were to exist, would I like that god to be the God represented in scripture whose fullness is found in Christ?
- You might be asking yourself this: “Ok, maybe I do understand that it’s important to understand what God is like, but what does this have to do with my everyday life?”
- It’s important for Christians to know what God is like because we were made in God’s image.
 - “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” *Genesis 1:26-27*
 - Since you are made in God’s image, it’s important for you to know what God is like so you can live into your intended life.
 - When you know what God is like and live into that image, you are reclaiming the image of God in your life.

Exodus 34:5-7

- Tonight we’ll dive into a passage of scripture that is one of the most important passages in the Old Testament.
 - One of “the most quoted passage[s] in the Bible by the Bible.”³
 - Moses, David, Jeremiah, Jonah, and other Old Testament figures go back to this passage again and again when speaking about God.⁴
 - John Mark Comer - “This is ground zero for a theology of God.”⁵
- One of my professors at Harding School of Theology, Evertt Huffard, said this about this passage: it’s “the most descriptive self-description of God in the Old Testament.”
 - This is one of the clearest and detailed descriptions of God in the Old Testament.
- When someone asks “What is God like?” you can take them to this passage.
- As we reflect on *Exodus 34:5-7*, ask yourself this question: Do I have an accurate view of God? Am I living into my Creator’s intent for my life?
- I invite you to turn to *Exodus 34:5-7*. We will focus most of our time on verses 5-7, but before we get into these verses, let’s look at the context that leads up to this beautiful passage.

Context leading up to Exodus 34:5-7

- God through Moses and his brother Aaron lead the people of Israel out from their slavery in Egypt. They are wandering in the wilderness heading towards the Promised Land.
- When Moses is up on Mount Sinai talking with God, Moses was taking longer on the mountain than the people wanted, so they requested for Moses’ brother, Aaron, to create a god (a golden calf) for them to worship and follow, since they did not know what happened to Moses. (*Exodus 32:1-4*)

³ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 32.

⁴ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 32.

⁵ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 32.

- When Moses came down from the mountain he was so angry he destroyed the tablets of the Covenant Law (*Exodus 32:19*).
- God invites Moses back up to Mount Sinai to receive two new tablets (*Exodus 34:1*).
- As Moses plans to go up to Mount Sinai, he requests to see God's glory (*Exodus 33:18*).
 - Moses wants to experience God.
 - He doesn't want to go anywhere without God (*Exodus 33:15*).
- Moses can not see the face of God, so God directs him to stand in the cleft of the rock (*Exodus 33:20-23*).
 - "He Hideth My Soul"

God's Self-Description (*Exodus 34:5-7*)

- The Lord passes before Moses and proclaims...
 - His Name - LORD or YHWH
 - Merciful/compassionate and gracious
 - Slow to anger
 - Abounding in steadfast love
 - Faithful
 - Forgiving
 - Just (by no means clear the guilty)
- This is the clearest self-description of God in the Old Testament.
- God reveals Himself and His glory to Moses.
- Notice this: God did not reveal any physical traits. He revealed His character.
 - Perhaps this is a lesson for us. The most important aspect of ourselves is our character.
- God lists six characteristics that are at the core of what God is like.
- At this time we will...
 - Reflect on these six characteristics of God.
 - See how Jesus exemplifies each of these characteristics
 - Reflect on how we can live more fully into these characteristics of God in our lives

Our God is gracious/compassionate and merciful. (*Exodus 34:6*)

- "Merciful/compassionate and gracious" (*34:6*)
 - This is the first characteristic mentioned here because this is the most important character trait of God.
 - "In the Hebrew Scriptures, order matters. Order is a clue as to what's most important. That fact that '[merciful] compassionate and gracious' is at the top of the list of Yahweh's character traits means it's the dominant one--the most important thing there is to know about Him."⁶
 - The original language here points us to the reality that God loves us as a parent loves his or her children.⁷
 - "God's baseline emotion toward you is mercy."⁸

⁶ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 127.

⁷ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 128-131.

⁸ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 140.

Our God is slow to anger. (Exodus 34:6)

- "Slow to anger" (34:6)
 - God is patient toward us.
 - God was very patient with the Israelites.
 - "The Lord...is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)
- God is SLOW to anger.
 - God does not lose His temper.
- God is slow to ANGER.
 - God is deliberate in His anger.

Our God is loving. (Exodus 34:6-7)

- "Abounding in steadfast love...keeping steadfast love for thousands" (34:6-7)
- "God is love." (1 John 4:8)
- "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Our God is faithful. (Exodus 34:6)

- "Abounding...in faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6)
- God is trustworthy. He will do what He says He will do.

Our God is forgiving. (Exodus 34:7)

- "Forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin" (Exodus 34:7)
- God doesn't just forgive. He is forgiving. Forgiving is a part of His character.

Our God is just. (Exodus 34:7)

- "Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." (34:7)
- God is a just god.
- The justice of God, to most people, is perhaps God's least admirable quality.
- But we want and need a God of justice.
- Justice is craved by people in our culture today.
- If you're raising your eyebrow at this trait of God, I understand. If God's justice and punishment was at a time the reason you rejected God, I understand. Hang in there. Come back in a few weeks, and we'll study this topic more in-depth.

Jesus is the best description of God

- Exodus 34:5-7 is the best description of God in the Old Testament, but Jesus is the best and clearest description of God in the whole Bible and the whole world.
- We've seen God's glory in Jesus.
 - Moses asks in Exodus 33:18 - "Please show me your **glory**."
 - John 1:14 - "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his **glory**, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

- *Colossians 1:15, 19* - "He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God...in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell."
- Jesus is like God. God is like Jesus. If you want to know who God is and what God is like, look at Jesus.
- Jesus exemplifies all the attributes of God listed in *Exodus 34:5-7*.
- Jesus is the person who exemplifies the characteristics of God when we can't.

Our response to seeing God is worship.

- "And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped" (*Exodus 34:8*).
- When Moses saw God for who He is, he fell on his face and worshipped.
- The only appropriate response to seeing God for who He really is is a life of full surrender and worship. This has been the case throughout scripture when people encounter the majesty of God.
 - Isaiah - "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (*Isaiah 6:5*).
 - Peter - after Jesus gave Peter some fishing advice, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." (*Luke 5:8*)
 - The elders fell down and worshipped when the Lamb appeared in heaven (*Revelation 5:14*).
- God is worthy of our worship.
- When people encounter God, their response is heartfelt humility, surrender, and worship.
- Don't fall into the temptation of just trying to figure out God. God isn't a mystery to be uncovered, question to be answered, or problem to be solved. God is not a subject you study; He is someone you love.
- My hope is that as you reflect on *Exodus 34* more and more, you will love God more and more, and worship Him more and more.

What we're doing this semester.

- Tonight was part 1 of a series called "God is..."
- Each week we will look at a different characteristic or attribute of God from *Exodus 34:5-7*.
- In each message we will do 3 things:
 - First, we will study each characteristic. We'll discuss what each characteristic means, and what it means for God to have that attribute.
 - Second, we will see how Jesus exemplifies that characteristic. Jesus is the clearest picture of God we've got. "[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God...in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (*Colossians 1:15, 19*). God is like Jesus. Jesus is like God. If we want to know what God looks like, we look at Jesus. This means Jesus perfectly exemplifies all of God's characteristics and attributes. We'll look at examples from Jesus' life in the Gospels of how he exemplifies each characteristic of God.

- Third, we will discuss how we can apply each characteristic to our lives. God created us in His image (*Genesis 1:27*). This means we are to be like Him. This means we're to strive to exhibit His characteristics and lean into His attributes.
- We will also take a break at some point, probably early October, and do a teaching series on faith and politics. Since the election is coming up, for many of you this will be your first opportunity to vote, and since we live in such a hostile, divisive, political environment, it would be good for us to reflect on how Christians should live and participate in our government and politics.

Closing

- Tonight we looked at the Word of God at one of the clearest descriptions of God in the Bible.
- The God of the Universe is gracious, merciful, patient, slow to anger, loving, faithful, and just.
- We also saw that when people encounter God, their response is heartfelt humility, surrender, and worship.
- We serve a God who is worthy of our worship.
- How will you respond?
- If you are a Christian...
 - I hope that you will live more fully into the characteristics of God. You were created in the image of God. Live more fully into those characteristics.
 - Rest in God's character. God is loving, gracious, patient, and just, and so much more. Rest in God. Trust in God.
 - *Exodus 33:14* - "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."
- If you're not a Christian...
 - Is this a God you'd consider following?
 - My hope is that you'll respond, maybe for the first time in your life like Moses - respond to God in heartfelt surrender, humility, and worship.
- I hope that as we looked at the character of God in *Exodus 34*, that we more fully understand God today, and we love Him all the more.
- A. W. Tozer - "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."⁹

⁹ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 23.